

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

REV. JOSEPH S. EXELL, M.A.

JEREMIAH.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

VER. 3. I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries.—*Home missions* :—As when some beautiful picture which has been put aside and forgotten, hid, it may be, from the enemy in time of invasive war, is found and cleansed and restored, and the eye is delighted with the gradual revelation of colour and of form, the life-like features of the portrait, the characters and incidents of the historical scene, the sunny landscape or the moon-lit sea : so in that great revival of spiritual life which came by God's grace little more than fifty years ago into this Church of England, the glorious truths of the Gospel, the joy which we have in the presence of our Lord, in His Sacraments and Scriptures, in our praises and our prayers, in our daily duty done in His name, and in our works of mercy done for His sake, have been again abundantly given to the faith which worketh by love. Oh ! blessed be He who of His tender mercy hath visited and redeemed His people. This merciful, marvellous restoration may be divided into three developments. First, there was the restoration of Faith : *Credenda*, what we should believe. Then there was the restoration of Hope : *Precanda*, what we should pray for, and when and how we should pray,—a restoration of worship. Thirdly, there came the grandest development of all—the restoration of charity, love : *Agenda*, the things we have got to do for God, our duty to Him and our duty to each other ; to love Him with all our heart, and all our soul, and all our strength, and then to love our neighbour as ourself. It is impossible for a Church or an individual to be quickened with spiritual life, and not yearn that others should be saved. It is impossible for your heart and mine to be united with the sacred heart of Jesus and not to long that others should share our joy and peace in believing. Jubilant and thankful—thankful for the past, strong and of a good courage in the present, and hopeful of the future—we stand no more by broken cisterns, for God has struck the rock, and the streams are flowing, and our cry is, the Master's cry is, "O every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters and drink." Our obedience is that of His mandate, "Go ye out into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the lame, the halt, and the blind ; go into the byways and hedges and bring in all—compel them to come in." Surely we may ask, almost in shame, are we true sons of those forefathers who built such churches as this, are we true sons of the men who built those grand cathedrals, and churches, and hospitals, and colleges throughout England ? Was there ever a time when it was so needful that the Spirit of the Gospel should be brought to bear upon the divisions and dissensions which are among us ? I mean, for example, the jealousies that exist between the classes, the commercial rivalries, the disaffection which there is. Without going beyond the measure of our knowledge, without presuming to interfere between employers and employed as to wages and those matters which we cannot possibly understand, we have an influence in pleading the great principles of justice, and honesty, and love, which, though it may be resented at first by those who are in the wrong, must in the end prevail and be established. Was there ever a time when it was more needful for men who know that God is no respecter of persons to preach the equality of all souls for whom the Lord Jesus died ? It has been well said that the Gospel

code, if it could only be enforced by human laws and a human legislature, would produce a condition of security and success of which the most sanguine, the cleverest politician has never even dreamed. But the Gospel is something infinitely higher and better to you and me. To you and me Christianity means all that is brave and pure in our life, all that is bright and happy in our death. It means re-union with those whom we have loved and whom we loved the best. It means—I hardly dare speak the thought—it means that you and I shall be sinless, and shall see God. It is impossible to have such a faith and hope as this, and not to desire that all should share it, and that none should perish. It is impossible for us to love God and not to love our brother also. (*Dean Hole.*)

Ver. 4. *I will set up shepherds over them, which shall feed them.*—*God-appointed pastors* :—God, in His wisdom, has most clearly indicated to every man his work. The doer carries within him the fitness for the work to be done. Each has most certainly been made for the other. A law of God brought them face to face at life's threshold. The same law unites them, when not interfered with, and stamps the union as Divine. As the vessel from the potter's hand, so we from the Divine mind. We and our work move along one continuous line till we scale the golden stairway where we end the now and begin the hereafter. The place to be occupied by us may possibly be of the most humble, but man is not estimated because of the place so much as how he filled it. Move along the line of God's plan and you will tap the fountain of Divine help. Each of God's intelligent workers has been given a place in the whitened fields, along the line of workers, and no position necessary to the many enterprises of the world has been by the great Creator forgotten. We are not surprised then, in the least, that the children of God should be provided with leaders, and that He would approach His flock and assure them of such provision made in their behalf. The men whom God has touched with a Divine sense of this sacred calling have adaptation to the work. God makes no mistakes in classifying His workers. His divinely appointed shepherds whom He will place over His people carry the evidence of such intention in their physical and spiritual construction. God prepares the shepherd to do the shepherd's work, and for him to throw himself out of his Divine gearing is to live an inharmonious life and walk where God could not walk with him, nor furnish him a comforting promise. The world would move as one harmonious whole, if every creature would keep within the laws made to govern him, and wear as his armour the outfit his Creator gave him. Like Moses, many may see from a human standpoint impossibilities in the way; but the same God, now as then, is abundantly able, willing, and ready to remove them. Woe and disappointment have been inevitable to all such as have overpowered this sense of God's wish, and have sought to follow some idle suggestion which reached the pride of the heart through the lust of the eye. With a shepherd's construction, having head, heart, and hand divinely adjusted to so important a calling, how readily each function reaches out, as the petal for the dew, after every nutritious element adapted to its growth. He who is to minister in holy things, early finds his thoughts running along the line of God's thoughts, and if he will yield to the Spirit's sweet influence, will gradually as growth gravitate to within the necessary sources for his equipment. While mental culture and literary discipline are necessary, and a holy familiarity with the doctrines of the Bible, the minister's wall and roof, yet God's ambassadors are expected to feed the flock of the fruit which comes from the bounty these attainments have led them to. The minister's knowledge should be principally used as the means to the end. Our peculiar gifts must be called into liveliest action and placed well to the forefront, and whatever else we may possess in the line of mental or spiritual gifts should be made to contribute subordinate, but loyal, help. But it is not enough that the doctrine be sound. While truth can be nothing but truth, and sound doctrine nothing less than sound, yet, the effect produced is all the better for having come from pure lips, and a heart known to be sincere. The man of God ordained to the high office of shepherd, whose business it is to minister in holy things, and preside at His altar, should, as far as it is possible, live along the line of Christ's life. Without this he cannot be the safest counsel for the flock entrusted to his care. He should not only know how to instruct, but how to live, so that his doctrine and his life may not antagonise. Like Christ, he must do as well as teach. His should be a life of simplicity, free from exceptional practices and evil habits. Bold and fearless, yet humble and

unostentatious. Mingling freely with the people, but in modest, quiet reserve. His language should always be the most chaste. His business relations with all men should be of the pleasantest character. Pulpit brilliancy may fill the pews and produce applause, but often spoils the preacher and cools the church. With an eloquent pulpit the church falls an easy prey to pride and vanity, losing sight of her humble, but dignified, mission, permitting the undershepherd to use the temple of God for self-glory. Bernard, whose power came from his tenderness and simplicity, on one occasion preached a very scholarly sermon. The learned only thanked him and gave applause. The next day he preached plainly and tenderly, as had been his custom, and the good, the humble and the godly gave thanks and invoked blessings upon his head, which some of the scholarly wondered at. "Ah!" said he, "yesterday I preached Bernard, but to-day I preached Christ." Congregations should arise from their pews more impressed with the power of Gospel facts than with well-rounded sentences and lofty flights of oratory. The Christian hearer should be made to feel the need of greater consecration. The sinner should be made to feel the remorse which comes from a correct estimate of a lost soul for which he has nothing to give in exchange. (*A. J. Douglas.*) *Preachers must feed the people*:—From the deck of an Austrian gunboat we threw into the Lago Garda a succession of little pieces of bread, and presently small fishes came in shoals, till there seemed to be, as the old proverb puts it, more fish than water. They came to feed, and needed no music. Let the preacher give his people food, and they will flock around him, even if the sounding brass of rhetoric, and the tinkling cymbals of oratory are silent. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Food attractive*:—Everybody knows that large flocks of pigeons assemble at the stroke of the great clock in the square of St. Mark: believe me, it is not the music of the bell which attracts them, they can hear that every hour. They come, Mr. Preacher, for food, and no mere sound will long collect them. This is a hint for filling your meeting-house; it must be done not merely by that fine, bell-like voice of yours, but by all the neighbourhood's being assured that spiritual food is to be had when you open your mouth. Barley for pigeons, good sir; and the Gospel for men and women. Try it in earnest, and you cannot fail. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 5. *I will raise unto David a righteous Branch.*—*Christ's Divine titles: the righteous Branch; and the Lord our Righteousness*:—Some of the grandest productions of nature appear small or feeble in their origin; though nothing is little or feeble with God. The majestic oak, the pride of the forest, that breaths the heavens in power, springs from a little acorn-cup; the mighty river, that creates life, health, beauty, and fertility in a realm, rises from some feeble well-spring beside the mountain. Now the wonderful fact of growth in life, or progress in nature or grace, was pre-eminently a profound truth with Christ, in His pure human nature. He that was David's Root, as God, the almighty cause of all life, was yet David's Offspring and Branch, as Man. I CHRIST IS THE RIGHTEOUS BRANCH. He is called by this remarkable name by the prophets (Isa. xi. 1, iv. 2; Jeremiah, in my text, and xxxiii. 15, 16; Ezek. xvii. 22-24; Zech. iii. 8, vi. 12). 1. The Divine titles of our Redeemer in Scripture are most expressive, and are full of spiritual truth and beauty. Among other glorious titles, He is called the Alpha and Omega, the First and Last, including all the letters of the Greek Alphabet, to denote His Eternal nature; as the Beginning and End of all things; as "the Author and Finisher of our faith"; as the origin, centre, and circle of all blessings for His people. He is the only and true Foundation on which the whole Church of God is built, and the chief Corner-stone of its perfection and beauty. He is our great Captain of salvation, and our Counsellor and Mediator before God in heaven; He is the Mystical Vine to give us Divine life; and the Heavenly Manna to feed and nourish our souls; as well as the living Water of purity and celestial joy. He is our Day-spring and Day-star from on high, to enlighten and guide us; as well as to give Divine knowledge and glory; and our Daysman and Deliverer to reconcile us to God. He is the Child born as man, to be our sacrifice; and the Son given as God, the Eternal Son of God, to impart infinite value to His work of salvation. He is the Prince of Peace, the King of Zion, our Great Prophet and High Priest; and our Peace-maker with Jehovah; our Redeemer from all sin; our Refuge in all danger; our Strong Rock in every storm; our Divine Saviour and Shepherd, who died to deliver us, and lead us to heaven; our Almighty Sun and Shield; in fine, the Righteous Branch, the Branch of Renown, the Righteous Branch of Jehovah,

"THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." 2. Christ is the Righteous Branch, as the cause of all Divine light and life in the Church. The word rendered "the Branch," has a double meaning; it signifies both a shoot from an old stock, or a branch springing from a tree, vigorous in life, with rich blossoms and fruits; as well as the splendour of dawn, or the sun rising in eastern glory. This double emblem is most appropriately applied to our Redeemer; both in the sense of His human origin, as springing like a branch into perfect and glorious life from the family of David; and in His Divine nature as God, displaying the splendour of His majesty like the full-orbed sun rising over the earth and dispelling all darkness.

3. As the Righteous Branch Christ fills all His Church with Divine life and blessings. This may be illustrated thus: when a tree is transplanted from one field to another, it belongs, in civil law, to the ground where it has root, and receives nourishment and growth; for though it may be the same tree still in its roots, stock and branches, yet, as all these derive new and continued life from the place where it grows, it therefore belongs, in civil law, by right to the lord of the soil. So Christ, in taking our pure human nature into union with His Divine nature, made ours His own by lawful right, and He gives infinite value to humanity. His Divine and human nature are distinct, though united—separate, though in connection, like our own soul and body. And all of our Divine life, and all the blessings we spiritually enjoy, must come and be derived from Christ, and vivify and nourish our spiritual life, as sap rising from the roots of a tree gives all the stock, branches, leaves, blossoms, and fruit their support, beauty, and sweetness! II. How is CHRIST TRULY THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS? 1. He only can restore righteousness to our fallen nature. 2. No sinner can ever be saved unless in some way by this righteousness of Jesus. 3. Christ is the Lord our righteousness in a twofold sense. He is the Cause, by His active and passive obedience to all the demands of Divine justice, and the Fountain of all our righteousness by His sacrifice on the cross. And as our Mediator in heaven, His continual intercession, and the blessed work of His Holy Spirit produce in our hearts holiness of life. This great work and doctrine may thus be illustrated. Suppose a powerful monarch goes to a prison-cell, where some favourite, who has been condemned for treason, lies expecting death. Royal mercy rises above law; royal affection remembers a friend's doom. The sovereign opens the prison door and bestows on him a full pardon. This frees the offender from all just demands of the law. But the monarch does more: he takes him again into his favour; he exalts him even to higher honours than he forfeited, and he admits him to all the communion of a friend, and to all the dignities of the state, and he bestows on him a royal title to an inheritance which nothing can destroy. 4. This scriptural doctrine, that Christ is our righteousness, must be implicitly the firm reliance of faith, and of all the heart. The natural man cannot receive this great truth. Like other things of the Spirit, it must be spiritually discerned. Remarks—1. How Divine and comforting are the Scripture titles of Christ! This one of the "Righteous Branch" is most expressive and just for our Redeemer. Many kings and rulers have been unjust and unholy, but the Lord Jesus never! for all His own nature, all His moral government of the world are perfectly righteous, holy, and just, and all of His dealings among men shall shine forth as the rays of a full-orbed sun in glory! 2. How great and glorious are the blessings bestowed on Christians by the Redeemer's work as the ever-living and righteous Branch of Jehovah! Take heed, then, of being in Christ for Divine life and fruitfulness. The leaves and blossoms on any fruitful branch or tree, though all various, must derive all their life and beauty from the living stock. All real Christians have all their continued spiritual life, holiness, and perfection from Jesus. And as no flower nor blossom can be without a branch, nor no ray of light without a star or sun, so no beauty nor brightness can be without Christ, the righteous Branch and Sundawn of eternal blessedness. 3. What a blissful and long day of peace and happiness shall that be for all the gathered Church of God! Gentile and Jew, all nations shall join hands in perfect amity and goodwill. No more discord, no more destruction, no more death. (*J. G. Angley, M.A.*) *The Lord our righteousness*:—1. INQUIRE WHO IS THE PERSON HERE SPOKEN OF; AND WHETHER ANY INDIVIDUAL HAS APPEARED, SINCE THE DAYS OF JEREMIAH, ANSWERING THIS DESCRIPTION. Jeremiah, we find, flourished in the reigns of Josiah, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah. In vain shall we look either to the times of the prophets, or to the commencement of the Christian era, for any individual answering the description in the text. 1. He was to be of the stock of David: to this description Christ exactly

corresponded. He was born of a virgin, "of the house and lineage of David." 2. He was to be righteous. To this part of the description, also, Christ exactly corresponded. He "did no sin," and in Him "no guile was found." 3. He was to be a King. To this, also, the character of Jesus of Nazareth corresponded. He was born "King of the Jews"; He was so called by the wise men who came from afar to worship Him. When asked by Pontius Pilate if He were a King, He did not deny it; and when He was pressed, He replied in the affirmative—"Thou sayest that I am a King." A King He was, but in disguise—a King, but wearing the garb of a servant. 4. It is here predicted that He should reign and prosper. Here, certainly, the history of Jesus of Nazareth does not correspond with the prediction before us. To reign and to prosper, is to have victory over all open enemies, and to see his friends in peace, and happiness, and prosperity around him. But mark the history of Jesus of Nazareth. Being in disguise, He hid Himself: He refused to be made a King when the people would have done so; and, instead of reigning and prospering, He was despised, scorned, crucified, and slain; instead of having the victory over His enemies, they had the victory over Him; and though, from the inherent dignity of His person, they could not hold Him, for He was a King, yet He left the world under a disguise, and left His foes in apparent triumph, to rejoice in the success of their rebellion. 5. He was to execute judgment and justice in the earth. Here, again, the history does not correspond with the prediction. He was, indeed, just; but He did not execute justice; He did not establish an ascendancy of righteousness. On the contrary, injustice, violence, and deceit remain to this day. 6. In the reign of the King here spoken of, Judah is to be saved, and Israel is to dwell safely. Here, certainly, the history of Jesus of Nazareth does not correspond with the prediction. In His days, Judah was despised and trodden down: according to their own confession, they had "no king but Cæsar": —to Cæsar, the Emperor of Rome, they paid tribute. 7. His name was to be called, the Lord our Righteousness. Now, what shall we say to this? Why, instead of all acknowledging Christ as the Lord our Righteousness, the bulk of professing Christians scoff at the very doctrine connected with this name! But I dwell not on this:—the speaker is a Jew, and the words must apply to Jews:—"the Lord our Righteousness"; —the Righteousness of the Jewish nation. Now I ask, Has the Jewish nation ever acknowledged the Messiah to be the Lord their Righteousness? Certainly not: therefore, the prophecy of Jeremiah has not been fulfilled. In examining this prophecy, we have seen that three points of the description have been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth; that three other points of His description have not been fulfilled in Him; and that the seventh has been fulfilled in a very partial manner, and not in a peculiar application to the Jewish nation. Now, it is an acknowledged truth, by all who believe the Word of God, that Christ, who, for a season, dwelt upon earth, shall come again. So that between what He did and what He shall do, all the parts of the prophecy shall be fulfilled in Him. Now, it is very remarkable that what we should expect from this prophecy He would be, we are told from other prophecies He shall be. For we are told that He will execute judgment and justice in the earth; and that He will reign as a King in the earth. II. CONSIDER ONE OR TWO OF THE IMPORTANT PARTICULARS WHICH ARE REVEALED CONCERNING THIS KING, SO PROSPERING AND REIGNING. 1. Concerning the reality and identity of the King's person. The human nature of Jesus, returning to earth as He quitted it from Mount Olivet,—the nature that was degraded, persecuted when on earth,—this same human nature shall be exalted in Zion; calling His brethren after the flesh, the Jews, to rally around Him, and to acknowledge Him as Jehovah their Righteousness in that day. 2. Concerning the appearance of the King in that day. On this subject the history of the Transfiguration was, I think, intended to instruct us. 3. Concerning the manner of His administration in His kingdom: the manner, I mean, of His interference in this kingdom. It was a Theocracy under which the Jews were placed. All difficult questions were referred to God Himself; and He gave answers by the Urim and Thummim on the breast of the High Priest. He either spake to the people by Moses, or by some visible appearance. The Lord Jesus Christ will reign by a visible interference; by stretching out His arm to award and to punish. And then will be said that which is written in the Psalms: "So that a man shall say, Verily, there is a reward for the righteous; there is a God that judgeth in the earth." (*H. M'Neile.*) *The kingdom of the Messiah*:—I. THE PERSON OF THE MESSIAH. 1. His human incarnation—"A Branch." This term is often used by the prophets, to represent Christ's

assumption of our nature. 2. His personal perfection—"A righteous Branch." (1) In His essential nature as God, Jesus Christ was infinitely pure, holy, just, and good. (2) In His human nature as man, He was perfectly righteous, and free from everything sinful and impure. 3. His sovereign character—"A King shall reign." He possessed every qualification requisite for the dignity of His character. He is infinite in wisdom, righteousness, power, and goodness. He is not only a Prophet to instruct, a Priest to atone, but also a King to rule and save His people. II. THE NATURE OF HIS KINGDOM. "A King shall reign and prosper," &c. 1. A universal kingdom. His presence fills all space, and His power is unlimited. 2. A mediatorial kingdom. This refers to Christ's official character, as the "Mediator between God and man." 3. A spiritual kingdom. The kingdom which Christ established in the work of redemption, is designed in its personal influence to destroy sin, that "grace might reign through righteousness unto eternal life." 4. A celestial kingdom. Heaven is often denominated a kingdom, and is the promised inheritance of the Lord's faithful people (Luke xii. 32). (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *The nature and prosperity of the Messiah's reign.*—I. THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST. "A King" (Numb. xxiv. 17; Psa. ii. 6, xlv. 1; Isa. xxxii. 1; Zech. ix. 9; Luke xix. 38; John xviii. 37; Rev. xvii. 14). There are three things we look for in a King. 1. Supreme power (Eph. i. 21; Rom. ix. 5; Phil. ii. 9; Col. i. 18). 2. Legislative authority. (1) Christ's authority to govern all arises out of His being the proprietor of all (John i. 10; Col. i. 16). (2) His legislative authority is still more confirmed by virtue of His redeeming acts: He has bought us with a price, and redeemed us to God by His blood. 3. Righteous administration; or the exercise of certain qualities essential to good government. (1) In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; He knows all His subjects—is acquainted with their infinitely diversified necessities. And such is His immaculate purity, that it is impossible for Him to enact any laws that will not subserve the interests of His creatures. (2) His justice is equal to His wisdom; justice and judgment are the habitation of His seat. (3) He is so merciful as to be "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." II. THE NATURE OF HIS REIGN. "A King shall reign," &c. 1. The reign of Christ is spiritual (Luke xvii. 20; Rom. xiv. 17). 2. The reign of Christ is benevolent. Look at the Alexanders, or Cæsars, or mighty chiefs of antiquity, marching at the head of vast armies, while every battle of these warriors is with confused noise and garments rolled in blood. How violent their operations! how cruel and sanguinary their triumphs! Oh, how unlike the means used by the Lord Jesus to subdue the world to the obedience of Himself! (Isa. xlii. 2.) 3. The reign of Christ is equitable. It is founded on principles of justice, reason, and truth (Heb. i. 8). The laws by which He governs are holy, just, and good: the obedience which He requires is not only right in itself, but essentially connected with human happiness. 4. The reign of Christ is perpetual. Earthly kingdoms have their rise, progress, perfection, declension, and ruin (Isa. ix. 7; Heb. i. 8). III. THE PROSPERITY WITH WHICH THAT REIGN SHALL BE ATTENDED. The word "prosper" is always used in a favourable sense. To prosper as a king implies—1. To have an increase of willing subjects. 2. To have adequate provision for the supply of all their wants. Our heavenly King possesses infinite treasures of grace and glory. 3. To secure their real happiness. Christ's subjects are all happy—by the indulgence of benevolent dispositions—by the conformity to righteous laws—by the practice of holy duties—by the anticipation of future felicities (Psa. lxxii. 7, 8; Isa. xi. 4-9, lii. 9). 4. To subjugate or destroy His enemies (Psa. ii. 9, 12; Isa. lx. 12). But as Christ came not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved, He is employing means to conquer its prejudice, and slay its enmity. Observe—1. If Christ shall reign and prosper, how great is the folly and madness of infidels, sceptics, and sinners of all descriptions, who attempt to prop the tottering throne of infidelity! 2. This subject should inspire the souls of Christ's devoted subjects with joy and gladness. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 5, 6. **The Lord our Righteousness.**—*Jehovah-Tsidkenu*:—After his conversion the apostle Paul must continually have been meditating on the state of Israel. Much as he loved the Gentiles, and clearly as he saw the disposition of God that now the Gentiles should be brought in, he never could forget Israel. "What shall we say then?" he exclaims. "Look at Israel! look at the Gentile nation! Israel for centuries has been striving most anxiously after one thing, to be righteous before Jehovah; they have not attained it. Why then has Israel not

attained it? Because they sought it not by faith but by works (Rom. x. 3). Why have the Gentiles attained it? Because by the grace of God they have been made willing to receive Jesus as their righteousness." Now look at the Jews going about to establish their own righteousness. They wish to be righteous before God. They wish to be such men as God approves—to be counted righteous and just so that He may be pleased. Therefore their idea of righteousness before God entirely depends upon their idea of God and of God's requirements. God has not left them in ignorance about this. If men who have not the revelation of God form a conception of God according to their own ideas it will be exactly in proportion to their moral condition; therefore the heathen nations made unto themselves gods like unto themselves, as ambitious, as impatient, as self-indulgent, as impure, as changeable as they were themselves. Israel knew the Lord. "I am Jehovah; I am God, and not man, spirit and not flesh; I am holy, be ye also holy." And not simply had God revealed Himself unto them, but He had given unto them also the law as a mirror in which they should see what His idea of men was. Israel had the law of God, and in the law of God they had the character of the righteous One described. And now Israel went about to establish a righteousness of their own. In this process those of them who were sincere in themselves and those of them who really sought not merely to be righteous, but to be righteous before God in order that they might have communion with God, very soon came into the knowledge of their sin, and into the most painful consciousness of their defilement, and, therefore, wishing to be righteous before God, they soon began to cry unto God out of the depth, and to know that innumerable sins had taken hold upon them, and that woe is unto them because they are undone and of unclean lips, and unto such through the knowledge of the law there came death under the law, a longing after pardon, and after the power of God's Spirit operating on their hearts. But those were always the exceptions, the small minority, the remnant according to the election of grace." The majority of the nation lowered their standard of God, and lowered their standard of the law, and so far did this deteriorating process go on that they not merely came into the idea that they were able to fulfil the law, but they came even to the idea that they were able to do more than the law commanded; that they were able, by extra exertions and by observing precepts which God never has enjoined, to have a treasury of merits, works of supererogation. Curious inconsistency—as long as men go about establishing their own righteousness they are proud before God. But then you would think that if a man is proud, and if he has got the kind of self-consciousness so that he can stand, as it were, before God, that then he would be sure of his salvation. One of their most celebrated prophets, whom they called the "law of the world," was on his death-bed, and one of his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, what sayest thou now?" The Rabbi said, "Heaven and hell are before me, and I know not whither I am going. If I were to be summoned into the presence of an earthly king I might well be afraid, and yet his displeasure would only last a few years, and his punishment, however severe it may be, must come to an end; but I am now going into the presence of the Lord God Most High, whose wrath is everlasting, and His punishment is infinite, and I know not whether I shall be acquitted." Going about establishing a righteousness of their own, lowering the idea of God, lowering the standard of the law, proud and unbroken in spirit, and yet without any peace or assurance of the favour of God. Such a one, also, was the apostle Paul before he was converted; he went about establishing his own righteousness, and afterwards he said that he was a Pharisee of the Pharisees, according to the law blameless, but now he wishes not to have his own righteousness, which is by the law. There is another righteousness of which both the law and the prophets have continually testified; which is apart from the law, which man does not work out, which is as much given to man as bread is given to a hungry person, and as water is given to a thirsty person. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness." What is the sad condition of the Jews? They do not see two things: they do not know that Jesus is Jehovah, and they do not know that this is our only righteousness. "Jesus our Righteousness." And what is the lamentable condition of Christians who do not know the Lord? Simply the same thing, for if they knew Jehovah-Tsidkenu then they would have the knowledge of salvation, they would put no confidence in the works of the law, they would simply rejoice in Christ Jesus. Then this Jesus is Jehovah. When He was an infant He had angels already calling Him Lord, and it was quite right that the wise men of the East worshipped Him. He is Jehovah, but He is "God manifest in the flesh." There is in all human beings, however far

they may be from God, this peculiarity : that without union with God they cannot have life. When we think of this union with God, that God should be all in all, that we should be one with God, unless we go by the Word of God we may fall into great depths of error, and into that which is very ungodly. And here is a very peculiar thing, that you find among all the Eastern nations a striving after this being absorbed in God. You find it in India, you find it in China—almost wherever you go ; you find it among the Arabs and the Persians. Mystics in all nations, what do they want ? They have a feeling that there is in God the only true existence, the only life and blessedness ; that everything else apart from God is transitory, is imperfect, is unsatisfactory ; they wish to be one with Him ; they wish to be absorbed in Him. But the great error which they commit, the great evil into which they are landed is this, that they do not see that sin is sin, that it is wrong, that it is evil. They imagine that sin is necessary, something through which we have to pass, something for which we are not accountable ; and thus they deafen the voice of conscience, and declare evil not to be evil, and that there can be no real difference between good and evil. But round it is the truth which God has taught us, that we are to be one with God ; we are to be in such a close union with Jehovah that it may be said, "We live, yet not we, but Jehovah lives in us." But how union with God ? Because we believe in Him who loved us, and gave Himself for us, and in this faith in Jesus submitting to the righteousness of God there are three elements. "No boasting." You can judge any religion, simply by that one point—is all the glory given to God and no glory to man ? Secondly, there is no uncertainty, for we have a perfect and Divine righteousness. Thirdly, there is no compromise with sin, because, if we believe that Jesus died for us, we believe that God condemned sin in the flesh. We must depart from all unrighteousness, nay, we are "crucified unto the world," and the world unto us. (*A. Saphir, D.D.*) *The Lord our Righteousness* :—If, as it seems probable, Zedekiah had already begun to reign, it is perfectly certain that he could not be the person to whom the prophet referred when he looked forward to the advent of the "righteous Branch." If he wrote shortly before the commencement of his reign it would be just possible so to interpret the prophecy. In the former case the very allusion which there might have been to the name of the reigning king would show all the more plainly that it was not in him that the promise was fulfilled ; in the latter case, the want of precise correspondence between the two names would only bring out into higher relief the non-correspondence of the prophecy with the fact. As a matter of fact the name of Mattaniah was changed to Zedekiah, and not to Jehovah-Tsidkenu. Neither could it be said that in his days, when the captivity was fast hastening on, and the dark shadow of Babylon must have hung like a thundercloud over the land, Judah should be saved and Israel should dwell safely. We are constrained to infer from the known historical conditions of the writing, that the prophet must have meant to depict circumstances not immediately before his eyes when he wrote. Moreover, this conclusion is forced upon us from the fact that some eight or ten years later Jeremiah repeated this promise, in a slightly altered form, when he was shut up in prison,—*"In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called,"* or, *"this is that which men shall proclaim to her"* ; or, as Bishop Pearson has it, *"He which calleth her is the Lord our Righteousness."* Enforced as that promise was by the remarkable addition at the very lowest ebb of the national hope, *"Thus saith the Lord, David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel ; neither shall the priests the Levites want a man before Me to offer burnt-offerings, and to kindle meat-offerings, and to do sacrifice continually"* ; it is inconceivable that the same prophet who had declared the seventy years' captivity of the whole nation as well as the captivity of Zedekiah himself should have spoken in this way, believing that the hopes he cherished for Judah were fulfilled in Zedekiah. His words, therefore, are a standing monument of an onward-looking hope. The main point which we have to grasp firmly, is that here, if anywhere, there is a prophecy of the times of the Messiah, which is known to have been given before the Captivity, and was undeniably not fulfilled for many centuries to come after it. It is insisted, however, that the analogy of similar names in Scripture, such as Jehovah-Messiah, Jehovah-Shalom, and Jehovah-Shammah, and the like, makes it needful for us to render this name, *"The Lord is our Righteousness."* Let us assume, then, that we are to understand it, *"The Lord is our Righteousness."* If that, then, was His name, the name by which He was to be called, I see not how it can be applicable to Him unless He is Himself the

Lord Jehovah. The proposition, "The Lord is our Righteousness," is to be His name, however awkward and uncouth that may be; but if men are to say to Him or of Him, if they are to call Him "The Lord is our Righteousness," it is hard to escape from the conclusion that He must be the Lord. But believing, as we do most firmly, that this is the prophetic name of Christ, and of Christ alone, what is it designed to teach us? 1. It teaches us that Christ is to us the realisation of righteousness; it is no longer an unattainable conception or an abstract idea which we find it hard to grasp or to fulfil, but in Him it becomes a concrete fact on which we can lay hold, and a thing which we can appropriate and possess. He becomes first "righteousness," and then "our righteousness"; first, the visible, incarnate and realised exhibition of righteousness, and then something of which we can claim possession, and in which we can participate. 2. If this is the obverse presentation or positive statement of the truth, it has also its reverse or negative side. If the name whereby Christ is called is "The Lord is our Righteousness," that fact is destructive to all other hopes, prospects, or sources of righteousness; it gives the lie to them, and asserts their vanity, for we can have no righteousness but what we find in the Lord. Behold in Him your righteousness; look away from and out of yourselves to Him and be righteous. The apprehension of that blessed fact will be the harbinger of peace and joy and fruition of righteousness in you. Whereas before there was nothing but continual delusive hope and abortive effort, together with painful disappointment and self-reproach, now there is the fulness and the fatness of a satisfied soul, the soundness and strength of a heart that is at peace with God, the quietness and assurance, the blessedness and calm confidence of a mind that is at rest in Christ. To know that "the Lord is our Righteousness," is to have and to know that which can alone enable us to contemplate the past with equanimity or serenity; it is to have and to know that which is alone the antidote for care and anguish and remorse, that which can alone take the sting out of sin and rob even the broken law of its just terror. But we have to face the future as well as to look back upon the past, and in that future there sits the shadow, fear of man, and we know not what besides may lurk there. It may be loss, bereavement, sickness, pain, disgrace, infamy; but if the Lord is our righteousness, and if He who is our righteousness is the Lord, the very and eternal God Himself, then, come what may, we must be safe with Him. (*Prof. Stanley Leathes.*) *The Lord our Righteousness*:—Man by the fall sustained an infinite loss in the matter of righteousness: the loss of a righteous nature, and then a twofold loss of legal righteousness in the sight of God. Man sinned; he was therefore no longer innocent of transgression. Man did not keep the command; he therefore was guilty of the sin of omission. In that which he committed, and in that which he omitted, his original character for uprightness was completely wrecked. Jesus Christ came to undo the mischief of the fall for His people. So far as their sin concerned their breach of the command, that He has removed by His precious blood. Still it is not enough for a man to be pardoned. He of course is then in the eye of God without sin. But it was required of man that he should actually keep the command. Where, then, is the righteousness with which the pardoned man shall be completely covered, so that God can regard him as having kept the law, and reward him for so doing? The righteousness in which we must be clothed, and through which we must be accepted, and by which we are made meet to inherit eternal life, can be no other than the work of Jesus Christ. We, therefore, assert, believing that Scripture fully warrants us, that the life of Christ constitutes the righteousness in which His people are to be clothed. His death washed away their sins, His life covered them from head to foot; His death was the sacrifice to God, His life was the gift to man, by which man satisfies the demands of the law. Herein the law is honoured and the soul is accepted. You have as much to thank Christ for living as for dying, and you should be as devoutly grateful for His spotless life as for His terrible death. The text speaking of Christ, the son of David, the Branch out of the root of Jesse, styles Him, the Lord our Righteousness. I. First, then, He is so. Jesus Christ is the Lord our Righteousness. There are but three words, "Jehovah"—for so it is in the original—"our Righteousness." He is Jehovah, or, mark you, the whole of God's Word is false, and there is no ground whatever for a sinner's hope. He who walked in pain over the flinty acres of Palestine, was at the same time possessor of heaven and earth. He who had not where to lay His head, and was despised and rejected of men, was at the same instant God over all, blessed for evermore. He who did hang upon the tree had the creation hanging upon Him. He who died on the Cross was the ever living, the everlasting One. As a man He died, as God He

lives. Bow before Him, for He made you, and should not the creatures acknowledge their Creator? Providence attests His Godhead. He upholdeth all things by the word of His power. Creatures that are animate have their breath from His nostrils; inanimate creatures that are strong and mighty stand only by His strength. Who less than God could have carried your sins and mine and cast them all away? How can He be less than God, when He says, "Lo, I am with you always, unto the end of the world"? How could He be omnipresent if He were not God? How could He hear our prayers, the prayers of millions, scattered through the leagues of earth, and attend to them all, and give acceptance to all, if He were not infinite in understanding and infinite in merit? How were this if He were less than God? But the text speaks about righteousness too—"Jehovah our Righteousness." And He is so. Christ in His life was so righteous, that we may say of the life, taken as a whole, that it is righteousness itself. Christ is the law incarnate. He lived out the law of God to the very full, and while you see God's precepts written in fire on Sinai's brow, you see them written in flesh in the person of Christ. No one that I know of has dared to charge Christ with unrighteousness to man, or with a want of devotedness to God. See then, it is so. The pith, however, of the title, lies in the little word "our,"—"Jehovah our Righteousness." This is the grappling iron with which we get a hold on Him—this is the anchor which dives into the bottom of this great deep of His immaculate righteousness. This is the sacred rivet by which our souls are joined to Him. This is the blessed hand with which our soul toucheth Him, and He becometh to us all in all, "Jehovah our Righteousness." You will now observe that there is a most precious doctrine unfolded in this title of our Lord and Saviour. As the merit of His blood takes away our sin, so the merit of His obedience is imputed to us for righteousness. Imputation, so far from being an exceptional case with regard to the righteousness of Christ, lies at the very bottom of the entire teaching of Scripture. The root of the fall is found in the federal relationship of Adam to his seed; thus we fell by imputation. Is it any wonder that we should rise by imputation? Deny this doctrine, and I ask you—How are men pardoned at all? Are they not pardoned because satisfaction has been offered for sin by Christ? Very well, then, but that satisfaction must be imputed to them, or else how is God just in giving to them the results of the death of another, unless that death of the other be first of all imputed to them? I must give up justification by faith if I give up imputed righteousness. True justification by faith is the surface soil, but then imputed righteousness is the granite rock which lies underneath it; and if you dig down through the great truth of a sinner's being justified by faith in Christ, you must, as I believe, inevitably come to the doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ as the basis and foundation on which that simple doctrine rests. "The Lord our Righteousness." The Law-giver has Himself obeyed the law. Do you not think that His obedience will be sufficient? Jehovah has Himself become man that so He may do man's work: think you that He has done it imperfectly? You have a better righteousness than Adam had. He had a human righteousness; your garments are Divine. He had a robe complete, it is true, but the earth had woven it. You have a garment as complete, but heaven has made it for you to wear. You will remember that in Scripture, Christ's righteousness is compared to fair white linen; then I am, if I wear it, without spot. It is compared to wrought gold; then I am, if I wear it, dignified and beautiful, and worthy to sit at the wedding feast of the King of kings. It is compared, in the parable of the prodigal son, to the best robe; then I wear a better robe than angels have, for they have not the best; but I, poor prodigal, once clothed in rags, companion to the nobility of the sty,—I, fresh from the husks that swine do eat, am nevertheless clothed in the best robe, and am so accepted in the Beloved. Moreover, it is also everlasting righteousness. Oh! this is, perhaps, the fairest point of it—that the robe shall never be worn out; no thread of it shall ever give way.

II. Having thus expounded and vindicated this title of our Saviour, I would now APPEAL TO YOUR FAITH. Let us call Him so. "This is the name whereby He shall be called," the Lord our Righteousness." Let us call Him by this great name, which the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath named. Let us call Him—poor sinners!—even we, who are to-day smitten down with grief on account of sin. "I have no good thing of my own," sayest thou? Here is every good thing in Him. "I have broken the law," sayest thou? There is His blood for thee. Believe in Him; He will wash thee. "But then I have not kept the law." There is His keeping of the law for thee. Take it, sinner, take it. Believe on Him. "Oh, but I dare not," saith one. Do Him the honour to dare it. "Oh,

but it seems impossible." Honour Him by believing the impossibility then. "Oh, but how can He save such a wretch as I am?" Soul! Christ is glorified in saving wretches. Only do thou trust Him, and say, "He shall be my righteousness to-day." "But suppose I should do it and be presumptuous?" It is impossible. He bids you; He commands you. Let that be your warrant. "This is the commandment, that ye believe on Jesus Christ whom He hath sent." And some of us can say it yet better than that; for we can say it not merely by faith, but by fruition. We have had the privilege of reconciliation with God; and He could not be reconciled to one that had not a perfect righteousness; we have had access with boldness to God Himself, and He would never have suffered us to have access if we had not worn our brother's garments. We have had adoption into the family, and the Spirit of adoption, and God could not have adopted into His family any but righteous ones. How should the righteous Father be God of an unrighteous family? III. I appeal to your GRATITUDE. Let us admire that wonderful and reigning grace which has led you and me to call Him, "The Lord our Righteousness." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) Christ the righteousness of those who believe in Him.—I. Christ becomes the righteousness of those who believe in Him—AS THEIR ATONING MEDIATOR. Sprinkled with that blood which the Godhead hath enriched, the penitent sinner fears not the wrath of the destroying angel of justice. Covered with that righteousness with which the Godhead hath invested him, the true believer can stand even the searching beams of Divine holiness. Behold, then, both the way by which we are to be justified from our sins, and our encouragement to apply for mercy. In this part of the process of justification, no qualifications are required on the part of man, but a lively sense of his need of mercy, and a full reliance on the propitiation of the Lord his righteousness. But as he is to be fitted for eternal happiness by the love and service of his Maker, a rule of duty must be prescribed and imposed on him. Christ therefore becomes the righteousness of His people.—II. AS THEIR LAWGIVER—imposing on them a law of evangelical holiness and perfection. The destiny of man which the scheme of redemption is designed to further and to secure, is to be eternally happy in the presence of God. For this presence, holiness is an indispensable qualification. In the justification of those who believe, therefore, Christ acts not only as Mediator, procuring their pardon, but also as Lawgiver, delineating the nature and extent, and enforcing the obligations of the Divine law. In this character, we are to acknowledge, receive, and obey Him, and He thus becomes "the Lord our Righteousness." III. AS OUR ALMIGHTY SANCTIFIER—who impresses on our hearts the obligations of the Divine law, and enables us to obey it. Thus is complete provision made for our release from the bondage of sin, and our being reinstated in all the graces and virtues of the Divine image. Let us then learn.—1. To ascribe our salvation to the free and unmerited grace of God. 2. But while we humbly acknowledge and adore the free grace of God in our salvation, let us remember that there are qualifications on our part. (*Bp. Hobart.*) Christ, the Lord our Righteousness:—So could none speak, save God. If man would condense his words, he says too little, or he says it obscurely or untruly. The characteristic of this Divine saying, is, that in the two Hebrew words it contains a summary of the whole supernatural relation of God to man under the Gospel, and of man to God. It contains the whole hidden life of the Christian: it is the substance of sacraments: the unseen spring of self-sacrificing holy action; the fountain of his inward peace; the surest contentment of his soul; the enkindling of burning zeal; the soul of devotion, the fervour of love. It matters little, as to the great outline of the prophecy, whether He, through whom this was to be wrought, is here declared to be "the Lord our Righteousness" or whether "the Lord our Righteousness" were simply a title given to designate His character, that this would be His characteristic, His watchword, the centre of His teaching, His life, His being; this the "end of His toils and tears"; this "the passion of His heart"; this He should labour to bring about, that the Almighty God should be our righteousness. In contrast to the evil shepherds, who, misleading the people, had encouraged them in their sins, and so had brought God's judgments upon them, He was to do away God's judgments, and outwardly to restore them to His favour; but He was also inwardly to remove the cause of that disfavour, their unrighteousness, and to be their righteousness. The change was to be, not without man, but within. It was to be an inward closeness of relation of God to man, and of man to his God. The words presupposed all the teaching of the law, orally or through ritual, as to sin. "Create in me a new heart, O God, and make anew a stayed

spirit within me. Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." It was the universal cry of our fallen nature; the deepest trace of that original righteousness, wherewith God endowed Adam, as soon as He created him. But, though felt more or less, weakly or mightily, disguised or clearly or corruptly, the belief that it could, that it would, be satisfied, was given, where alone it could be given, among the people to whom God revealed Himself, by those whom He sent to promise what He alone could fulfil. This union Jeremiah spoke of under those two words, "the Lord our Righteousness." As unrighteous, we could not be united with Him. God's awful holiness and man's sinfulness are incompatibles. "Your sins have been abidingly severing between you and your God," was expressed in act by the whole Hebrew ritual. The truth ever lived before their eyes; it was enforced by the prophets; it was chanted in the Psalms; it was confessed in their prayers. But there was a Deliverer yet to come, a deliverance larger, wider, deeper, more inward, than any before, which should stretch out and encompass the human race, through One despised and rejected by those who were despised of all. He Himself was personally to restore our race, personally to be "our righteousness." And has it not been? Is it not? This was the faith of the barbarous nations from the first, written "not with pen and ink, but by the Spirit of God upon the hearts." This was the hope and strength of martyrs; this was the virtue of the continent; this was the victory of the young; this, the triumph over the world's seductions; this, the peace with God and the full contentment of the soul, "the Lord our Righteousness." "In Christ Jesus," the Holy Ghost saith, "we are chosen"; "in Christ Jesus we are called to eternal glory"; "in Him we have redemption"; "in Christ Jesus we are created," "are a new creation"; "in Christ Jesus we are alive unto God"; "in Christ Jesus we are accepted"; "in Him we are justified"; "in Him we are sanctified"; "in Him we are accepted"; "in Christ Jesus we are of God"; "in Christ, it is the will of God that we should be perfected"; "in Christ Jesus, those who are His, have fallen asleep"; "in Christ Jesus they shall be made alive." This supernatural life antedated our use of reason. Antedating, then, the use of reason, His first act, in our Christian land, is to unite the soul to Himself. As we are really sons of man by physical birth, so are we as really and as actually "sons of God" by spiritual birth; sons of man, by being born of man; sons of God, by being members of Him, who is the Son of God. Blessed they who so remain, in whom the hidden life in Christ unfolds with the life of sense and reason. But if this has not been so, if the soul have gone away from God "into a far country," forgetting Him, squandering in pleasures of sense the gift of God, can such an one be the object of the love of God, can to such an one Jesus be "the Lord our Righteousness"? God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost long to communicate Themselves to the creature, which they made for Themselves. They long anew to sanctify him, anew to make him that wherein They may take pleasure; to fit him, by the renewed gift of righteousness, for Their gracious engraving Presence; to make the soul, which has been the abode and sport of devils, the dwelling-place of the Trinity. And whether He works this in those who know no more, by creating in the soul a penitent sorrow, for love of their God, that they had so offended God, or whether He teach the soul, over and above, that He gives superabundant grace through an ordinance of His own appointing, and that He has still "left power with His Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and turn to Him," no sooner is His work accomplished, no sooner has His Saviour absolved him through His own words, pronounced at His command by His creature's lips, than the dark catalogue of sins is blotted out by the precious blood, the soul is again transfigured with light; it is not forgiven only, it is arrayed anew with the righteousness of Christ. Yet there is a higher closer union still, on which Jesus Himself dwelt with greater fulness and greater complacency of love towards us; which, in different words, He presented again and again; which, when contradicted or misapprehended, He dwelt on the more; which He seems in His love to have been loath to cease to speak of, that mystery whereby He is, above all, our righteousness, because He, who is righteousness itself, comes to "dwell in us, that we may dwell in Him; to be one with us, that we may be one with Him." In other sacraments He gives us grace; in this, Himself. By no less condescension could He satisfy His love towards us. They are His own words, "he that eateth Me." (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *Christ is our Righteousness*:—I. WHAT IS MEANT BY HIS BEING OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS? 1. That it is in Him alone that God the Father is well pleased (*Matt. iii. 17, xvii. 5*). Not only with whom, but in whom, I am well pleased, atoned, pacified, satisfied

He is God's all in all, and why then should He not be ours? 2. That it is by and through Him alone that we are justified; that is, acquitted from guilt, and accepted into favour, which are the ingredients of justification. 3. It is through His merit and mediation alone that our performances are made acceptable (1 Pet. ii. 5). 4. It is by Him alone that we have right and title to the heavenly inheritance.

II. CALL JESUS CHRIST BY THIS SWEET NAME, the Lord our Righteousness; each one with application to himself—as David. And would you think an Old Testament saint, that lived under that dark dispensation, should have such clearness in this matter? A shame to us that are not clear in it, that live under Gospel light (Psa. iv. 1).

1. The misery they are in who never yet called Jesus Christ by this name, and the blessed and happy condition they are in that have done so. (1) Till we have called Jesus Christ the Lord our Righteousness, that is, heartily owned Him as such, our condition is a shameful, naked condition, and that is a wretched, miserable condition (Rev. iii. 17), because, till clothed with Christ's righteousness, our shame appears in the sight of God. (2) Till we have called Jesus Christ the Lord our Righteousness, ours is a dismal, dark condition. When we call the Lord our Righteousness, then He rises upon our souls as a Sun of Righteousness, and that which follows is the light of comfort, and peace, and joy; such joy as none knows but they that feel it. It is hidden manna (Psa. lxxxv. 10). (3) Till we have called Jesus Christ the Lord our Righteousness, we are in a perilous, perishing condition. Christ's righteousness is to us as Noah's ark. 2. The difficulty, nay, the impossibility, of being pardoned and justified, accepted and saved, in any other way, and the facility and easiness of obtaining it in this way. (1) It is impossible we should be accepted of God without a righteousness, one or other, because He is a righteousness God; that is, He is of pure eyes, and, therefore, cannot endure to look upon iniquity (Psa. v. 4, xi. 7). (2) It is impossible that either our own righteousness, or the righteousness of any of our fellow-creatures, one or other, in heaven or earth, should bear us out and bring us off before God. On the other hand, how easy is it to obtain peace, and pardon, and salvation, by the merit and righteousness of the Lord Jesus, by calling Him by this name. Easy, did I say? mistake me not. I mean easy to grace, easy where God is pleased to give a willing mind, as knowledge is easy to him that understandeth (Prov. xiv. 6; Matt. xi. 28-30; 1 John v. 3). Easy; that is, it is a ready way to justification and salvation, whereas seeking it by our own righteousness is a round-about way. We can never while we live know in any other way that one sin is pardoned, because perseverance to the end is required. Oh, then, be persuaded; and you that have called Him by this name, call Him so still. There are four special times and seasons when this should be done. 1. When we have done amiss, and are under guilt, and wrath threatens. And when is it not that it is so? 2. When we have well done, after some good work, and pride of heart rises, and we begin to expect from God as if we were something. No, Jesus Christ is the Lord my Righteousness. I am an unprofitable servant when I have done all. 3. When we ask anything of God (John xiv. 23). 4. When we come to look death and judgment in the face, which will be shortly; when sick and dying. Oh, then, for Christ, and His righteousness—it will be the cordial of cordials. (*Philip Henry.*)

The Lord our Righteousness :—I. When the people of Christ address Him by this name, it implies **A CONTRITE ACKNOWLEDGMENT THAT THEY HAVE NO RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THEIR OWN**,—that they are destitute of all personal righteousness in which to appear before a holy God. II. When the people of Christ give this name to Him, they declare **THEIR SOLEMN PERSUASION THAT THEY REQUIRE A RIGHTEOUSNESS**, though they have none of their own, in which to appear before the Holy One of Israel; they not only confess their entire destitution, but acknowledge their indispensable need, of a true and perfect righteousness. III. When the people of Christ address Him by this name, **THEY EXPRESS AND PROFESS THEIR FAITH, THAT MESSIAH, BEING IN ONE PERSON GOD AND MAN, HAS BROUGHT IN A RIGHTEOUSNESS IN THEIR BEHALF**, which is by God accepted for them, and imputed unto them, for their justification. IV. When the people of Christ call Him by this name, they are seen **IN THE ACT OF EMBRACING, APPROPRIATING, AND REJOICING IN HIM**, as the Lord their Righteousness. "The Lord our Righteousness." It is the language of joy and triumph, as well as of reliance and faith. It is not the spirit only of the drowning man laying hold of the plank, but of the safe and happy, rich and joyful man, realising his safety, and rejoicing in his treasures. "My Beloved is mine, and I am His." Conclusion—1. See here how wondrous a provision the Gospel has made for at once humbling the sinner and exalting

him,—laying him low in his own eyes, and yet gloriously ennobling him. 2. See what a ground of security, of peace, and of everlasting blessedness, the believer in Christ enjoys. 3. Use the subject in the way of self-inquiry, and of direction, according to the result of it. (*C. J. Brown, D.D.*) *Jehovah-Tsidkenu*.—I. A RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT IS ABSOLUTELY PERFECT. 1. It has passed through every test (John xiv. 30, viii. 46; Heb. iv. 15, vii. 26; 1 Pet. ii. 22). 2. It has fulfilled every requirement (Phil. ii. 8; Matt. iii. 15, v. 17). 3. It has satisfied the highest claims (Matt. iii. 17; Rom. iv. 25; Phil. ii. 9). II. A RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT IS IDENTIFIED WITH CHRIST HIMSELF. 1. Christ—God's gift of righteousness (Rom. v. 17). 2. Christ for us, in the presence of God (Heb. ix. 24). 3. He is made unto us righteousness (1 Cor. i. 30). 4. "The Lord our Righteousness" (Jer. xxiii. 6; Isa. xl. 42; 1 John ii. 1). III. A RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT IS PUT TO OUR ACCOUNT. 1. Not the reward of our obedience (Tit. iii. 5; Eph. ii. 8, 9; Gal. ii. 16). 2. Not something we have to wait for (Rom. iii. 22, x. 4). 3. But a righteousness that is ours now by faith (Rom. v. 1, iii. 28; Phil. iii. 9). 4. Christ for us, our righteousness, to be distinguished but not separated from Christ in us, our sanctification (1 Cor. i. 30). (*E. H. Hopkins.*) *The Lord our Righteousness*.—In journeying through a mountain region, we find ourselves, at times, on the top of a gentle hill, which will give us a delightful view of the picturesque scenery of the landscape that immediately surrounds us. But, now and then, we may reach the summit of some towering mountain. That lifts us far above all other points of view. As we stand there and gaze, we can look down on hills, and plains, and valleys, and take in the geography of all the surrounding country. In the mountain range of Scripture truth, we reach such an elevated summit in our text. The righteousness here spoken of may be looked at from five different points of view. I. Its AUTHOR. We see from the connection in which our text is found, that the person here called "Jehovah our Righteousness," is the same as "the righteous Branch, the prosperous King," promised to be raised up unto David. This proves that the Jehovah of our text is Jehovah-Jesus. Isaiah (xi. 1), in speaking of Him, says, "There shall come forth a rod," &c. Ezekiel (xxxiv. 29) calls Him "the Plant of renown." Zechariah (vi. 12, 13), speaking of Him, says, "Behold the man whose name is the Branch," &c. When the angel Gabriel foretold His birth, he applied this very prophecy to Him, saying, "The Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David, and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever." And then, to complete the testimony of Scripture on this point, and prove to a demonstration that the Jehovah of our text is Jesus, it is only necessary to turn to a single passage in the New Testament (1 Cor. i. 13). II. Its FOUNDATION. It is spoken of in the New Testament as "the righteousness of Christ." And the foundation on which it rests—that of which it is made up—is the active and passive obedience of our Lord and Saviour. It embraces all that He did, to honour God's law, when He obeyed its every precept to the uttermost, in thought and feeling, in purpose, word, and action; and all that He suffered, when the tremendous penalties of God's broken law were visited upon Him. The righteousness of Christ means simply the BENEFIT of all that He did and suffered. This benefit, or righteousness, belongs to His people. It is made over to them. It is reckoned as theirs. III. Its NATURE. No miser ever felt half the joy in counting over his hoarded gold, and no monarch ever experienced half the rapture in gazing admiringly on the magnificence of the crown jewelry he inherits, than the intelligent Christian experiences in dwelling on the nature of that all-perfect righteousness that Jesus, his glorious Saviour, has wrought out for him. 1. It is a gracious righteousness. It was of God's good pleasure alone, that ever a plan for working out such a righteousness was devised. It is grace alone which makes men feel their need of this righteousness, inclines them to seek it, and makes them willing to cast sin and self, and everything else away, and to rest on this righteousness, on this only, on this now, and on this for ever, as the ground of their acceptance with God. 2. It is a perfect righteousness. God's perfect law was the standard by which this righteousness was to be measured; and it came fully up to that standard. It was the scrutiny of God's holy and penetrating eye to which this righteousness was subjected. He weighed it in the balances of the heavenly sanctuary, and declared Himself well pleased with it. It is because of His connection with this righteousness that God the Father loves His Son with a love that is unspeakable. This was what the Psalmist meant (Psa. xlv. 7). And it is because Christ's people share in this righteousness that God cherishes towards them the same affection

that He entertains towards His only-begotten Son. Nothing less than this will meet our wants. "A robe I must have," says an old writer, "of a whole piece; broad as the law, spotless as the light, and richer than ever an angel wore; and such a robe I have in the righteousness of Christ. It is a perfect righteousness." (3) It is an uniform righteousness. Where the sun shines at noonday, I have the benefit of his shining, as fully as though there were none around me to share his beams, and he shone for me alone. Yet each of my neighbours has, or may have, the same benefit of his beams that I have. And so it is with the righteousness of Christ. The dying thief who turned in penitence and faith, and was accepted in the last hour, had just the same title to enter heaven that the apostle Paul had, or Peter, or John, or Isaiah, or Elijah, or David, or Moses, or Abraham, or Enoch. 4. It is an unchanging righteousness. If the whole world, with its contents, were given at once to you or me, in fee-simple ownership, of course it would be impossible to add to our worldly possessions. There might be much that was new for us to discover; but there could be nothing new for us to own. We might proceed to lay bare the rich mines in our inheritance, and to search out their hid treasures. But this would only be adding to the knowledge of our possessions; it would not be enlarging them. And so when Christ gives Himself and His righteousness to His people, He gives them a world of spiritual treasures, which it will take all eternity for them fully to explore and find out. But all this is given to them from the start. The soul once justified is justified fully. The righteousness which secures justification will remain without changing what it was at first. 5. It is a glorious righteousness. We see this in the peculiar position which the ransomed people of Christ will occupy among the creatures of God, in possessing this righteousness. They will stand on higher ground in the scale of being than even angels and archangels can ever reach. We have no reason to suppose that there is another tribe or race of creatures in all the boundless universe who will rise to a point of elevation like this. This is what is meant when we are told that Christ's ransomed ones are to be "a peculiar treasure unto Him." They are to be to "the praise of the glory of His grace," as none other of His creatures shall be. Their peculiar, distinguishing privilege will be that Jehovah-Jesus is their righteousness. IV. ITS IMPORTANCE. 1. It is not possible that we can have the comfort of being Christians, unless we have a clear knowledge of this great truth. Suppose that, in a week from to-morrow, you have a note of a large amount to take up, and you have nothing with which to meet it. Of course, under such circumstances, you must feel very uncomfortable. And suppose that, under these circumstances, a friend should deposit, in your name, at the bank a sum of money more than sufficient to meet all your indebtedness. The fact that the money was there would put you in a position of safety. But unless you have a clear knowledge and a full assurance of this fact, you cannot be in a position of comfort in reference to it. Now, in our natural condition as sinners, we are all overwhelmingly in debt to God. We are liable at any moment to be called to a settlement, and we have nothing to say. But when we are led to repent of our sins, and believe in Jesus as our Saviour, His infinite and all-perfect righteousness is entered in the bank of heaven in our name, and to our account. It is reckoned as belonging unto us. If we are able to understand this truth, and grasp it, in the exercise of a firm faith, we shall have access to the most full and flowing fountain of comfort which the Gospel affords. 2. Our confidence for the future must depend entirely on our knowledge of this doctrine, and our belief in it. It is only by sharing in the righteousness of Christ that any child of Adam ever has entered heaven, or ever will. And the robes which the ransomed wear who entered that blessed abode are robes that have been washed, and made white in the blood of the Lamb. V. ITS POSSESSION. It is faith in Christ, alone, which can make this righteousness ours. Show me one, therefore, who is exercising simple faith in Christ as his Saviour, and I will show you one who has a gracious, covenant, inalienable right to say, "This little word 'our' in the text takes me in. I belong to the company here spoken of. Jehovah-Jesus is my Righteousness." (R. Newton, D.D.) *Jehovah our Righteousness*.—In that day, when we all shall stand before God, there will be a great multitude whom no man can number, perfectly spotless even in His searching sight. He who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, will look on them without offence. Nay, more than this: He will delight in them. These very men came from the world where we live—out of sin and imperfection—out of disease and decay—out of doubts and fears—out of murmurings and backslidings, and a thousand infirmities and errors. And

whence came this change? Where nothing approaches that is not perfectly holy, how entered this uncounted multitude of sinners? First, I think we shall be able to make it manifest that such a change cannot come from a man's self. We all can do much for ourselves in the way of self-government. But will any one be bold enough to say that self-government will make a man perfectly holy in God's sight? Everything human is imperfect; and no imperfect thing will suit our present purpose. We must have a perfect principle of righteousness, a perfect fount of holiness, something into the image of which the saints may be changed, each in his measure and degree, but all without spot or flaw of any kind. I answer that I cannot believe death to bring with it any such radical and total change. On what is the change at death dependent, in the case of God's saints? Why, entirely on the reality, and on the amount of progress, of that other change of which we are speaking. According as they are holy here below, so will that change be glorious. Again, what sort of a change is it that death brings about? Not a change of heart—not a change of desires, affections, principles—but merely, great as it is, a change of circumstances. The righteousness of the saints remains after death what it was before, with this difference, that every circumstance which before hindered its development will then be removed, and all will be replaced by circumstances the most favourable possible. Sin and imperfection will have been left behind in the grave; perfection and spotlessness put on in the resurrection. But the spiritual life goes on throughout, before and after death, one and the same in principle, in nature, in acceptability with God. Mankind is a tree tainted at the root. It is not that there are not fair branches—goodly leaves—bright blossoms—vitality and sap in abundance:—but that a taint lies at the root and infects all, so that it brings forth no fruit fit for the Master's use. What power can heal this tree? Manifestly, no power from without. All the suns, showers, and dews of heaven will never eradicate that taint from its root. The only conceivable way would be, if by some wonderful process its vital sap could be renewed; if some better and healthier influence could enter into its very root and core, and permeate all its branches with wholesome and fruit-bearing vigour. Such was the state of our humanity. Our race laboured under two disabilities before God: guilt, and powerlessness for good. He that created first, must create anew. By the same power, which made the first man a living soul, must the second Adam become a life-giving spirit. And all this within the limits of our race,—that the God whom man had offended, man might satisfy; that as by the disobedience of one man all were made sinners, so by the obedience of one man might all be made righteous. And this mighty thing was undertaken and achieved by the eternal Son of God Himself. He became man: not an individual human person, bounded by His own responsibilities, accountable to God for Himself and Himself only, which would have done us no good, whatever were the result of His Incarnation; but He took our nature upon Him—our nature entire: as entire as it was in Adam: He entered into its very root and core, and became its second Head. Now mark—He did not take that nature in its sinful development, as it then was, and now is, in each member of the human family; this would have been against His very essence and attributes as God, and was unnecessary for His work, nay, would have nullified that work: but He did take it subject to all the consequences of the state in which He found it—to temptation, —to infirmity,—to bodily appetites,—to decay,—to death. In our nature, He wrought out a perfect righteousness: and He presented Himself before the Father at the end of His course on earth, as the holy and righteous Head of our race, claiming of right, and by the terms of the everlasting covenant, that gift of the Holy Spirit, due by His merits, and become possible by His perfect human righteousness now united to the Godhead. So, then, the Lord Jesus becomes the Justifier of our race,—i.e., our clearer from guilt: and the Sanctifier of our race,—i.e., the giver of the Holy Spirit from the Father, by whom we become holy and changed into the image of God. Now, let us contemplate the effect on those who believe. Entering into Christ's finished work, they know Him as "Jehovah their Righteousness." In themselves, they are as others. They carry about with them the remnants of a body of sin, and are in conflict with it as long as they are here below. But sin has no dominion over them, nor shall it condemn them in that day. They are accepted in the Beloved. Christ's righteousness is their righteousness, because they are living members of Him the righteous Head, and are regarded by the Father as in Him with whom He is well pleased. Do you call Christ, Jehovah your Righteousness? What, then, is your estimate of your own duties,

and your performance of them? (*Dean Alford.*) *The Lord our Righteousness*:—
 I. The Lord is "our Righteousness," because He is OUR PARDON. "We have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins." Our amendment—our often too partial, superficial amendment—is not our pardon; for how can amendment cancel the past? Neither is our repentance our pardon; it neither is nor can be the meritorious cause for which God pardons. In the words of one of our greatest saints: "Our repentance needs to be repented of, our tears want washing, and the very washing of our tears needs still to be washed over again in the blood of our Redeemer." II. He is "the Lord our Righteousness" in the sense of OUR ACCEPTANCE WITH GOD. It is solely through His merits that we are first received, and are afterwards continued in the favour of God. Just as His righteousness is the meritorious cause of the remission of those sins which we repent of, so His righteousness is the meritorious cause of the acceptance of our service, notwithstanding its imperfections. III. In ordaining His Son to be "the Lord our Righteousness," God has also ordained in His wisdom that He should be the SOURCE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS IN US. He, our great Head, our second Adam, is the Lord, our "renewal in righteousness." 1. We partake of an evil nature, because we have naturally transmitted to us Adam's weak and sinful nature, and those who are savingly in Christ have had, and yet have, supernaturally transmitted to them Christ's nature, as the seed in them of spiritual and eternal life. 2. He is "the Lord our Righteousness," inasmuch as He is the Lord our strength to serve God and subdue Satan. IV. IN WHAT RESPECT CHRIST IS NOT, AND NEVER CAN BE, "OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." He never can be our righteousness, so as to supersede the necessity, in any one particular, of our own personal holiness and righteousness. Righteousness is the order, the harmony, of God's intelligent creation, just as sin is its disorder, its confusion. "The righteous Lord loveth righteousness," because He loves order, He loves harmony, He loves to see His creatures truly and permanently happy, which they only can be so long as they understand and fulfil the conditions of the particular place in His creation which He, in His infinite wisdom and goodness, has assigned to them. The love of God is righteousness. It is our inmost heart and affections being disposed towards God, as they should be when we consider who God is, and what He has done for us, and what claims His goodness has on us as spiritual beings redeemed by His Son's blood. Reverence to God is another branch of righteousness. It is our souls knowing and realising their place in the presence of so great and terrible a God. Obedience to rulers is righteousness; it is acting in accordance with the requirements of the place in which God has set us in human society. Obedience to parents, honouring and reverencing our parents, loving our brothers and sisters, is righteousness; it is realising the duties of our condition as members of families and households. Feeling for, assisting, judiciously and generously relieving the poor, is righteousness; it is fulfilling our position in a world left by God full of inequalities of estate and condition; which God has left full of these inequalities, in order that those servants of His to whom He has lent some superfluities, may grow in the grace of Christian charity by lessening the misery they see around them. Bearing distress with patience is another branch of righteousness; it is our hearts not revolting under, but submitting to, the dispensation of a God who always orders all things for the very best. (*M. F. Sadler, M.A.*) *The Lord our Righteousness*:—I. TO WHOM DOES THIS PASSAGE REFER? It is vain to inquire whether the reference here be to the Jews literally, or to Christians; for the thing comes to the very same result. II. HIS PERSONAL TITLE. "He shall be called the Lord our Righteousness." The word is Jehovah. Hence the amazing importance of the preceding inquiry; for whoever the person intended may be, here is a name applied to Him "which is above every name." 1. The language is strong; but His perfections allow it. His omniscience allows it. Peter said to Him, "Thou knowest all things"; and He said, "The Churches shall know that I am He who searcheth the reins and the heart." His omnipresence allows it. "Where two or three are gathered together," &c. "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." His unchangeableness allows it. He is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." 2. The language is strong; but His operations justify it. "By Him were all things created," &c. "Without Him was not anything made that was made." 3. The language is strong; but it accords with the worship demanded of Him and received by Him. 4. The language is strong, but the occasion requires it. His greatness must be carried into every part of His work as a Saviour. III. HIS RELATIVE CHARACTER, or what He is

to us. "The Lord our Righteousness." The former would have filled us with terror; but this softens down the effulgency; this throws a rainbow around His head, and tells us we need not be afraid of a deluge. How is He, then, "our Righteousness"? We answer, generally, He is so in two ways: by His making us righteous by a change in our state, and by a change in our nature; for the latter is as really derived from Him as the former. IV. THE KNOWLEDGE OF THIS. For names are designed to distinguish and to make their owners known. Persons, more than things, are always called by their proper names. 1. This is considered His greatest work and honour. When a man takes a name from any of his actions, you may be assured that he will do it from the most peculiar, the most eminent, the most glorious of them. 2. It means that He is to be approached under this character. This is always to be the great subject of the Christian ministry. 3. That all His people would own Him as such. (*W. Jay.*) *The Lord our Righteousness*.—I. THE LAW HAS SHUT US ALL UP UNDER SIN. 1. This law having been given, and being expressive of God's nature and holiness, He must require that it be perfectly obeyed. He can allow of no deviation from it, no coming short in any one jot or tittle. A lawgiver conniving at the breach of his own laws, though in the smallest particular, would be to make them despicable. 2. Who can declare, that never in thought, word, or deed, he has come short of what he owed to God and his neighbour? Who can say, I am clean, I am pure from sin? Yet the slightest imperfection, though but in thought, exposes us to the curse of God's righteous law. 3. But some perhaps will say, "I have not, it is true, done all I should have done; but I have done my best." The law replies, "Tell me not of your best; have you done all? if not, the curse is upon you." "But I have repented of what has been amiss." "Tell me not of your repentance: you have transgressed; the curse is upon you." "But I will do better." "Tell me not of doing better: you must do all. Could you render full obedience for the time to come, the past is still against you. That debt is unpaid: you are under condemnation." II. HOW, THEN, SHALL MAN ESCAPE? He has transgressed, and he must die, unless he can find one to answer the utmost rigour of its demands, to bear the fiercest vengeance of its curse. But no creature can do this. What hope, then, unless God Himself should find a substitute? What hope, unless God Himself should obey the law which He had given, and suffer in our stead? But is this probable? nay, is it possible? Yes. God Himself has done it. Jehovah has become "our Righteousness." God has given His only-begotten Son. In Christ, and in Him only, have we righteousness and strength. III. APPLY THESE TRUTHS. 1. Has the law wrought in us its convincing humbling work? Have we seen ourselves lost? 2. Have we, under a deep sense of our own undone condition, betaken ourselves to Christ for help? Have we, without reserve, fixed our hope of salvation upon Him? (*E. Blencowe, M.A.*) *The Lord our Righteousness*.—I. AN ANNOUNCEMENT OF AN IMPORTANT TRUTH. 1. The Lord is our Righteousness inasmuch as the purpose and plan of justifying sinners originated with Him. 2. Inasmuch as He Himself has alone procured righteousness for us. 3. Inasmuch as it is through His grace and by His free donation that we receive righteousness. II. AN UTTERANCE OF PERSONAL BELIEF AND CONFIDENCE. The language of faith, hope, joy, gratitude. III. A DIRECTORY TO THE SPIRITUAL INQUIRER. Anxious sinners wish to know the way of acceptance with God. The text is a brief but satisfactory answer. (*W. L. Alexander, D.D.*) *Christ's supreme name*.—I. EXHIBIT THE DELIGHTFUL CHARACTER UNDER WHICH CHRIST IS HERE PRESENTED. 1. His essential dignity. 2. His mediatorial office. 3. The spiritual relation in which He stands to His people. II. SPECIFY SOME CONSIDERATIONS WHICH PUT AN EMPHASIS AND VALUE UPON REDEMPTION, AND HEIGHTEN OUR SENSE OF ITS IMPORTANCE. 1. The work of redemption has ennobled our nature and shed a lustre over the annals of our world. 2. It eclipses and throws into the shade the greatest of the Divine works. 3. It enhances the value of temporal blessings following in its train. 4. It forms a permanent bond of union among subjects of grace. 5. Judge of the grandeur of the work by the doom denounced against those who despise and reject it. (*S. Thodey.*)

Vers. 7, 8. *The Lord liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them.*—*Divine persistence*.—Faith, even our own trembling faith, can hold on, perhaps, to the past; it retires upon the past in order to fortify its

position. There are its reserves, its supplies. It looks back, and as it looks the big words stand out, the high memories awaken, the ancient story revives again. "God was a King of old. The works that were done upon earth, He did them Himself." We can believe it still. God was about in those days, long ago. Men met Him in the way. "The hand of the Lord was upon me." Yes! in the past, in days long ago, we are sure of God; and this, not merely out of traditional habit, nor merely because it is far off and remote. No! it is rather because the present is never really grasped or understood in its true significance until it is past. The present disguises its inner glories in a suit of drab; it is busy with small affairs; it has no leisure to sit at God's feet and brood. So the present is always being misjudged and misinterpreted by those it holds prisoners in its tiresome meshes. Only as it passes off into some quiet distance from us do the frivolous incidents drop away out of sight and hearing, and the superficial vulgarities fall back into insignificance, and the real heart of the mystery is felt in its work upon us. It is no glamorous illusion which gives wonder to the present as soon as it is past. Rather, it is become wonderful because it has shaken itself free from the illusion which veiled it from our eyes while it was still with us. We see it now in its actual worth as part and parcel of a continuous existence, not as an isolated accident that comes and goes. So it wins dignity and pathos and beauty. So strange—this transfiguration of the common-place by the past: an old brick wall, a garden walk, a turn of a lane—all can become sacred and mystical because of those unknown to us who once walked there before we were born. And this is right. This is their truth. And so, too, our past, as we turn to review it, is really recognised to have possessed an importance which escaped us when it was within our living grasp. We see now how momentous were the issues involved in this or that ordinary and temporary decision which we took as it came along, without anxiety or strain. There lay, we now acknowledge, the parting of the road for us. There and then our souls were indeed at stake. Our whole future turned on what we saw or did that day. A day at the time so unmarked, and dull, and unmomentous. How little we remembered God as we did it! Yet it was He, before whose eyes we were at that moment become a spectacle to men and angels, at that passing moment when we made our choice. Yes! it is no glamorous illusion that the past throws: it is the actuality of things which it discloses. The past reveals God at work in the acts of judgment by which we stand or fall under His searching light. Therefore it is that the Jew, reading out his national past, saw and found God at work everywhere in it. Jewish prophecy was concerned with the past, at least as much as with the future. The prophet looked back and read into the facts their deep inner interpretation. Old events were recognised by him for their spiritual value; now they were lifted into the light of the Divine will. "When Israel came out of Egypt and the house of Jacob from among the strange people, Judah was His sanctuary and Israel His dominion. The sea saw that and fled. Jordan was driven back. The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like young sheep." Not at the moment of the deliverance could Israel have sung out that clear song of recognition. The escape out of Egypt was probably sordid enough at the moment; troubled, confused, dismal. Only long afterwards, when it had been clarified by the purifying process of time, could the prophet's eye pierce below the surface disarray and see the whole scene as a vivid and unthwarted drama; only after long review with vision purged could the singer pronounce that "God came from Teman and the Holy One from Mount Paran." Backed by the strong assurance that God was with our fathers, that God brought up His people out of Egypt, Faith must make its great venture and recognise that the God who was alive and active in the past is the same God to-day and for ever. This drab and dismal present which rings men ruefully round with its noisy bustle, with its troublesome futilities, holds in it urgent and supreme the living energies of God. When it has dropped away from them into the past they will see and know it. How disastrous, then, to cry out, when it is too late, "Surely God was in this place and I know it not." Why not wake up at once, in the very heart of stony and forlorn Bethel, and see now the golden stairs laid between heaven and earth? Here is the prophet's task, to declare that what God did once, He may yet do again. If He brought up His people out of Egypt, He can yet deliver them out of captivity in Babylon. Ah! that is the difficult, the impossible thing to believe. That is when and where the ordinary temper of faith collapses and recoils and surrenders. Egypt! They can see it all, feel it all. God's arm was outstretched

to save, and He spake; and His great presence went out to them; and His voice was heard like the voice of a trumpet, exceeding loud. But Babylon, where they now lie in captivity! How hard and grim those iron walls of fact which hold the people fast! How relentless the immense pressure of its tyranny! Day follows day, and all days are the same; and the night comes following the day; and no watchman can tell them any news; and no cry shatters the night! Nor even are the people gathered in Babylon. They are not assembled and compact, as once in Egypt, ready to move altogether if the opportunity ever came. No; they are now hopelessly divided—scattered to the four winds; lost in detachments amid a crowd of swarming cities. Nothing can happen; there is no sign; they see not their tokens. Heaven above them is as brass, and the earth as iron. No God appears. "Well enough in Egypt! We would have gone out with Moses then with willing feet; but we see no Moses now. Things are too strong for us; they shut us in. We listen, and no voice answers. It is different now; it can never be again as it once was." So we can fancy what these poor, faint souls to whom Jeremiah is writing must have murmured. As if Egypt had not looked just as hard and just as motionless to those who first heard the summons of Moses; as if it had not all been as grimly incredible then. And therefore, that same chill of despair that now overshadows them beside the willows of Babylon need not prevent another day like that of Moses arising as glorious as in Egypt. Another prophetic epoch will be known and named for ever. So the prophet announces. Once again the faith which is strong enough to face and defy the repellent facts of the present shall see its God rise as of old. We ourselves are sorely aware of conflict between our faith as it gazes back at the past, and our faith as it faces the chill and staggering present. We who can yet hold on to our belief in what happened long ago, find no heart to declare this might happen again to-day. God might be seen as visibly at work; Jesus Christ might be heard calling us with as clear a voice as that which fell on the ears of fishermen washing their nets by Galilean waters. The present wears so horribly material an appearance, and it looks so absurdly remote from Spirit and from God. "There is no God here," we cry; "Christ cannot be alive; no angels sing here of peace and goodwill." So everything about us asserts with might and main; it defies us to say our creed in front of it without laughing or without breaking down in sobs. Yes; but was not the present always what it feels to us to-day? Did it not always look as hard and commonplace and godless? The inn at Bethlehem was as noisy and regardless as Fleet Street to-day. The people felt life then as commonplace an affair as it seems to us on Ludgate Hill to-day. The past witnesses through all its long centuries to the actual reality of the living deed done by God in our midst. Again and again in dark days those who believed it to be true have dared to realise it in their own present day afresh, and have found it answer to their appeals. There was a revival, as we say, a revival in the present of what was once for all asserted in the past. As God who had delivered men from Egypt verified Himself anew in the God who can deliver out of captivity, so Christ who rose and lived has quickened a new generation sunk in its sloth; has named a new epoch, has brought in a new day; and men have started from their sleep to find that it was true what they had always dimly believed, Christ is alive, Christ is at work here on earth; the impossible can happen; the incredible change can stir and can transform; it is all true. It shall no more be said merely that God liveth who once raised Jesus from the dead; but God liveth—our own God—who still raises in Jesus Christ those who were dead in trespasses and sins into newness of life for evermore. Why not? Why not now? The old creed is being battered by ruthless attacks on its past records, and there is only one triumphant answer—a revival of its ancient efficacy in full swing here and now. Christ, we feel, may have once raised a dead world into life, but He cannot do it again. Are we going to acquiesce in that? Are we going to try to keep our faith, and yet confine it to a day long dead? If Christ cannot do it now, then He never did it. If we resign the present to its godlessness, then we shall not long retain our belief in God in the past. No; we have but one obligation: to rally first on the past, and in its strength to dare the present. Why should not we take our belief in Jesus Christ as seriously to-day, and let it be done again? Oh, for this outrush of a great revival! We have lingered and languished so long; is not the moment near for some reaction from our spiritual lethargy? The night has been so prolonged, there must surely be a streak of dawn. (*H. S. Holland, D.D.*)

Ver. 14. **They strengthen also the hands of evil-doers.**—*Strengthening the hands of the wicked*.—1. All sin is horrible in its nature, as being contrary to the character and will of God. 2. To strengthen the hands and hinder the repentance of sinners is to oppose the great plan of the Divine government. 3. It tends to the misery of mankind, and is the reverse of that benevolence which ought to govern us in all our conduct. 4. It is to operate with that evil spirit who works in the children of disobedience. 5. It is a horrible thing, because we thus become partakers of their sins. 6. It is directly contrary to God's commands, and marked with His peculiar abhorrence. (*J. Lathrop, D.D.*)

Vers. 21, 22. **I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran; I have not spoken them, yet they prophesied.**—*A Divine call indispensable to the success of a minister of the Gospel*.—I. A DIVINE CALL IS NECESSARY TO WARRANT ANY MAN IN TAKING UPON HIMSELF THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE. First, he ought to be satisfied that, in making his decision, he is not swayed by worldly motives, and should examine himself strictly as to the singleness of his aim, and earnestness of his desire, to promote God's glory and the good of souls. But as there may exist this desire on our part, when there is no call on God's, there is a second necessary point in regard to which we must be satisfied, namely, our fitness for the work; and this is a matter which must be determined not by ourselves, but by the proper authorities of the Church. But there is still another security against error in reference to this matter; for we must, in the third place, clearly see a way open in Providence for our approach to the ministerial office; and I can conceive that, not only may a man be satisfied as to the two first points, but his way may be so hedged up, that his vocation may be as clear as if a voice were to address him from heaven upon the subject. II. THE MAN WHO INTRUDES INTO THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE WITHOUT A PROPER CALL, HAS NO RIGHT TO EXPECT THE DIVINE BLESSING UPON HIS LABOURS, WHILST HE IS UNCALLED AND UNSENT. There are few things more absurd and thoroughly inconsistent with every principle of propriety, than the grounds on which young men have too often been appointed to the holy ministry. How often have we known young men licensed to preach the Gospel, merely because they had attended the requisite number of years at college, and were able to undergo an examination, whilst decisive evidences of personal religion were neither sought nor given; and then ordained as ministers of Christ upon being presented to a living by a patron, who, perhaps, had little interest in the parish, and still less in the cause of vital godliness! How deplorable that a youth inexperienced in the Christian warfare should be appointed to lead the hosts of the Lord! How deplorable that a person should be ordained to rouse and watch over the souls of others, who never felt any concern for his own; that one should be appointed to deal with persons labouring under the convictions of an awakened conscience, who is altogether ignorant of the matter, and to point out the way of salvation to others when he knows it only by hearsay himself! It is only a converted and divinely-called ministry, whose labours God can be expected to own and render profitable to His Church. However profound the intellect and acute the discrimination and splendid the eloquence of a mere man-taught preacher, though he may gratify the itching ears of his audience, and excite their admiration of himself, so far as the grand ends of preaching are concerned, he is like a man beating the air. III. THOUGH A PERSON MAY HAVE ENTERED INTO THE SACRED MINISTRY WITHOUT A PROPER CALL, THERE IS HERE A HOPE HELD OUT, THAT IF HE IS FAITHFUL IN THE DISCHARGE OF MINISTERIAL DUTY, GOD MAY FAVOUR HIM WITH A CALL, AND RENDER HIS LABOURS AT LAST EMINENTLY SUCCESSFUL. It would seem from ver. 22, that, even though a person do enter the ministerial office from improper motives, and without a Divine call, yet, if he act according to the instructions of God's Word, and apply it for the regulation of his own heart and conduct, and be diligent and faithful in the performance of ministerial duty, he will be caught by the truth with which he is brought into contact, and converted and commissioned by God, and made to see the Divine pleasure prospering in his hand. This is certainly a perilous experiment for any man to make, but there are undoubted instances on record of unconverted men intruding into the ministerial office from secular motives, whose presumption has been pardoned, whose souls have been converted, whose official appointment has been recognised of God, and whose labours have ultimately been abundantly blessed. Oh, what need of intimate and very frequent communion with God, that our graces may be kept in lively exercise, that, when we mingle

with our people, coming fresh from the ivory palaces, all our garments may smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia; that, being constantly conversant with spiritual things, and having our affections placed upon them, an habitual solemnity may pervade our conduct, so that it may be no effort for us, wherever we go, always to bear in mind that we are the servants of the Lord Jesus. Ah, were we thus always to act, how should our private conduct illustrate and enforce our public services! (*W. B. Clark.*) **If they had stood in My counsel, and had caused My people to hear My words.**—*The ideal preacher*.—I. HIS MENTAL POSITION. "If they had stood in My counsel." By God's "counsel" here we understand His written Word. To stand in it implies making His Word the permanent sphere of the mind, the one great subject of study and scene of action. This mental position is—1. Most necessary. God's thoughts alone and not man's can spiritually and effectively help humanity, and these thoughts are only to be got at by profoundly studying the Scriptures, and thus standing in the counsel of the Lord. 2. Most ennobling. The man who lives in the Scriptures will have an elevation of spirit, a nobility of nature, a dignity of bearing that will give him power over the minds of men. II. HIS GRAND WORK. "Caused My people to hear My words." 1. This is the most difficult work. Man's spiritual ears are so sealed by carnality, worldliness, and sin, that they will not listen. Notwithstanding, this is the preacher's work. 2. This is the most urgent work. The words of the Lord are a man's only light, hope, and salvation. III. HIS TRUE TEST. "They should have turned" their hearers "from their evil ways," &c. 1. Conversion from evil is the great want of mankind. 2. Conversion from evil is the great tendency of God's Word. (*Homilist.*) *God's ministers must deal faithfully with men*.—Ministers should not be merely like dials on watches, or milestones on the road, but like clocks and larums, to sound the alarm to sinners. Aaron wore bells as well as pomegranates, and the prophets were commanded to lift up their voices like a trumpet. A sleeping sentinel may be the loss of the city. (*Bishop Hall.*) *The effectiveness of faithful dealings with the wicked*.—Dr. Pierson said, that at the funeral of a man who had been very generous but ungodly and dissipated, he felt unwilling to say anything that would be untrue to his convictions, and accordingly spoke to the business men, who were there in large numbers, of the folly of neglecting the soul even for the sake of worldly profit. One of them cursed and swore that he would provide in his will that he (*Mr. Pierson*) should never officiate at his funeral. Shortly after, he was smitten of an incurable disease, and for months he lingered in great agony, and died. He sent for *Mr. Pierson*, and begged him to pray for and with him. He also wrote him a letter in which he said, "Be always honest and true with men; tell them the truth, and even those who at the time may take offence, will afterwards stand by you and approve your cause." When he came to look into the hereafter, he wanted no shallow quicksand of flattering falsehood on which to rest his feet.

Vers. 23, 24. Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off?—*God nigh at hand*.—God is nigh at hand for judgment: the period of judgment, therefore, need not be postponed until a remote age; every man can now bring himself within sight of the great white throne, and can determine his destiny by his spirit and by his action. God is nigh at hand for protection: He is nearer to us than we can ever be to ourselves: though the chariots of the enemy are pressing hard upon us, there is an inner circle, made up of angels and ministering spirits, guarding us with infinite defences against the attacks of the foe. God is near us for inspiration; if any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God: what time we are in doubt or perplexity as to the course we should take, let us whisper our weakness into the ear of the condescending and ever-accessible Father, and by the ministry of His Spirit He will tell us what we ought to do. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The practice of God's presence*.—God is a Mind having all possible perfections, and one of these is Omnipresence. The deepest thought of modern poetry is that of the Divine immanence in nature, and the best modern theology recognises it. Emerson said that "Nature is too thin a veil, God is all the while breaking through." Are there not those among us who imagine that God dwells in churches, in certain consecrated places, at certain appointed times, and who rarely think that He is in their houses, unless one lies dead there and prayer is being said by an open coffin? The Syrian enemies of the Israelites called the God of Israel "the God of the hills and not of the valleys," believing that Jehovah's presence was stationed there, as the Greeks believed that Neptune was confined to the sea. And something

of this misconception lingers in us all when we think of God as being somewhere else than where we now are. Such mistakes make worship impossible. If God's nature had any bounds, if it were limited to any portion of space, it would be defective in being. If you could conceive of God as confined to any one place, He would immediately be shorn of His glory. In order to be God, He must be everywhere in His perfection. He cannot be restrained and confined by any higher power, for there is none other equally exalted. He would not voluntarily shut Himself out from His dominions, for He would not willingly curtail His own perfections. But, it may be asked, is not God peculiarly present in heaven, in the assemblies of His saints, in the hearts of His loving children? Yes, wherever He reigns without opposition, there He manifests His completer glory. But how can God dwell in heaven, in human temples, and in the hearts of His scattered children, without being omnipresent and without being purely spiritual; that is, incorporeal? God is in my soul, if there at all, in His whole nature, and in yours also; and when you come to realise the presence of God, never think that a fragment of Him is before you. No; the whole nature of the Eternal and Infinite Jehovah, before whose presence angels hide their faces, from whose throne the heavens and the earth flee away, and in whose light in the celestial climes the sun himself dare not shine, the whole essential glory of the Lord, God Almighty, penetrates, sustains, and glorifies our lives continually. God is an infinite Mind, present here in His infinite glory, and present in whatever other part of the universe I may ever dwell. And if you say such a mode of Being as His is mysterious even to inconceivability, I gladly and reverently grant it. God is Light, and as the light of the sun fills a globe of crystal with its splendour, displacing no particle, and yet not becoming identified with that which it illuminates, so God fills all this crystalline universe with His shining presence without becoming identified with that which He glorifies. Thus a rational philosophy justifies the teaching of God's omnipresence; but modern science throws even a more dazzling light on this sublime theme. Science, as taught to-day, presents to us four commanding facts, each one of which runs into practical religion. The first of these is the omnipresence of thought and adaptation in the universe. The doctrine of evolution, as Professor Drummond has said, has not affected, except to improve and confirm it, the old teaching that all things have been created on a plan. Now the plan is a complicated one, requiring the fitting together of many parts. It is plain that He who brings in the winter months directs the honey-bee to lay up in summer-time its store of food for the season of cold, and teaches it to build of waterproof wax its six-sided cells, wherein the honey may be packed without waste of room. Mind is present, not only in the bee's instinct, but in the world which supplies with its blossoms the sweetness on which the bee feeds. The second fact which science presents to us is the universality of motion. It is a mistake to speak of anything as being at rest. The universe is one blazing wheel within another blazing wheel, all rushing with inconceivable rapidity, and testifying, by the omnipresence of motion, to the omnipresence of that Mind that created and upholdeth all things, and without whose continued activity the very thought of universal motion is inconceivable and inconceivably absurd. The third fact that science presents to our attention is the universality of law. There is no caprice in the motions of the universe, but undeviating submission to intelligent regulation. But the proof of the universality of law is the proof of the omnipresence of God. Law is only the method of the Divine activity. Law is inconceivable except as the working of a willing Mind. Law, self-made and self-executed, is an absurdity, as much so as a proposition made to yonder organ that it should compose and then render the "Hallelujah Chorus." So that when you extend the domain of law so as to embrace the rushing hosts of the stars, and you find law everywhere executed, you only announce the omnipresence of Him who said to Jeremiah, "Am I a God at hand, . . . and not a God afar off? . . . Do I not fill heaven and earth?" And the fourth fact which science presents is the omnipresence of conscience. The moral law cannot be escaped. But this law is not of human origin. It was not enacted, it is not executed by man. It existed prior to all human legislation. It is universal and infallible; and, above all, it is executed by a Power not human. God is behind it and in it: and if we can escape by no possibility from its action, then by no possibility can we escape from the presence of Him who is its Author and Executor. "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord." Neither heaven, nor hell, nor the uttermost part of the sea is beyond the immediate presence of Him

who filleth all in all. It is sometimes said that God is in the world. It is truer to say that the world is in God. In Him we and all things move and have our being, and thus the universe becomes what Sir Isaac Newton called it, "The vast sensorium of Deity," with God vital and throbbing in every part. He upholds all things by the Word of His power. When the question was asked of Basil, one of the Christian Fathers, "How shall we do to be serious?" he answered, "Mind God's presence." "How shall we avoid distraction in service?" he replied, "Think of God's presence." "How shall we resist temptations?" "Oppose to them God's presence." This is God's method of perfecting holiness. Enoch, the first saint, is described as one who walked with God. His faith was to him the evidence of things not seen. His loving trust made God a present reality. The Lord said unto Abraham, "Walk before Me, and be thou perfect." The secret of perfection is to know God's presence. Remember this truth when you are abroad in nature, and nature is everywhere, in your solitary room as truly as among the summer fields. This is God's universe, in every part of which He is actively present. Behold Him in the light, as the Persian poets did, for He is there. See Him in the sun, as the makers of the Hindu Scriptures did. Breathe in His life as you breathe the morning air, for it is God's atmosphere in which you dwell. Let every created thing be a reminder of the Infinite Father, the Eternal Spirit, who lives in all life, moves in all motion, shines in all splendour, and filleth heaven and earth. And remember this truth when you pray. It will kindle your soul to devotion, it will control rebellious thoughts, it will make prayer a real communion with a personal God. Remember this truth in the midst of sorrow. It brings to the weary and troubled heart the immediate presence of the Infinite Comforter. It brings before the mind the consolation of an omnipresent love, and the sure defence of an omnipotent hand. And remember this truth in your daily toil. God is with you, and you may build a chapel to Him in your heart and sing His praises from morning until night. But if God is everywhere, the Spirit of God, embodied in His people, should go everywhere. There can be no righteous divorce in our best lives from this sorrowing and sinning world. The Church has lived too much apart with God, in meditation and worship. Its business is to enter human life in every division of it, with the Divine Spirit of healing and help. (*J. H. Barrows, D.D.*)

*The present God :—*I. THE FOLLY AND SIN OF EVERY FORM OF IDOLATRY. When Pompey, the Roman general, had conquered Jerusalem, his curiosity prompted him to enter the temple; and finding no image there of any divinity, he was filled with astonishment, and would fain have called the Jews atheists. The presence of an image seemed to him an essential part, or, at least, an important prerequisite, of Divine worship. As Pompey thought, so all pagans think; hence we term them *Idolaters* (from εἰδωλον, an image), because they either worship an image as God, or adore their divinities through the instrumentality of an image. This practice both reason and revelation condemn, as being exceedingly senseless, and exceedingly sinful. II. THE TRUTH OF THE TEXT SHOULD STIMULATE US TO THE CULTIVATION OF AN INCESSANTLY DEVOTIONAL SPIRIT. The whole universe is but one vast apartment filled with the Divine presence, and everywhere, therefore, we may be closeted with God. III. SURE CONSOLATION TO THE CHRISTIAN, AMIDST THE SORROWS TO WHICH HE IS EXPOSED. God sees every tear, hears every groan. His seeing is blended with sympathy. "Like as a father pitieth his children," &c. With the exercise of sympathy is connected the putting forth of Divine power. He will either deliver us from our sorrow, or give us strength bravely to bear it. IV. WHAT A SAFEGUARD AGAINST THE SEDUCTIONS OF SIN MAY THOSE NOBLE WORDS PROVE. Shall we yield to temptation beneath the gaze of the infinitely Holy One? Shall we dare to oppose the righteous will of Him, "in whom we live and have our being"? Shall we dare to break the holy commands of the Divine law-giver, in whose presence we are at all times placed? (*Homilist.*)

*The Divine perfections :—*There are three ways of discoursing upon the perfections of God. 1. We prove that there is a God, and that He must have these powers and qualities which we ascribe to Him. 2. Supposing that God is, and that He possesses all perfections, we explain them as far as the sublimity of the incomprehensible subject permits, and confute the wrong opinions which have been entertained concerning them. 3. Supposing that they to whom we address ourselves have just and honourable notions of all God's perfections, and confining ourselves chiefly to practical truths, we show the effects which such a belief and such a knowledge ought to produce, and endeavour to excite in them a behaviour suitable

to their faith. **I. GOD'S OMNIPRESENCE, UNLIMITED KNOWLEDGE, AND IRRESISTIBLE POWER.** 1. God is present everywhere. A proof of this may be taken from the creation. The world is plainly the offspring of one great and wise mind, which produced it, and disposed all its parts in that beautiful order in which they continue, and gave them those regular motions which they preserve, and by which they are preserved. Now God must of necessity be present with the things that He made and governs. 2. He is present everywhere in knowledge. This perfection is united with the former: for, if God be everywhere, everything must be known to Him. 3. God is also present everywhere in power. He is the only independent being, He is before all things, He made all things, He upholds and governs all things; from Him all powers are derived, and therefore nothing is able to resist or defeat His will.

II. WHAT EFFECTS THE FORE-MENTIONED TRUTHS SHOULD PRODUCE IN US. 1. We should endeavour to resemble God in these perfections, and in the manner in which He exerciseth them. 2. This consideration should deter us from sin. 3. This consideration should teach us humility. Pride is a very unfit companion for poverty and dependence; and vain men should remember that they receive all from God, and that they can acquire and preserve neither strength nor skill, unless by His blessing, by His appointment or permission. 4. A particular encouragement to reliance and contentment, to faith and hope. (*J. Jortin, D.D.*)

The omnipresence of God:—I. THE DOCTRINE OF GOD'S OMNIPRESENCE. The omnipresence of which the Bible teaches us that God is possessed, is that attribute by which He is present everywhere, equally, at all times, in the possession of all His perfections. 1. The uniformity of the operations of nature, and of the moral principles by which the universe is governed,—everywhere that we are able to trace them,—leads us to conclude that the same God is everywhere present, as the Ruler and Disposer of all. 2. The possession of this attribute is necessary to the perfection of His other attributes, and the want of this would destroy the analogy and resemblance that otherwise exists between them. 3. The declarations of Scripture regarding the omnipresence of God are both plain and numerous: Job. xi. 7-9; Acts vii. 27, 28; Psa. cxxxix. 7-11; 1 Kings viii. 27; Amos ix. 2, 3; Jer. xxiii. 23, 24; Matt. xviii. 20, xxviii. 20. **II. THE PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF THE DOCTRINE OF GOD'S OMNIPRESENCE.** 1. God is everywhere present, as the Preserver and Governor of all. 2. God is everywhere present as the object of religious worship. 3. God is everywhere present as the inspector of our conduct. 4. God is always present as the helper and Saviour of His people. In the time of duty he will give them strength to perform, in the time of trial strength to resist, and in the period of trouble strength to endure. (*W. Dickson.*) **The Divine omnipresence:—**Few things in nature but are mysterious to us. Outward appearances we know, but when we attempt to inquire into the causes of things, we find our researches quickly at an end. Our sensations give us no intelligence of the essence of those material objects which produce them, nor, indeed, immediately of their existence itself: and though we have an inward consciousness of our own existence, our perceptions, and volitions, yet what the intimate nature is of that self-consciousness, we cannot understand. Least of all can we form any adequate notion of the Supreme Being himself. By reflecting on ourselves, on the constitution of our nature, with its various tendencies, affections, passions, and operations, and by considering external objects as perceived by our senses, we are led to a persuasion of His being, power, wisdom, and goodness. By this method of inquiry we are also convinced that God is intimately present with us, and with all beings in the universe: yet still it is only by the means of sensible effects that we attain to this conviction. The Divine nature and attributes themselves, the inward principle of the Almighty's various operations, "no man hath seen at any time, nor can see." Hence it follows, and we find it so in experience, that the perfections of God which are the most clearly manifested, and immediately exercised in His works, are the best understood by us. We have much more distinct apprehensions of power, wisdom, and goodness, than of self-existence and infinity. With regard, therefore, to those attributes which it is hardest for us to conceive, we shall still think and speak of them the most usefully, when, as far as it can be done, we consider them in relation to the works of God. God is from all eternity: He consequently exists without any cause; He therefore necessarily is, and it is impossible that He should not be. But it is certain that absolute necessity of existence excludes all relation to any one place more than another: for He who is, by necessity of nature, must be everywhere, for the same reason that He is anywhere; because if He could be absent from any one place,

He might be absent also from any other place, and so could have no necessary existence. To necessity of existence all points of space are alike; and, therefore, it is equally necessary in them all. This argument is held to be irrefragable: but there is another, at once more obvious and more convincing. We see, in this vast creation, a power everywhere exerted in pursuing a design that is perfectly uniform and consistent: we see it exerted at all times, and in all places; the same intentions are, by the same energy, advanced from age to age. Now, wherever this power is exerted, there is God; in the heavens above, and in the earth beneath. But if we know that He fills heaven and earth, we know that there can be no difficulty in supposing that He is present in all imaginable worlds, and in all imaginable space. In this kind of reasoning, from obvious and manifest appearances, the mind rests perfectly satisfied. And thus we conceive, that as in man there is one individual conscious self, that sees, hears, feels, and determines for the whole body; so in the universe (but in a manner infinitely more perfect) there is one conscious intelligent nature, which pervades the entire system, at once perceiving in every place, and presiding over all. To every good mind this must be a joyful reflection. It is a noted observation, that in the company of one whom we esteem and love, we are sensible of a pleasure which seems to communicate itself to all objects around us. And why should not all nature appear to us delightful, as it is everywhere the seat of the Divine presence; the seat of that presence which contains the perfection of grandeur and of beauty? God is here; and should not everything rejoice as in His presence? So the rising sun displays his beams, and the skies are filled with day; a thousand beautiful objects open to the eye, nature smiles on every hand, and the world appears a grand and delightful theatre. To look on the beauty of opening flowers, gradually growing up to all their pride, is certainly pleasant, even to a superficial observer; but to discern the Creator's hand which adorns them in a manner so delightful, and to consider them as the contrivance of the eternal Mind, eloquently displaying His intention to please the children of men, this shows them in a very different, and in a much nobler light. Even the most formidable appearances in nature, considered in this view, become easy to the imagination. If the thunders and the lightnings of heaven are conceived as having the Deity presiding in them; if the wild tempests and the tumultuous ocean are His servants, constantly under His eye, ever executing His pleasure, and having all their force measured by Him; they cease then to be terrible, for they discover a power which must be always tempered with kindness, and directed by love. (*A. MacDonald.*) *The omnipresence of God:—I. INFINITE KNOWLEDGE.* If a being is perfectly acquainted with me—if he knows all I do, and all I say, and all I think—he is, in an eminent sense, present with me. In this sense God is everywhere present; there is nothing hidden, nothing concealed from Him. *II. DIRECT, CONSTANT, AND UNIVERSAL AGENCY.* Wherever a being immediately operates, there He is present. When God created the world out of nothing, He was present at its production: but the same power is requisite to sustain, as to create, the universe. If we imagine the lights of heaven to exist and move, and the processes of nature to be carried on by the laws of this Creator, yet let it be remembered, that there is no binding power in law; it is only the ordinary rule by which creative energy and power sustains the world, and the works He has formed. Thus it is with God's power in the laws of nature, not simply by ordination or by appointment, but by a perpetual impartation of mighty energy, which, if for a moment withheld, the world would cease to be. And He is not only employed in preserving His works, but, as far as our knowledge extends, He is perpetually calling new beings into existence and terminating the present condition of others. Both are perpetually passing the opposite barriers of life—entering into existence, and passing out of it: but neither event transpires without the immediate presence of God. *III. THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF HIS PURPOSES.* The world was created for His glory: but if on its production he had retired from it, only sustaining it in being, we might have seen His power in creation; but His wisdom, His might, His goodness in the works of providence, would not have been displayed. But He governs the world which He has made, and His supremacy is so complete that nothing happens without His permission; and every purpose of the Eternal Mind will be fully and perfectly accomplished. "The purpose of the Lord shall stand, and He will do all His pleasure." To accomplish these objects He must be everywhere present; not only acquainted with external events, but with the thoughts and the intents of the human heart. *1. The grandeur and the incomprehensibility of Jehovah,*

2. The nature of all true religion. All religion is founded on correct views of the Deity ; it is the state, the habit of mind, which accords with our relation to God and His perfections. If, therefore, God be a Spirit, and by reason of His spiritual nature is everywhere present, then He must be worshipped in spirit and in truth ; that is, in sincerity and with the heart. 3. Religion is a habit of mind. It consists not in isolated acts of worship ; not in our regular attendance on the Sabbath in the house of prayer : but the conviction that God seeth us at all times should make us religious in all places. 4. Our subject is full of consolation to the good man. Oh, it is a delightful and cheering thought, that my heavenly Father is never absent from me. 5. However forgotten and contemned may be the doctrine of God's omnipresence, it is an awful truth to ungodly men. (*S. Summers.*)

The omnipresence of God :—I. THE PROOFS OF IT. It is implied in the idea of an unoriginated Being, that there can be nothing to limit Him. Were His existence determined to one place, rather than to another, it must have been so determined by some prior cause ; and, consequently, He could not have been the first cause.

2. That necessity by which the Deity exists, can have no relation to one place more than to another. It must be the same everywhere that it is anywhere. The infinity itself of space is nothing but the infinity of the Divine nature.

II. THE MANNER OF IT. God is to be conceived as present with us in all we think, as well as in all we do. The motives of our actions, our most secret views and purposes, and the inmost recesses of our hearts, lie naked before Him. 2. He is present with us by His influence. His hand is always working to preserve us, and to keep up the springs of life and motion within us. 3. He is present with us by His sense. We feel Him in every effort we make, in every breath we draw, and in every object that gives us either pain or pleasure. 4. It follows, from hence, that He is present with us in a manner in which no other being can be present with us. It is a presence more real, more close, more intimate, and more necessary.

III. THE PRACTICAL IMPROVEMENT OF THIS SUBJECT. 1. Since God is equally present everywhere, we ought not to imagine that our worship of Him can be more acceptable in one place than in another. 2. Since God is the only being that is present with us in the manner I have described, there can be no other being who is the proper object of our prayers. 3. The consideration of the constant and intimate presence of the Deity with us, ought to encourage us in our addresses to Him. He is our benevolent parent, and therefore no pious wish of our hearts, no virtuous breathings of our minds, no desire of bliss that can be directed to Him, can escape His notice, or fail of being properly attended to. 4. A reverential fear should continually possess us, since God is always with us. 5. The presence of God with us should deter us from sin. 6. The presence of God with us should support us in the performance of our duty, and quicken us in a virtuous course. 7. The consideration of God's presence with us should encourage and comfort us under every pain and trouble. A present Deity is a present friend, and a present helper in every time of need. (*R. Price, D.D.*)

*The omnipresence of God :—*If you were cast out of your country a thousand miles off, you are not out of God's precinct ; His arm is there to cherish the good, as well as to drag out the wicked ; it is the same God, the same presence in every country, as well as the same sun, moon, and stars ; and were not God everywhere, yet He would not be meaner than His creature, the sun in the firmament, which visits every part of the habitable world in twenty-four hours. (*S. Charnock.*)

Vers. 28, 29. *The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream ; and he that hath My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully.*—*The word and the dream :—*The prophet here exhibits in contrast Divine teaching and the speculations of men. The former he calls the Word of the Lord. The latter he calls but dreams, the visionary offspring of the human mind, and partaking of the weakness and fallibility of the source whence they spring. Human minds must think. They will clothe truth in forms of their own. Classify, arrange, systematise. It helps memory and clearness of conception. Yet all such speculation needs to be under the restraint of a godly fear, of a solemn sense of responsibility, to be sober, guided by a constant reference to Holy Scripture, carefully restrained from wandering into the dangerous regions of mere invention, and guarded against the spirit of dogmatism and dictation. The moment the dream of man and the oracle of God are put on a footing of equality, and the distinction that separates them is forgotten, mischief ensues ; the teacher promulgates error, his teaching degenerates into "vain babbling" ; and "the lips that should keep knowledge,"

"cause the people" that seek at them the law of the Lord "to err through their lies and their lightness." In that pure word alone Divine energy and efficiency reside. That is the fire whose searching heat few things can abide unchanged, the hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces, that alone can effectually subdue the hardness of the human heart, and conquer the stubbornness of the human will. One step in the process of obtaining scriptural truth from Scripture is interpretation. Scriptural truth is not the letter of the word, but its meaning, the mind of God conveyed to men under its various forms and delineations. Truth lies in the Scriptures as the ore lies in the mine, mingled with foreign substances, disguised by various combinations. Not till it is elicited, disengaged and presented in its simple, unmixed condition, is it moral and spiritual truth, an infallible lesson of doctrine and duty to men. Another step in the process of obtaining scriptural truth from Scripture is to systematise, arrange, and combine the results of interpretation. Truth must be adjusted to truth, so that they may be parts of a coherent whole, and not a confused aggregation of unrelated particles. A separate truth viewed without reference to other truths grows immediately disproportionate and corrupt. Hence the necessity of "comparing spiritual things with spiritual," "prophesying according to the proportion," that is, the analogy "of the faith," "rightly dividing the word of truth." Let us next attend to the action of the human mind on the truth thus ascertained. The mind will not receive truth passively. It will think, speculate. For instance, it is taught redemption, viz., that by the suffering and death of Christ, man is relieved from the wrath of God and the punishment legally due to transgressors on condition of becoming penitent and believing. This is Divine teaching. But the mind will not rest there. It will have theories of redemption, and it may have different theories innocently, provided it leaves the truth in its integrity; and any man may tell his theory, his dream, if he do but tell it as a theory, and not put it on a level with the truth which it attempts to explain. There are Scripture hints, again, which we cannot refrain from attempting to expand, to give them form and fulness by conjectures of our own; as, for instance, a spiritual state of being and a future life we seek to clothe with substance and reality by imagining what they are, what are the conditions of such states of existence, what are their sources of enjoyment, what their modes and occasions of action; and we seize upon analogies and symptoms, if we can find any, to help our conceptions. But the teacher must always be careful to distinguish between the explicit announcements of God's Word, which are infallible because Divine, and those thoughts of man about them, which are valuable only in proportion to the soundness of the argument and evidence by which they are sustained. But there is a question lower down than all we have yet said—How shall we extract scriptural truth from Scripture,—how shall we derive the meaning from the letter of the Word? 1. The natural and apparent meaning is ordinarily the true one. The Bible is God teaching men by human speech. To do this effectually it conforms to the laws of human speech. It is popular teaching clothed in popular phraseology, and not in the technical language of scientific theology. 2. That meaning of any particular passage of Scripture is the true one, which harmonises with the general strain of its teaching. We are not to build doctrines on isolated texts, if there are other texts which, fairly considered, operate to modify and limit their sense. God must be consistent with Himself. What He says in one place cannot contradict what He says in another. And the true sense in either must be that which gives a consistent sense in both. 3. The ancient meaning is to be preferred to any that is more modern. There are no such things as discoveries in Christianity. It is not an improvable system. It has no such thing as growth. Christianity came from the hands of its Author perfect and unalterable. No doctrine that was unknown in early ages is any part of it. We are to remember that the Gospel was taught before it was written, that a definite system of belief and practice was established before the Christian Scriptures were composed. And the Scriptures do but echo and republish this, and with this system in our minds, handed down from the beginning in the Church, we are to read them. The meanings that conform to it we are to embrace, the meanings that contradict it we are to reject. (R. A. Hallam, D.D.) *Religious truth and error*.—I. RELIGIOUS ERROR IS A HUMAN DREAM BUT RELIGIOUS TRUTH IS A DIVINE WORD. 1. Let us notice a few of the religious errors that have ever been prevalent in the world. (1) Sacramentalism—the idea that we can discharge our moral obligations, and obtain the favour of God, by attending to certain religious ceremonies. (2) Meritoricism

—the Pharisaical idea that, on the ground of our own individual excellence, we have a claim to the Divine benignancy. (3) Functionalism—the idea that certain periodical religious services rendered to our Maker, where the life is selfish and worldly, are acceptable worship. (4) Proxyism—the idea that we can be saved through the merits or offices of some priest, or supposed heaven-favoured man. (5) Fatalism—the idea that we can do nothing; that if we are to be saved, we shall be saved, and that, therefore, we must run the risk. 2. These ideas are all human dreams. (1) They imply a partial dormancy of the soul. (2) They are temporary illusions. There is a morning to dawn on every soul, when they will melt away as visions. 3. But while these religious errors are mere human dreams, religious truth is God's Word. A "word" is the representative of mind. God's Word is the representative of His all-perfect Mind; it is the "arm of the Lord revealed."

II. RELIGIOUS ERROR, AS WELL AS TRUTH, IS ALLOWED A VOICE IN THIS WORLD.

1. God allows it to speak. He does not seal the lips of the false prophet. This fact indicates—(1) The superior force of truth. God knows that truth is sufficient to conquer any error, if His prophets will but speak out "faithfully." (2) Man's inalienable right to free speech. God allows it even to the false prophet. It is not, therefore, for man to interfere with this right. (3) The probability of future retribution. False prophets will not always speak; their mouths will one day be "stopped"; they will be "speechless." Eternal justice demands this. 2. But whilst the false is allowed to speak, the true is bound to speak. "He that hath My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully." My Word, not his own; not the word of others, but Mine, and that "faithfully." Though it clash with men's tastes, prejudices, and practices, speak it;—though it rouse the bitterest opposition, lead to the sacrifice of property, health, life itself, speak it, and speak it faithfully.

III. THE RELATIVE VALUE OF RELIGIOUS TRUTH AND RELIGIOUS ERROR DOES NOT ADMIT OF COMPARISON. 1. What are these human dreams, these religious errors, though elaborated into intellectual systems, or organised into gorgeous rituals, compared to My Word? Chaff. 2. But this pithy appeal may be viewed in other applications without violating its spirit. (1) It may apply to ideas and their expressions. There is a man who is exceedingly particular about the garb of thought: all his talk is about style. Mere style is chaff. (2) It will apply to religion and its forms. There is another who is wondrously attached to certain forms of worship; he has but little sympathy with those who adopt not his ritualism. Mere formalities are chaff. (3) It will apply to character and its accidents. There is another who has not much sympathy with a brother, because of his appearance, manners, or connections. These accidents of character are chaff. (4) It will apply to spiritual and secular worth. There is yet another who is striving after worldly wealth; who thinks more about property than principle—the body than the soul. The world is chaff compared with the soul. (*Homilist.*) *The faithful utterance of the Divine Word.*—I. A COMPARISON

INSTITUTED AND ILLUSTRATED. "What is the chaff to the wheat?" The comparison is instituted between the pure authorised Word of God, and the vain fancies and delusions of men, called here "dreams." Dreams are those vague speculations of men who profess to be trying to find something new in the world of religion about God, man, and the future life, while at the same time they depart from the truth. Their endeavour seems to be to comfort and cheer those who are anxious about spiritual things, and the future, by throwing doubt upon the old teachings, and they cry, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace." But the sure Word of God tends to arouse men, to quicken their consciences, and show them what they are within themselves. Revelation is a light streaming from the throne of God upon our dark world; where its beams shine, the night of pagan darkness retires, the spectres of ancient superstition depart, and errors which had enslaved the mind for ages melt away; there Truth erects her throne and bestows the blessings of her reign; she breaks the iron sceptres of despotism, throws open wide the putrid dungeons of oppression, removes the fetters of the slave, awakens the torpid powers of the mind, erects the prone savage into a man, transforms man into a saint, and fits him to dwell with the angels of God. In the time of sorrow, when life is darkened with affliction and bereavement, what are the dreams of men then when compared with the Word of God? said a man some time ago, who had not gone to the Word of God for his comfort and hope in times of trial, but he had tried to find comfort and hope in the philosophy, falsely so called, of human reason; finding, as he thought, a refuge in agnosticism; but when his beloved daughter died, and when he saw the corpse prepared for

its last resting-place, his heart was sad, for he saw nothing beyond; in his philosophy he could find no help, not a ray of light to lighten the gloom, and there was nothing to soothe his sorrow, until from the lips of the man of God standing by the side of the casket he heard words that seemed to drop from Heaven for him: "Let not your heart," &c. "Then," he said, "whilst the tears were not dried, and the sorrow for the present loss yet remained, yet through the tears I could see a light breaking through the darkness, and above the sorrow a fountain of joy, which would be eternal, and I rested upon the Word and found peace." II. AN

ADMONITION TO MINISTERS, URGING THEM TO FAITHFULNESS IN THE DELIVERY OF THE DIVINE WORD. "And he that hath My Word let him speak My Word faithfully." Let him maintain its Divine authority. Let him hold to the truth and proclaim the Word that has the "thus saith the Lord" behind it. Speak it not as the word of men, but as the Word of God. Let the dreams of men be told (if they must be told) as dreams, but let the faithful minister proclaim the Word of God with all faithfulness and earnestness. Let him speak it correctly. Keep close to instruction, neither add to nor take from, bring no corrupt glosses, but receive it at the mouth of God, and deliver it pure and unadulterated to the people. But there is also, I think, in the text a word or suggestion for the hearers, as well as for the preacher. They should take heed how they hear, and should never indulge in the desire for human speculation instead of the Word of God. (*John T. Wills, D.D.*)

Ministerial fidelity.—I. EXPLAIN THIS MINISTERIAL DUTY. To preach the Word of God faithfully implies—1. That a minister understands it. "He that hath My Word," &c. By having the Word of God is meant having the knowledge of it, in distinction from having a dream, or a mere imaginary idea of Divine truth. It is true that a perfect knowledge of every text in the Bible is not necessary, in order to preach the Word of God faithfully. No man does, nor perhaps ever will, possess such a universal and perfect knowledge of the Scriptures. But yet a clear, a just and general knowledge of the first principles of the oracles of God, is necessary to qualify a preacher for the faithful discharge of his duty. Ministers must have the Word of God in their understandings as well as in their hearts, in order to be able and faithful instructors of the doctrines and duties of Christianity. 2. They must not only understand the Word of God, but know that they understand it. "He that hath a dream," saith the Lord, "let him tell a dream," and not pretend it is My Word; "and he that hath My Word, let him speak My Word"; and speak it as Mine, and not as his own. But if ministers do not know that they understand the Word of God, how can they, with propriety and sincerity, preach His Word as His Word? To do this would be daring presumption. The primitive preachers of the Gospel knew that they knew, not only the inspiration but the doctrines of the Gospel. They could say, "We believe, and therefore speak." They could confidently declare that they did not preach cunningly devised fables. 3. Fidelity requires ministers to preach the Word of God fully, and lay open the great system of doctrines contained in it. The apostle Paul declares that he did not preach the Gospel in a partial and superficial manner, nor shun to declare the whole counsel of God. And if we look into his epistles we shall find that he developed the great plan of salvation as devised by God the Father, as executed by God the Son, and as applied by God the Holy Ghost. He explained the distinct offices and operations of the ever-blessed Trinity, in creating, redeeming, and governing the world. Of course, he taught the doctrine of Divine decrees; the doctrine of human depravity; the doctrine of vicarious atonement; and the doctrine of Divine agency in preparing all mankind for their future and final destination. It is difficult to see how ministers can preach the Word of God faithfully, unless they preach it in such a full and comprehensive manner. 4. They must preach the Word of God plainly, so as to be understood; but they cannot be understood by the great majority of their hearers, unless they use proper words, arranged in their usual, natural, and proper order. Christ preached as He conversed, with peculiar perspicuity. Paul imitated His example. He said he had rather speak five words which were easy to be understood, and edifying to common Christians, than ten thousand which they could not understand, and which could do them no good. 5. Fidelity requires ministers to preach the Gospel in its purity and simplicity. They have no right to mix their own crude and confounded opinions with the revealed truths which they are commanded to deliver. Truth mixed with error is often more dangerous than mere error alone. 6. It belongs to the office of those who preach the Word of God, to defend it against its open enemies. They are set for the defence

of the Gospel; and charged, in meekness, to instruct those who oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth. And to hold fast the faithful Word that by sound doctrine they may both exhort and convince gainsayers, whose mouths must be stopped. 7. The faithful preaching of the Gospel necessarily includes godly sincerity. Christ requires those to love Him supremely, whom He employs to feed His sheep and lambs. II. ENFORCE THE PRACTICE OF MINISTERIAL FIDELITY. 1. God expressly commands those who preach His Word to be faithful in the discharge of their duty. 2. It concerns them to consider, that they have solemnly bound themselves to be faithful in their sacred office. 3. Faithful preaching has a tendency to save, but unfaithful preaching has a tendency to destroy the souls of men. Conclusion—1. If preaching the Gospel faithfully includes so much as has been represented, then ministers have a very arduous and laborious work to perform. (1) It requires much reading and much thinking to acquire that knowledge of the Gospel, and that knowledge of the human heart, and that knowledge of the various ways of preaching and affecting the human heart, which is necessary in order to preach plainly, instructively, and impressively. (2) Besides preaching, they have a vast many pastoral services to perform, which require the exercise of all their wisdom, prudence, zeal, and self-denial. 2. If ministers are bound to preach the truth and the whole truth faithfully, then they are bound to preach against every species of error, whether in principle or practice. They are set as watchmen to espy danger, and warn their people against it. 3. If ministers are bound to preach the Word of God faithfully, then they can have no excuse for being unfaithful. Their obligations to fidelity are superior to all the reasons they can possibly urge in excuse for unfaithfulness. The commands of God, their own engagements, the cause of Christ, and the salvation of souls, create obligations to fidelity, paramount to all possible excuses for unfaithfulness, in the sight of God and man. 4. If ministers are bound to preach the Word of God faithfully, then they ought not to be afraid to preach it faithfully. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *God not in the preacher's code*:—Dr. J. G. Paton, when last leaving these shores for the South Seas, was seen off by a good number of friends. Many of his well-wishers were assembled on one of our piers to say farewell, and it occurred to them that a last signal might be sent to the departing vessel. One of the party approached the man in charge of the signal-station, and asked if a message could be sent. On hearing in the affirmative, the visitor wished that the words, "God-speed to you," should be arranged, and for that purpose the code-book was consulted. To the astonishment of all, the seaman confessed that the word "God" did not appear at all in the register; and so, to the general disappointment, a fresh message had to be signalled to the veteran missionary as he passed out from the river to the open sea. Sad, indeed, is it for any of us if we have not the name of God in our code-book. If we will we may all have God's name, first in our hearts, then on our lips, to be signalled as a message of peace to all whom we meet. **What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord.**—*Chaff or wheat*:—My theme is the superiority of the Divine Word to the merely human dreams by which men have sought to displace it. I refer not to the discoveries of science, but rather to those views regarding God, and the soul, and the hereafter which multitudes in our times are seeking to put in antagonism to the Word of God,—and I say that these "human dreams" when tested by experience are found to be chaff, while the Word of God, when similarly tried, is discovered to be wheat. I. THE HUMAN DREAM IS EMPTY; BUT THE DIVINE WORD IS SUBSTANTIAL. Chaff is a mere husk, but wheat is all grain. So the antagonists of the Bible deal in vague speculations, or empty negations; whereas the Scriptures are positive and satisfying. Try the human dream in the hour of bereavement. What has it to say to the mourner weeping over the casket that holds his dead beloved? I challenge infidelity to utter then a word which has in it a single particle of comfort for the stricken one. If he choose to repress the intuitions of his own nature, and shut his eyes to the evidences of intelligent design which exist in the external world, one may affirm that there is no God. But what comfort is there in that at such a time? The specific in medicine has won its recognition when it is seen to be unfailing. In like manner the power of the Gospel to comfort the mourner establishes its claim to be received as the Divine specific for his grief, and he will not give it up unless he gets something better in its place; least of all will he part with it for that which is unsubstantial as an airy nothing. II. THE HUMAN DREAM IS DESTITUTE OF NOURISHMENT FOR MAN'S SPIRITUAL NATURE, WHILE THE DIVINE WORD IS STRENGTHENING,

AND MINISTERS TO ITS GROWTH. Chaff does not feed ; but wheat gives nutriment. So mere speculation has in it no educating and ennobling influence. It occupies the mind without strengthening the character. Scepticism puts an arrest on progress. It stimulates the critical faculty into excess ; and, instead of stirring a man up to the formation and development of his own character, it makes him a mere anatomist of the characters of others. The great majority of mere critics have become so through their lack or loss of personal religious faith. What a contrast, in this regard, there is between the lives of the two Frenchmen, Vinet and St. Beuve ! They were companions in youth, and, indeed, friends through life. But St. Beuve lost his religious faith and became a literary critic, one of the very best of critics, indeed, yet only a critic, delighting the readers of his *Causeries du Lundi* with his expositions of the systems of other men and his estimates of their worth ; but Vinet, who retained his faith to the last, became a producer himself, added something great to the thought and work of his time, and earned the right to be called the "Chalmers of Switzerland." III. THE "HUMAN DREAM" HAS NO AGGRESSIVENESS IN IT TO ARREST OR OVERCOME THE EVILS THAT ARE IN THE WORLD, BUT THE DIVINE WORD IS REGENERATING AND REFORMING. "Is not My Word like a fire ? saith the Lord, and like a hammer," &c. Where shall we look for anything like similar results from those who are the votaries of the human "dreams" of agnosticism, scepticism, or infidelity ? What has any one of these done to improve the characters of individual men, or elevate society, or bless the world ? Let the advocates of infidelity either do more than we have accomplished, or let them for ever hold their peace. IV. THE HUMAN DREAM IS SHORT-LIVED, BUT THE DIVINE WORD IS ENDURING. Chaff is easily blown away, but the wheat remains. And so the "little systems" of human speculation "have their day and cease to be" ; but the "Word of the Lord endureth for ever." The arguments of the first antagonists of the Gospel are now read only in the pages of the apologists who replied to them. And in more recent times, how many adversaries have advanced to assail it, with haughty boasting that it would speedily be defeated, but with the same result ? Voltaire said that it took twelve men to establish the Gospel, but he would show that one man could overthrow it. Yet the Gospel is here studied by millions, and how few now read Voltaire ! A certain German rationalist alleged that the Gospel was not worth twenty-five years' purchase ; but half a century has gone since he wrote, and the Gospel is more vigorous than ever, while he is forgotten. Again and again, in the estimation of its adversaries, it ought to have been demolished ; but it will not die, for there is deep truth in Beza's motto for the French Protestant Church, which surmounts the device of an anvil surrounded by blacksmiths, at whose feet are many broken hammers, and which I once heard Frederick Monod translate thus—

"Hammer away, ye hostile bands :
Your hammers break, God's anvil stands."

(W. M. Taylor, D.D.) *Winnowing-time* :—Whenever God's Word deals with things truthful, be they material objects or living persons, however weak and feeble they are, it always speaks of them tenderly and handles them gently. God Himself has an eye of respect for everything that is real and veritable. He does not quench the smoking flax, nor will He break the bruised reed. But God hates every false thing. He scorns the hypocrite and the dissembler. The words of Jehovah are keen and cutting, sometimes even sarcastic, as He withers the specious lie with a laugh of ridicule. Notice the peculiar sharpness and biting severity of the text : "What is the chaff to the wheat ? saith the Lord." Like the edge of a razor it cuts. As a sabre flashing over one's head—a sword gleaming to the very point, a fire lurid with coals of juniper—we are appalled as we glance at it. It strikes with implacable resentment. There is no word of mercy towards the chaff—not a thought of clemency or forbearance. He bloweth at it as though it were a worthless thing, not to be accounted of, a nothing that vanishes with a puff. I. IN APPLICATION TO ALL MINISTRIES OF God's Word, let us first of all face the question, "What is the chaff to the wheat ?" That ministry which comes from God is distinguished altogether from that which is not of His own sending by its effects. 1. It is sure to be heart-breaking. If thou hast not been made to feel thyself lost, ruined, and undone by the Word, I charge thee by the living God to be dissatisfied with thyself, or else with the ministry under which thou art sitting ; for if it were God's ministry to thy soul, it would break thy heart

in shivers, and make thee cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" 2. Not less also is a God-sent ministry clothed with power by God's Spirit, to bind up the heart so broken. Only let a ministry be full of Jesus, let Christ be lifted up and set forth, evidently crucified in the midst of the assembly—let His name be poured forth, like a sweet perfume, it shall be as ointment to the wounded heart, and then it will be recognised as the ministry of wheat, and not a ministry of chaff to your souls. 3. Further, the ministry which God does not send is of no service in producing holiness. Dr. Chalmers tells us that, when he first began to preach, it was his great end and aim to produce morality, and in order to do so he preached the moral virtues and their excellences. This he did, he says, till most of the people he thought honest turned thieves, and he had scarcely any left that knew much about morality practically. But no sooner did Chalmers begin to understand, as he afterwards did so sweetly, the power of the Cross, and to speak about the atoning blood in the name and strength of the eternal Spirit, than the morality, which could not be developed by preaching moral essays, became the immediate result of simply proclaiming the love of God in Christ Jesus. What we all want, is to have less and less of that which comes from ourselves and savours of the creature, and to have more and more of that which comes from our God, who, though we cannot see Him, is still in our midst, the mighty to will and to do; for His power is the only power, and His life is the only life by which we can be saved ourselves, and those that hear us.

II. APPLY THE TEXT, AS INDIVIDUALS, TO OURSELVES. 1. No doubt, we are all well aware that if we have wheat in us, there is chaff too. Which preponderates, it may be difficult for us to tell. Some Christians are greatly puzzled when we begin to talk about the experimental riddle which the Christian finds in himself; but, if they be perplexed, we cannot help them out of the difficulty except by describing the case. I know in my own soul that I feel myself to be like two distinct men. There is the old man, as base as ever, and the new man, that cannot sin, because he is born of God. I cannot myself understand the experience of those Christians who do not find a conflict within, for my experience goes to show this, if it shows anything, that there is an incessant contention between the old nature—Oh, that we could be rid of it!—and the new nature, for the strength of which God be thanked! This suggests great searching of the heart in connection with the question, "What is the chaff to the wheat?" Oh, let us feel that the chaff is to be all got rid of. Let us feel that it is a heavy burden to moan and groan under, that it is not a grievance we should be contented with. Let us make no provision for the flesh. Let us not ask that any chaff may be spared to us. 2. A great deal of our religiousness is chaff likewise. Do you never find yourselves borrowing other people's experience? What is that but chaff? Do you never find yourselves at a prayer-meeting glowing with somebody else's fervour? What is that but chaff? Does not your faith sometimes depend upon companionship with some fellow-Christians? Well, I will not say that your faith is chaff, but I think I may say that such growth in faith as is altogether the result of second causes and not immediately of God, is very much like chaff. "Lord, take from me all the guilt, leave me nothing but the gold; take from me all the paint, the graining and the varnish, and leave me nothing but what is veritable and *bona fide*." It is a prayer for every Christian to offer. III. THIS TEXT MAY HAVE A VERY STRONG BEARING UPON THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH. Take any of our churches, take this church, and do you suppose that all of you who now profess to be Christians would be willing to burn at the stake for your Master? I wish we could believe it, but we cannot. I dare not tell you we believe it, because some of you have been put to much smaller tests than that, and what has become of you? The nautilus is often seen sailing in tiny fleets in the Mediterranean Sea, upon the smooth surface of the water. It is a beautiful sight, but as soon as ever the tempest wind begins to blow, and the first ripple appears upon the surface of the sea, the little mariners draw in their sails and betake themselves to the bottom of the sea, and you see them no more. How many of you are like that? When all goes well with Christianity, many go sailing along fairly, in the summer tide, but no sooner does trouble, or affliction, or persecution arise, where are they? Ah! where are they? They have gone. IV. We may use this text, sorrowfully and solemnly, WITH REGARD TO THE WHOLE MASS OF HUMAN SOCIETY. The whole mass of our population may just be divided into the wheat and the chaff. Both are mixed up together now, and it would be impossible for you or for me to divide them. In courts of law and the houses of commerce, on the Exchange, and in the committee-rooms, in busy thoroughfares

with their various shops, and in the open streets among those that ply different callings, here in this tabernacle, and in the many churches and chapels where multitudes are wont to assemble, we are all mixed up together—the wheat and the chaff. And it is wonderful how united the chaff is with the wheat, for see, the wheat once slept in the bosom of the chaff. There is chaff on the best threshing-floor. There are ungodly sons and daughters in the best families. Unconverted persons are to be found in intimate association with the holiest men and women. Two shall be grinding at the mill, one shall be taken and the other left. Two shall be in one bed, and one shall be taken and the other left. God will make a division, sharp, decisive, everlasting, between the chaff and the wheat. Oh, thou thoughtless, frivolous, light, chaffy, giddy spirit, canst thou bear the thought of being thus separated for ever? (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The chaff and the wheat compared*:—I. WHAT ARE WORLDLY MAXIMS, COMPARED WITH THE WORD OF GOD, BUT AS THE CHAFF TO THE WHEAT? Regard the conduct of men who call themselves men of the world; by what principles are they governed? what maxims do they follow? to what authority do they defer? To the authority of Him who made them, who sent His own adorable Son to buy lost, guilty offenders with the shedding of His precious blood; or to the authority of him who deceived our first parents, and hath ever since been spreading snares for their posterity? Doth it not encourage the worldling to spend the precious and unreturning season of mercy in laying up treasure to himself, instead of being rich toward God? Doth it not industriously stigmatise all true religion, as the dreams of enthusiasm, or the inventions of hypocrisy? But “what is the chaff to the wheat?” What is the authority of the world, compared with the authority of Him who reigneth supreme, King of kings and Lord of lords, King over His enemies? What is the ridicule which deters many a feeble-minded professor from seeking Christ, compared with the indignation of Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell? What is the present judgment of man respecting us, compared with God’s decisions? II. WHAT IS THE VALUE OF THAT LEGAL RIGHTEOUSNESS IN WHICH CARNAL MAN DELIGHTS, COMPARED WITH THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST JESUS, AS A GROUND OF JUSTIFICATION BEFORE GOD? A self-complacent Pharisee may regard himself to be, “touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.” An amiable moralist may gather, and deservedly gather, around him the esteem and love of men, and may ask, in the spirit of presumption, “What lack I yet?” Let the Spirit shine into his heart, take him as by the hand, and flash the lightnings of an injured law in his eyes; let him see God condemning sin in the flesh, by sending Christ to die for it in the flesh; let him see his own miserable shortcoming of that obedience, which a pure and heart-searching Judge requires, and then “what is the chaff to the wheat?” III. WHAT IS THE HAPPINESS OF THE WORLDLING, COMPARED WITH THE HAPPINESS OF A CHILD OF GOD? What is the chaff of his perishing joys, compared to the happiness of a believer? He hears the joyful sound of Gospel love, receives it through infinite grace into his heart, and walks in the light of his Father’s countenance. IV. WHAT ARE THE PRESENT PLEASURES OF SIN, WHICH ARE FOR A SEASON, COMPARED WITH THE GLORY OF HEAVEN, WHICH WILL BE FORFEITED BY THEIR INDULGENCE? (*R. P. Buddicom, M.A.*) *Lessons of the harvest field*:—Chaff is of great importance. We mete it out its due quota of praise, but are terribly anxious for fear the praise of chaff and that of wheat be disproportionate to their respective value. If chaff is praised by one sweet voice there ought to be a hundred singing the praises of the grain. Would a farmer be pleased if the net result of his ploughing and sowing, harrowing and reaping, was so many bags of chaff? Do we not see that if chaff has any value at all, it only has such through being the guardian angel of the wheat? It is the golden grain which will be food to men that is the great aim to which all the work of a farmer is directed. Let me apply in one or two ways the analogy of the chaff and wheat. I. MOTIVES AND ACTS HOLD THE RELATION WHICH CHAFF AND WHEAT HOLD TO EACH OTHER. Every act a man performs has behind it a motive. This may be good, bad, or indifferent. The motive determines everything, and however much the world condemn us for our actions, if they are done in the spirit of Christ, this reward will be ours, that our characters will become Christlike. Don’t despise a man’s actions, but never forget that it is the motive that made him do these that makes them commendable or condemnable. II. GOD JUDGES NOT THE ACTS BUT THE MOTIVES. Whilst the world is applauding some men because they have given some money to put a fancy window in some old church, God has written down words of condemnation. The motive in giving the money

was as base as base could be. The day is coming when the harvest of God will be gathered. Woeful and sad will that man be who in the threshing day will give abundance of chaff but no wheat. III. THE PRESENT LIFE AND THE FUTURE HOLD THE RELATION OF CHAFF TO WHEAT. In answer to the question, What is this life? two extreme answers have been given. Some say that this life is not worth living. Others live in this world as if this world were everything. The truth, as in all extremes, lies between the two. Now, as to life not being worth living, let me say this is throwing stones at the wisdom of God, and is as absurd as saying chaff has no place in this world. The present life is the chaff covering an eternal life. Within each of us there is a precious wheat that needs nourishing and protection. The trials and difficulties of this life are all working together towards its development. Instead of this world not being a help, like chaff it is God's appointed means whereby the eternal life may grow within us and spring into full perfection. The chaff may not appear worth all the sunshine and rains bestowed on it, yet it is. It has its purpose to fulfil. To-day, as when God made the world, it can be said "and behold it was very good." If the one extreme—that life is not worth living—is false, how shall I stigmatise that answer which says in deeds that the present life is everything? How absurd for a man to say chaff—this present life—is all he wants! Fancy a farmer collecting all his chaff in sacks and burning all the golden grain. Would we consider him to be in his sane senses? (*J. M. Dryerre.*) *The chaff and the wheat*:—Divine revelation does not degrade or supersede human reason. It assumes reason on our part; sets before us what is above, though not contrary to reason; aids reason as the telescope aids the eye, and also shows spurious, antichristian counterfeits—the chaff as distinguished from the wheat. Let the dream go for what it is worth. Take the wheat of God's Word instead. The text speaks half in irony, half in warning.

1. As admonitory to Christian people. Human speculations present themselves at the bar of my taste or judgment. In self-complacency I pass judgment upon them, but when God's Word is heard, it breathes authority, and my place is in the dust. Keep, then, the chaff of man free from the wheat of God.

2. As counsel to us who are teachers. (1) Let parents inculcate the thought of God. Endued with His Spirit, their children may be left in confidence, for the promise is to us and our children. (2) Teachers in the Sunday School are to give, not guesses, but Gospel. (3) The clergy need this counsel. They cannot, ought not to stay the current of free thought. Yet, in the wide activity of intellectual conflict, in the bewildering notions and "refractory egotism" of the age, we must discriminate. Stability is found in loyalty to God's truth. Applying these thoughts—

1. We are now better able to estimate what reputation really is. We are not to be indifferent to men's estimate of us. It is a useful stimulus, but it needs to be regulated. It is "a small matter to be judged" by them. What is God's estimate? 2. What is success? Many look at pecuniary results. They play fast and loose with conscience. Some affect a supercilious devotion and look down on others above whom they seem to rise. What is God's estimate? 3. Finally, we learn to understand the value of the life we are living as compared with that which is eternal. There is no antagonism in the interests of each. Even the chaff envelops and protects the wheat. It has its place and work, though perishable. (*John Hall, D.D.*) "*What is the chaff to the wheat?*"—

I. WHAT IS MAN'S WORD TO THE WORD OF GOD? God's Word has its base deep down amongst the eternal things of the mysterious past; and if there be clouds and dimness upon some of its higher peaks, it is because its top rises up amongst the sublimities of a glorious future. Now and then a gleam lights up the awful heights to which revelation towers, and the eye of faith is strong enough to see the rosy tints, which tell that those holier mysteries are near to the beauteous heaven to which they point. At such a time, the believer will say, "What is the chaff to the wheat?" The fallible comment to the infallible text? The earthly setting to the heavenly jewel? The basket of silver to the apples of gold?

II. WHAT IS MAN'S FAVOUR TO THE LOVE OF GOD? It is pleasant to live in the creature's love. There are happy family groups on this our beautiful earth, upon which the loving eye is glad to be permitted to look. There are satisfactions which come over the soul when pleasures of earth are many, and the hopes for time are bright. The first sip of pleasure's cup is sweet. The first climb up ambition's hill is sunny. The first burst of hope's young bud is beautiful. Some are so smitten with the loveliness here, that they care not to look for the brighter things which are in store hereafter. But "what is the chaff to the wheat?" What

is all this to the love of God? Oh, glorious thought! that I am loved by the Father of Lights, the King of uncreated glory! It is the candle of the Lord within my soul. It is the comfort of the Holy Ghost springing up unto everlasting life. To know the love of God, which passeth knowledge: this is peace, this is bliss, this is life. III. **WHAT IS THE BODY TO THE SOUL?** We are fearfully and wonderfully made. This mortal body is beautiful in the very ruins by which sin has laid it low. And when the building of God, the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, shall have been given us,—when our vile bodies shall have been fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body, then the beauty of our material part shall be seen in all its glory. But "what is the chaff to the wheat?" Who can tell of all the value of a human soul? Coated, as it is now, by earthly matter, we see something of the brightness which this gem can wear. What will the soul be, under the light of heaven, in the crown of Christ? In righteousness and true holiness—seeing Jesus face to face—amid the pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore, the spirit of the just made perfect, the soul of the redeemed in the garments of salvation: oh, it must be a glorious thing! IV. **WHAT IS THE WATER TO THE BLOOD?** No earthly fountain can suffice to wash away sin. After all that civilisation has ever done to wash the outside of the cup and p'atter, it has never been able to touch, much less to purge, the heart. Man's resolution, man's effort to reform himself, man's contrivance to cure the soul's running sore, have all and altogether failed. The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin. It is the blood of sprinkling which purges the soul and conscience. Turn ye, then, from doing to believing; turn from self to Jesus; turn from earning to accepting; turn from water, which cannot cleanse, to the blood which will make filthy garments white: say in the matter of merit and salvation, "What is the chaff to the wheat?" What is self to the Saviour? V. **WHAT IS THE FORM TO THE LIFE?** The words of worship are easily said. The attitude of worship may be soon assumed. But "what is the chaff to the wheat?" The eye of God is upon the worshipper's heart. The ear of God listens to the language of the soul. Put off, spiritually, the shoes from off your feet. Gird up the loins of your minds. Let the holy fire be kindled upon the altar of your heart, and the incense cloud of grateful praise will rise with acceptance before the mercy seat. VI. **WHAT ARE THE THINGS OF TIME TO THE THINGS OF ETERNITY?** In life's endless progress, the earthly is the shortest stage. In the continuous chain of being, the lowest link is the least. When we shall climb up the great hill of eternal life, we shall see how small our earthly dwelling looks at the mountain base. How small earth looks to the eye which can travel over the visible orbs which come even within its limited field of vision. Oh, it is an important thing so to live that we may have life everlasting! Jesus bids us "seek first the kingdom of God." His servants say, "Here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come." True wisdom bids a man "set your affections upon things above, not on things on the earth." We are all moving, things are all changing: it is madness to cling to these passing things, and say, Here will I dwell for ever. It may not be, it should never be desired. God has found some better thing for His children. He says, "What is the chaff to the wheat?" (*J. Richardson, M.A.*)

Ver. 29. Is not My Word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?—God's fire and hammer:—I. THE WORD OF GOD HAS POWER IN IT. 1. It is like a fire. (1) You who are the people of God must often have felt greatly comforted, encouraged, and cheered, when you have been hearing the Gospel, just as when, on a cold day, and you are half benumbed, if your eyes are blindfolded you know when you are coming near a fire by the genial glow which you feel. You delight yourself in the Word of the Lord as you warm your hands at a bright cheery fire. (2) But, next, fire is only at work very moderately when it yields us comfort; it has also the effect of paining, awakening, arousing. So, even if you are an unconverted man, if you have as yet no knowledge of the power of the Gospel of God, yet if you come in contact with it, I will warrant you that you will know it. Very likely you will show that you know it by getting very angry, growing very indignant. Men do not like being sigped and scorched by the Gospel. (3) Fire also has a melting power, and so has the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, that we could get the hearts of many hardened ones into the very centre of the blessed flame, till the holy heat should make them flow like melted wax before the presence of the God of Israel! (4) More than that, the Gospel has a consuming power. When it first

comes into a district, it finds people indifferent to it; but possibly it begins by burning up some one of their vices. There have been old systems of iniquity that have been hoary with age, but when, at last, they have been attacked by the Church of God, with the sword of the Spirit, and the Gospel of Christ, they have been utterly destroyed. 2. God's Word is like a hammer: "and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces." So that, whenever a minister has the Gospel to use, this simile should teach him how he ought to use it; with his whole might let him strike with it mighty blows for his Lord. Hammer away, then, brethren, hammer away, with nothing but the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The heart that is struck may not yield even year after year, but it will yield at last. 3. Now put the two together,—the fire and the hammer,—and you will see how God makes His servants who are to be instruments for His use. He puts us into the fire of the Word; He melts, He softens, He subdues. Then He takes us out of the fire, and welds us with hammer-strokes such as only He can give, till He has made us fit instruments for His use; and He goes forth to His sacred work of conquering the multitudes, having in His hands the polished shafts that He has forged with the fire and the hammer of His Word. II. ILLUSTRATE THIS STATEMENT by noticing certain parts of God's Word which have, to our personal knowledge, operated both as a fire and a hammer upon the hearts of men. 1. A large part of God's Word is taken up with the revelation of His law, and you cannot fully preach the Gospel if you do not proclaim the law of the Lord. Men will never receive the balm of the Gospel unless they know something of the wounds that sin hath made. If the law of God is faithfully and fully preached, what a fire it is! What a hammer it is! 2. But have you not also felt that there is fire-work and hammer-work in the teaching of the Gospel? The Gospel of redemption through the precious blood of Jesus, the Gospel which tells of full atonement made, the Gospel which proclaims that the utmost farthing of the ransom price has been paid, and that, therefore, whosoever believeth in Jesus is free from the law, and free from guilt, and free from hell,—the telling out of this Gospel has made men's hearts burn within them, and has dashed out the very brains of sin, and made men joyfully flee to Christ. 3. Above all, what fire-and-hammer power there is in the doctrine of the Cross! Man must yield when the power of the Spirit of God applies to his heart the doctrine of the precious blood. III. PUT THE STATEMENT OF THE TEXT TO A PRACTICAL TEST. "Is not My Word like as a fire, saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" 1. Let us, first, try it upon ourselves. When you are sad, do not run into your neighbour's house, do not sit down alone, and weep in sullen despair; get you to the Word of the Lord. There is such sweetness in it, there is such power in it, that in a short time you shall have beauty instead of ashes, and songs instead of sighs. You say that you are not sad, but you are very sleepy; you have become very drowsy and dull in the ways of God; you have not the earnest spirit you used to have, nor half the spiritual life and vigour you once felt. Very well, then, come to God's Word; read it, study it, listen to it, find out where that Word is faithfully preached, and go there. Oh, how quickly the Lord has blessed some of us in times of great barrenness! Perhaps another says, "I have lost so much of my comfort, and assurance, and joy, that I feel as if I had grown quite cold and hard and insensible." Why need you be cold when God's Word is like as a fire? Why need your heart remain like a rock when God's Word is like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces? 2. Let us try to use it upon others. I have an opinion that there are a great many persons in this world, whom we give up as hopeless, who have never been really tried and tested with the Gospel in all their lives. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Fire and hammer*.—I. A picture of the HUMAN HEART. 1. It has within it that which requires to be consumed. Who that knows his own soul can gainsay this? There is ignorance, prejudice, error, selfishness, guilt, and ungenerous and pernicious principles of action that must be consumed. They pollute the conscience, they enlurch the faculties, they enervate the powers of the soul. Like the luxuriant growth of the prairies, they must be burned down to the root before the soil can be cultivated. 2. It is in an unimpressionable condition. It is like a "rock," insensitive, hard, obdurate, and so it verily is in its unregenerate state. II. A picture of the DIVINE WORD. 1. It is a fire. "Is not My Word like as a fire?" saith the Lord." (1) It is a penetrating fire, it burns into the inmost soul. (2) It is a destructive fire, it burns up the wrong. (3) It is a purifying fire, it consumes all that is noxious and vile. (4) It is an unquenchable fire, it cannot be put out;

the billows from the great ocean of worldliness, infidelity and superstition, have been dashing against it for centuries; but it burns as strongly and brightly as ever. 2. It is a Divinely constructed "hammer," to break through the stratum of moral rock which covers the soil of the heart, shutting out the sunbeam and the shower, and preventing the germination and growth of the seeds of virtue and religion. Conclusion—Thank God for this fire and hammer! Let the fire burn, let the hammer strike. (*Homilist.*) *Human resistance and Divine power*:—I. THE MORAL RESISTANCE OF MAN. "The rock"—the unconverted heart of man. 1. Every rock has a character. There are aqueous and igneous rocks—stratified and unstratified rocks. So with hearts; some are hard and unyielding, others are soft and flexible; some are full of pride and selfishness, others are gentle and benevolent. But they are all "rock"—hard against God. They all agree in this, though they may differ in other respects. 2. Rocks remain in the same condition for ages. So with sin-hardened hearts. Under the kindly rays of the Father's countenance, and the Saviour's love, they remain in the same unmoved and unfeeling state. The Lord has called, but they have not answered—they have despised His reproofs. 3. These rocks may be broken. They are composed of blocks of stone. The hardest is formed by the adhesion of minute particles; these may be separated—pieces may be detached, and the whole rock broken. If we now apply this to the heart, we shall see the points of resemblance. Each heart has many parts and many avenues. One part after another is conquered, until the whole soul is subdued, and brought in humble submission to Jesus. 4. These rocks may be made useful. Rock is valuable in many ways: it girds the seacoast and stops the encroachment of the waters; it is the best foundation for the friendly lighthouse; it gives us the most solid and the most beautiful of buildings. So with the wicked hearts around us. It is true, that they are not only useless but injurious in their sinful unquarried state; yet from these must come the able and devoted servant of Christ, the loving disciple, the brave defender of the faith, and the real benefactors of a needy world. They need only to be broken to be useful. II. THE DIVINE MEANS EMPLOYED BY GOD TO REMOVE THIS RESISTANCE. 1. There is adaptedness in the means to accomplish the desired result. The result is to be the broken rock. There is no instrument so adapted for breaking as the hammer. It has weight in a small compass. It has also hardness; it will not yield to the stone; it has a peculiar shape and this gives it power. Thus the Word of God, with all its doctrines, promises, and threatenings—in all its discoveries of truth, and sublime revelations of the Father, and His Son Jesus Christ, is fitted to make deep and abiding impressions on the mind, and to subdue the soul. 2. There is a concentration of power. The same part is struck repeatedly,—each stroke tells. It cannot withstand. The hardest rock will yield to this concentrated force. The Word is similarly applied to the heart in order to subdue it. The rays of Divine truth shine upon the heart's false refuges until they are seen to be such, and are abandoned. 3. There is the strong arm in its application. There must not only be the means, but these must be applied by intelligence and power. This is seen in other matters. For instance, we may have all the apparatus for taking a correct likeness, but unless the photographer is there to superintend the process, we shall have no likeness. So with the Word. We must have the Divine Spirit, the arm of the Word, to bring it with convincing and saving power to the heart. (*W. Darwent.*) *Fire and a hammer symbolical of the law and the Gospel*:—I. "IS NOT MY WORD LIKE A HAMMER THAT BREAKETH THE ROCK IN PIECES, SAITH THE LORD?" I place this simile before the other, because it is in the order of human procedure, when a mass of ore is to be submitted to the fire, that its metal may be extracted, to beat it small with hammers, then to carry it to the kiln, and finally to the furnace. Take the case of one whom the Word of salvation hath never influenced, who is alienated from God, and with no other principle of affection, or of action, than his own unsanctified reason, or his own unrenewed desires. Here, then, is the rock. But let the law of God speak to his soul in its power; let it show him the perfection of the Lawgiver, the spiritual character of the law, the withering curse pronounced against "every one that continueth not," &c.; let it moreover display his utter inability to do the will of the Being who chargeth even His angels with folly, by letting him into the secrets of his own fallen nature, and proving that he is carnal, sold under sin. And what will be the consequence? The rock, hard it may have been as the nether millstone, will be bruised and beaten to pieces. II. But after the mighty and terrible agency of the law, MAY WE HOPE

THAT THE GOSPEL CALL OF LOVE WILL BE EQUALLY EFFECTUAL? We surely may. "Is not My Word like as a fire? saith the Lord." 1. Fire hath a penetrating nature, and finds its way into every part of the substance that may be submitted to its action. And surely thus doth the Gospel of our redemption. 2. Is it the nature of fire to enlighten? Even so doth the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It removes the delusion which overspreads the mind of man until it shines into him, and he learns, by the light which it reveals, that "other foundation can no man lay, save that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." It exhibits the Divinity of His character, the freeness of His love, the riches of His salvation, the peace that flows into the heart when His kingdom is embraced and submitted to; the holy nature of His law; the sanctifying work of His Spirit; the brightness and grandeur of those hopes which it enkindles, and the duties to which it binds the obedient children of the love of Jesus. 3. Is it the property of fire to warm every object to which it may be applied? And shall we deny a similar power to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, when communicated to the heart by faith and in sincerity? 4. Hath the fire a purifying energy? So hath the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The refiner's flame may be fierce, the trial of a child of God beneath the discipline of the Gospel may be severe, but it will have an effect the most salutary and gracious. It will separate the gold from the dross. It will consume the one, and make the other meet to be employed even in the noblest uses. 5. Fire hath a property to comfort. And shall we deny this quality to the mercies of the everlasting Gospel, when faith embraces them, and makes them her own? It is that provision which a gracious God hath sent to sustain us in the way to heaven, as the corn was given by Joseph to his brethren, for their sustenance through the wilderness that lay between Canaan and Egypt, whither he had invited them. (*R. P. Buddicom.*) *The power of God's Word needful for national education:*—The circumstances of Judah were new and strange when this question was put by God into the mouth of Jeremiah. The name of Jehovah was now falsely used to cover those deceits for which Baal's was of old the cloak. Against this new form of an old temptation God now warns the people. He bids them winnow the wheat, and cast away the chaff, and not slight necessary truth because falsehood was abroad. "What is the chaff to the wheat?" The counterfeit cannot have the inner life and power of the original. "Is not My Word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer," &c. Here is the mark of My true message: there is a power and might about it which cannot be caught by imitation. The figure is natural and expressive. The custom on which it is founded still prevails in the East. In Madeira, for example, at this day, if a new road is to be carried through a set of rocky obstacles, a fire is lighted on the bed of rock; and when by its action the solid mass is charred and its cleavage loosened, the hammer of the workman soon breaks it thoroughly away. And this same power, says God, is the true credential of My message: as "the hammer and the fire" against the rock of the wilderness, so shall be My Word and My message against the stoutness of man's heart. In this sense, evidently, the "Word of God" must not be limited to His written Word; in its first application it did not describe the written Word at all: it was the living ministry of the prophet of the Lord, and not the written law, which was to be discerned from that of all pretenders by its possession of this inner power: and it is therefore a strong and impressive assertion of this great truth, that the power of God, and that only, avails for the real subjection and renewal of man's heart—that this "fire," and that "hammer" can break it up; and that this is so exclusively their work, that the possession of this power is truly a mark and a countersign of that administration with which God is co-working. Who can watch himself without seeing how far too strong evil always is, and has been, for his own unaided resistance? When did our best resolutions stand long before the hotness of a pressing temptation and the seeming safety of a fitting opportunity? when did the frost-work of the morning stand before the sunshine of the noon? how often do we find old habits of sin breaking out again, when we deemed them long since quenched; showing, like revived volcanoes, that what seemed extinction was but a temporary lull! On the other hand, who that has noted what is passing round him has not marked some instances in which God's grace has evidently changed the heart and formed anew the spring of its affections? Who has not seen this heavenly power bow the swelling passions of youth to the pure and peaceable rule of a willing obedience? Who has not seen the proud made humble, the rough-tempered gentle, and the indolent laborious? How broadly too has this truth been sometimes written in the alteration of a

nation's character, and its submission to the Gospel yoke. Whenever the "stone cut out without hands" has indeed smitten a people or nation, how have they and all their former manners crumbled into dust before it. Such then is the witness of experience; and right reason would lead us to expect this difference between the work of God and all inferior power. For, if the hypothesis be true; if man's nature be thoroughly corrupted to its deepest springs; how can he indeed renew himself to righteousness? That on which he has to work, and that with which he has to work, are both alike defiled; how can the one cleanse the other? From the very nature of things it is impossible. And yet who is there that has closely watched others, or still more himself, who does not know that one of the last and hardest things which we can do, is to bring the mind and soul in very deed to hold this truth? The peculiar attempt of infidelity at present is silently and decently to supersede religion—to speak of it as an excellent thing in its way: but to be always able to do without it. It is the monstrous folly of confessing that God is, and treating Him as if He were not our God. This new form of infidelity might easily be traced as more or less harassing society at present. But what is most to our present purpose, nowhere is it more plainly to be found than in the schemes of education which we hear every day buzzed on every side of us. It is asserted, and with a painful truth, that our people are not now educated as they should be: but what remedy is set before us? A scheme of national education which, more or less, evidently is indeed so framed as to exclude religion. What, then, even for this world, is the object of national education? Doubtless, to form amongst the masses of our population a high-toned character; to make them brave, honest, industrious, and unselfish; and then, to add to this as much of knowledge upon other matters as will enlarge their powers of mind without diverting them from the peculiar duties of their several stations; for this will make them wealthy, powerful, and happy: that is, in one word, you educate your people to give them a higher moral tone; and can mere earthly learning give a man this moral tone? Surely not. The most learned man may, in spite of his learning, continue the most thoroughly depraved. What human understanding can come up in subtlety and power to his who is God's enemy and man's: who once was, as we deem, second in power and wisdom to none of God's highest creatures, and whom spiritual, not carnal wickedness, drew into rebellion and cast down to hell? So that the highest spiritual wickedness may be combined with the greatest mental cultivation. What, then, but God can purify man's heart? And is it not, then, the mere naked madness of the infidel to endeavour to do this without religion? Is it not, in very deed, to shut God out of His own world, to believe that other means besides His power can be, in truth, "the hammer" and the "fire" to break the heart of man? (*Bp. Samuel Wilberforce.*) *The Word of God compared to a hammer*:—1. Words are the vehicle by means of which we convey to others the ideas which exist in our minds, making known our wishes, responding to the speech of our friends, and declaring to the world what manner of men we are. By the medium of words we give expression to the feelings of kindness and of benevolence toward others, by which we are animated. Our desires for help or assistance in times of difficulty and of danger, are made known by means of language addressed to friends, or to those from whom aid may be expected. Our real characters are often made known by the use which we occasionally make of our tongue, more than by the habitual form of our words, and an accidental inadvertence may do more to enable others to form a correct estimate of us than years of dissembling. Words often fly from our lips, without ever being thought about again, but the consequences which flow from them, either for good or for evil, cannot be calculated. Words spoken by our lips may prove us to be God's people, and animated with love to our fellow-man, or they may brand us as children of the devil, and enemies of religion and of truth. 2. The Word is one of the names by which Christ is known in the New Testament. In the first ages of Christianity a sect arose in the Christian Church, who held some very peculiar opinions, of which the adherents were called Gnostics. They supposed that the world was ruled by one supreme Being, but that under Him there were inferior deities, who presided over departments of creation, to whom were given the names of the Word, the Life, and the Light, and of whom Christ was one. St. John commences his Gospel by declaring the falsity of such an idea, and, instead of denying that Christ was one of these inferior beings, he asserts at once that He was the Word, that He was really God, and that He had existed from the

beginning in the bosom of the Father. He is called the Word, because He came upon earth to declare the Father, whom He revealed to man much in the same manner as words make known the desires and intentions of a human being.

3. There is another meaning to be given to the term "word" in Scripture, differing from the speech by which men convey their thoughts one to another, and from the person of Christ. It must be understood as the revelation of His will, which God has condescended to make to man on various occasions, and the various forms which it has assumed in the hands of different persons. In the New Testament it is equivalent to the Gospel preached by Christ Himself, and afterwards by His apostles. It is a powerful agent in the hands of the Almighty, the idea of which is conveyed by a threefold comparison—to a sword, to a fire, and to a hammer, in order to show its effects when applied to the consciences of men.

I. IT IS MANIFESTLY GOD HIMSELF WHICH IS SPOKEN OF; for the inquiry is, "Is not My Word . . . like a hammer?" It is the Almighty who uses the Gospel as His instrument for reaching the consciences of sinners, and awakening in them a sense of the value of the blessings which it is calculated to bestow. The Father, Son, and Spirit planned the scheme of redemption in the councils of eternity, by which a lost and degraded race were to be rescued from ruin and death, and to recover their forfeited inheritance. This great work having been finished, the Holy Spirit employs His power in applying it to the consciences of men, giving them ability to see the efficacy of the blood of Christ to wash away sin, renewing them by the washing of regeneration, and shedding abroad in their hearts the love of God.

II. THE INSTRUMENT WHICH THE SPIRIT USES IN ACCOMPLISHING THIS WORK. It is the hammer of the Word. The age of miraculous manifestations is past, and there is no reason to suppose that God will ever employ miracles to convert men from sin. It is Scripture and Scripture only which He employs to carry home conviction to the soul. God does not speak to man from heaven with an audible voice, commanding him to repent and live, but He speaks by His Spirit, in the words of the revelation which is now in our hands. He does not reveal His will to any, in another manner than by the inspired sentences which contain the embodiment of His gracious purposes of mercy and of love, and which the simplest and most illiterate can understand. The Word is the instrument which He always uses, and none other, wielding it like a hammer, to smite the human heart. If you went into the forge of a blacksmith, you would see him, with strong arm, beating a piece of heated iron with a hammer or sledge, in order to form it into some particular shape, either of a nail, a horse-shoe, or a ploughshare. If you went into the shop of a carpenter, you would see him driving home nails into wood with a hammer, as he makes some article of furniture or of utility. Now, in the same manner, the Holy Spirit uses the hammer of the Word, in order to fashion the hearts and characters of the saints, employing particular passages of Scripture for this purpose, by shedding upon them a light, which, when reflected into the soul, causes them to be felt and experienced in power. He uses the hammer of the Word in order to drive home truth, "as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd."

III. OBJECT UPON WHICH THE HOLY SPIRIT USES THE HAMMER OF THE WORD. It is called in the text "the rock"; this being a metaphor to convey the idea of the hardness and insensibility of the heart of the natural man. The heart of man is compared to a stone by our Lord Himself, in the parable of the sower. Some of the good seed of the Word is represented as falling upon stony places, where there was little earth, and where it was impossible for it to come to perfection, because it could not take root, and soon withered away. Nothing will grow upon stones or rocks, and no good thing can come out of the heart of the natural man; but, on the contrary, very much evil. But, when the human heart is thus compared to a stone, and in our text, to a rock, what do we exactly understand by the comparison? If you saw a stone lying upon the ground, you would see it to be destitute of the power of motion, a hard, irregular, and useless mass. If you saw a rock out in the sea, at a distance from an iron-bound coast, lashed unceasingly by the restless waves of the ocean, you would see that it ever bids defiance to the utmost rage of the tempest, unaffected and unchanged by the ceaseless flow of the briny waters. These illustrations will give us some idea of the senseless nature and the hardened indifference of the heart of the unconverted man. There are persons in the world upon whom no impression whatever is produced by the tale of sorrow or of distress, the spectacle of suffering or of misery, or by appeals to their feelings of compassion or of sympathy. The

story of Divine love, surpassing that of a mother for her child, as much as the Infinite surpasses the finite, the spectacle of suffering and of distress endured in the Garden of Gethsemane, and on the Cross, when Christ drank to the very dregs the cup of wrath, appeals to men to have compassion on themselves, by accepting the mercy which God offers, exhortations to repentance, motives to draw forth the exercise of the feelings of affection and of love, and calls to manifest gratitude for unceasing favours, fail to extract a tear from their insensate eyes, to stir within the soul a single emotion, or to soften their hard and obdurate hearts.

IV. THE EFFECTS WHICH ARE PRODUCED WHEN THE ROCK IS SMITTEN BY THE HAMMER. It is said that it is broken in pieces, which conveys to us the idea of destruction. If the human heart be not softened by the ordinary means which the Spirit employs, and if the sinner be not brought to humble himself before God, the only alternative before him is to be broken to shivers. If you went into a blacksmith's forge, and struck his anvil with a hammer, it would recoil, damaged to some extent by the blow, while the metal of which the anvil is made would be condensed. If the hammer were strong enough, and if a blow of sufficient violence were struck, it is manifest that the anvil would be shivered into fragments. This will give us some idea of the method of the Spirit's operation, when He strikes the conscience with the hammer of the Word. If all efforts are unavailing, and the stone of the human heart still continues impenetrable, then the awful doom is pronounced—"Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone." The Spirit ceases to strive, invitations to come and drink of the water of life freely are no longer issued, the unpardonable sin has been committed, and nothing remains but the execution of the sentence. The Word is the instrument which we may now turn to account, that we may be saved; but hereafter, if rejected, it will be a witness against us, and a testimony to the justice of the perdition of ungodly men. (*J. B. Courtenay, M.A.*)

Ver. 35. *What hath the Lord spoken?*—*The contents of the Bible*:—I. THE IMPARTIALITY of its contents. Each writer is an "honest chronicler." With an undimching adherence to truth the whole story is told whoever may be unpleasantly involved therein. Such is the undaunted boldness, sterling integrity, and resolute independence of the Scripture scribes that they do not pause to inquire whose faults they are recording. Such is their antipathy to sin in all its forms that they expose the hydra wherever he may be encountered. Ay, the writers even disclose their own faults and infirmities. They unfold their hearts without any reserve. They allude to their own virtuous actions without any ostentation, and do not palliate their vices. They refer to themselves with the same simplicity and fidelity with which they treat of others. Where will you find such a marked feature in any other book? II. THE ORIGINALITY of its contents. 1. Look, for example, at the disclosures given of the Divine Being—read the sublime language of the holy scribes concerning the self-existence, independence, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, justice, long-suffering, and love of the Deity. Whence were these lordly conceptions derived? They were revealed by God to man, and so made known to mortals. You commend us to the productions of Horace; do you forget that a thousand years before his day the lyric poetry of the Hebrews was famous? Read the books of Grecian or Roman authors of the highest standard, and tell me in which of them can you discover themes so stately, thoughts so surprising, and diction so sublime as you have in the Bible? 2. Look, again, at the Scripture teaching concerning Christ. Now, such a Divine Being either lived or He did not. If you grant He lived, then the evangelistic narratives are the authoritative biographies of Jesus. If He did not live, then the narratives are fictitious, and the character is an invention. But was it possible for the New Testament writers to have invented such an original character? It is a moral impossibility that they should have concocted a story such as that the New Testament contains. Nor did they gather the elements of the unique character of Christ from any person or persons then living. A slight acquaintance with the condition of society at the time of the Saviour's appearing will suffice to satisfy us that there were no men who could sit as models to the evangelic artists. Nor did they reproduce themselves. Four men of very different temperaments produce a history of one Man in which all four coincide. There is but one way of accounting for this original, peerless, beautiful life in the Gospels, and that is by accepting the declaration of John—"That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you." III. THE HIGH MORAL TONE of the contents. From first

to last the Book of books holds forth the Divine law as the safe and sole standard of morality. It points to God as the supreme lawgiver, and tells us that He, in His spotlessness, demands purity in man. It condemns not merely the overt evil, but the concealed offence; not only the spoken word, but the voiceless emotions; not alone the guilty act, but the hidden thought of its committal. Where was such elevated morality taught before the Bible propounded it? So far back as the days of Abraham, Egypt was sunk in sensuality and unrighteousness. Whence, then, did Moses obtain the morality with which his writings are full? He could not evolve it from his own brain—that were a greater miracle than the act of Divine revelation. And whence did the evangelists and apostles obtain their sublime and stainless sentiments? Not from Rome, not from Greece. In the lands where Homer, Hesiod, Euripides, Plato, Socrates, Virgil, and Cicero wrote—in the countries where philosophers, poets, and orators of the most distinguished order lived and laboured, idolatry abounded, brutal savageness was patronised, voluptuousness and debauchery were approved. How out of paganism, as it then was, could there have sprung up the noble, beautiful, and blessed system of morality like that we possess in the New Testament? How could the icy, indiscreet, and infamous teachings of heathen philosophy have given birth to the warm-hearted, winsome, and wonder-working ethics of our Scriptures? Do men expect figs from thistles? IV. THE BEAUTIES of its contents. The volume is full of literary splendours. Picture, proverb, parable, and poem are blended to produce a superb Book. Creation has been ransacked that its choicest works may embellish the page of inspiration. The fairest flowers of nature are woven into this garland for the brow of Immanuel. The beauties of this volume are like the veins of gold beneath the surface soil. Generations of men intellectually cross and recross the hallowed ground, and remain in entire ignorance of a tithe of the hidden glories. Whole armies of mental athletes handle “the sword of the Spirit,” without ever detecting the jewels which decorate its hilt. Companies of learned men saunter in the gardens of revelation, examine one plant and another, and pronounce an opinion upon the whole—an opinion dogmatic and defiant—whilst they have never discovered the sweetest flowers which are concealed by the masses of luxuriant foliage. And yet they who have judged simply by the conspicuous features of the volume are enthusiastic in their praises of the Book, even our enemies themselves being judges. V. THE PROMINENCE GIVEN TO CHRIST. It is said that a celebrated artist of ancient times constructed a shield of so remarkable an order that he had worked his name into the device in a manner that it could not be removed. To erase the name you must destroy the shield. Thus is it emphatically with the Bible. From Genesis to Revelation the whole volume points to Jesus. He is the centre and soul of the Book. Take away Jesus from the Book of books, and you have a casket without a jewel, an envelope without a letter, a scaffolding without any superstructure, musical notation without any melody, a frame without a portrait, an assembly without a leader, ages of preparation on the most extensive scale for an event that never happens, centuries of practice for an oratorio that is never performed. From the fatal declension of Adam, He was the subject of promise and prophecy. In paradise He was referred to as the “seed of the woman.” Abraham “rejoiced to see His day,” and avowed that the Lord would “provide Himself a Lamb.” Jacob spake of Him as the coming “Shiloh,” Moses foretold the rising of a “Prophet,” Balaam saw Him as a “Star” and a “Sceptre,” Job rejoiced in the life of his “Redeemer,” David described the agonies, death, and resurrection of the “Holy One,” Solomon ecstatically praised his “Beloved,” Isaiah graphically dwelt upon the doings of the “tender Plant,” and the “precious Corner-stone.” He was Jeremiah’s “Branch,” Ezekiel’s “River,” Daniel’s “Ancient of Days,” Hosea’s “Lord of hosts,” Joel’s “Latter-day Glory,” Obadiah’s “Saviour,” Jonah’s “Salvation,” Micah’s “Peace,” Nahum’s “Him that bringeth good tidings,” Habakkuk’s “Strength,” Haggai’s “Desire of all nations,” Zechariah’s “Fountain,” and Malachi’s “Sun of Righteousness.” How can you account for such a marked blending of all writers on one theme—such a manifest gravitation of thought toward one point—such a glorious clustering of hope, expectation, and joy around one centre? How was it that these scribes, separated by ages, and climes, and callings, and capacities, all looked Christward? There is but one answer. All were under the invisible spell of the Saviour’s attractive influence—all felt the centripetal force of the Cross which was to be erected on Calvary—all were God-guided and God-taught. (*J. H. Hitchens.*)

Vers. 37-40. **Because ye say this word, The burden of the Lord.**—*Sins of the tongue*.—Great part of the prophetic writings is occupied with denunciations of vengeance on the Jews, for their obstinacy, ingratitude, and perverseness. Hence the message which a prophet was commissioned to deliver was frequently and appropriately named "The burden of the Lord," as being heavy with woes about to fall on the impenitent. But it would appear that the Jews not only gave no heed to the messages which they received, but were accustomed to turn them into ridicule. They were in the habit of coming to the prophet, and asking him if there were any new burden from the Lord; using the word in such a way as to indicate contempt, or to mark that they thought it good material for a jest. In consequence of this, God expressly prohibited the use of the word "burden." He forbade any who should come to inquire of the prophet, to put the inquiry into the shape, "What is the burden of the Lord?" but required a more simple form of speech, "What hath the Lord answered? and, What hath the Lord spoken?" Very probably it appeared to the Jews quite an indifferent thing what word they used; and they may even have said, that as they had not invented the word, but had derived it from God Himself, they could not be much to blame in persisting in its use. But God viewed the disobedience in a wholly different light, and considered it deserving of most severe vengeance. Whatever had been the crime with which God had been charging the Jews, He could not have followed up the accusation with the denunciation of sterner punishment: "Behold, I, even I, will utterly forget you, and I will forsake you, and the city that I gave you and your fathers, and cast you out of My presence." Now, this is our subject of discourse, the using a prohibited word drawing upon a nation the extreme vengeance of God. You must all be aware of the importance which in the Bible is attached to our words, and you may be disposed to wonder, if not to complain, that the utterances of the tongue should be made so indicative of character, and so influential on our portion for eternity. Our Saviour expressly declared, "By your words ye shall be justified, and by your words ye shall be condemned"; as though actions might be wholly put out of account, and words might determine our everlasting allotments. God gave Adam his vocabulary, as well as that fine intellectual equipment which might excogitate things worthy of being embodied in its magnificent expressions. We may fairly regard language, the power of expression, as the great distinction between man and the brute. Reason is often spoken of as constituting this distinction; but speech, itself equally an endowment from God, may more justly be regarded as separating the two. There is a much nearer approach to reason in the instinct which an animal often displays than there is to language in the inarticulate sounds which the animal utters. Wonderful power! that I can now stand in the midst of this assembly, and use the air which we breathe in conveying to every one the thoughts which are now crowding the hidden chambers of my own soul; that I can knock therewith at every man's conscience and at every man's heart—transfusing myself, as it were, into those impenetrable solitudes, filling them with the images that are passing to and fro in my own spirit, or causing kindred forms to rise or stir in hundreds that are around me. Every one condemns the prostitution of reason, because every one regards reason as a high and a palmy attribute, and therefore, when the intellect is unworthily employed, degraded to the ministering at the altars of scepticism or sensuality, there is an almost universal sentence of indignant reprobation; but language might be put before reason. It is reason walking abroad among the myriads of human kind; it is the soul, not in the secret laboratory, and not in its impalpable mysteriousness, but the soul amid the crowded scenes of life, formed and clothed, and submitting itself to the inspiration, and influencing the sentiments of a multitude. And if this be language, I know not why any one should be surprised that so great heinousness is attached to sins of the tongue. God "will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain." It is grievous to think of God irreverently; the soul should be His sanctuary, and to profane Him there is to aggravate contempt of God, by offering it at the shrine which He reared for Himself; but it is yet more grievous to speak of Him irreverently. But now let us further point out to you, that the Jews were guilty of turning solemn things into ridicule; and this of itself might suffice in vindication of the severity of their sentence. It is quite evident that scoffing and sneering were quite common in Jerusalem, and that the word "burden" was contemptuously used in the way of ridicule or joke. The Jews did not invent the phrase, or devise for themselves the applying it to the messages which God sent through His prophets.

God Himself calls some messages burdens—an appropriate title, which well defined their chief subject-matter, for vengeance was the great theme of the prophetic announcements. But such a use of the word burden gave occasion for wicked comments and remarks. It were very easy, if we may use the expression, to pun upon the word; and without any concern for the awful significance which God had attached to the phrase, the Jews diverted themselves with the sayings, and asked the prophets for burdens, that they might turn them into ridicule, or provoke laughter at their expense. Now, let us suppose that jesting with solemn things was the head and sport of the offence. Was, then, the offence trivial? We might judge that it were, if opinion were to be guided by the frequency with which a light thing is done. How often is a scriptural expression ludicrously used! How often is a text, a saying, quoted in some jocular sense, or in some absurd application! There could be no readier way of practically bringing the Bible into contempt, and weakening or destroying its influence upon men, than the making ludicrous applications of its statements, or using its expressions to give point to a joke, or force to a witticism. What helps your laughter will not long retain your reverence. Let not, therefore, the temptation of saying a good thing, or of giving a laughable turn to certain words, prevail on you to use Scripture irreverently: you will hereby harden yourselves more than you can calculate, and you will give an untold advantage to your spiritual adversaries. It is to sharpen all the arrows of the devil, to sharpen your wits on the Bible. Be jocular with what else you will; but revelation, with its statement of everlasting things, be ever serious and reverent with this. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *A contemptuous use of the phrase, "The burden of the Lord." Ye shall not say, "The burden of the Lord."* But this was a phrase which the prophets themselves had used, and did use afterwards. They spoke of the burden of Babylon, Moab, Dumah, Egypt, &c. It was not, therefore, the expression itself, so much as the spirit in which these people repeated it, that was the offence. It might perhaps be partly in the way of jeering contempt, turning the office of the prophet to ridicule; representing it thus—"What is the burden this time? Let's hear it." They did show all this profane lightness sometimes. But probably it was with many of them a deeper, graver feeling. It was to many an expression of grievance in hostility to the will and dictates of God. "Well, you are here again, in the name of God! a most unwelcome sight you are; what is it you have now to say? Is it to be another solemn aggravated recital of our crimes? There seems to be a very careful register kept in heaven of our sins. We wonder our little failings should occupy such attention there. And you have a strange liking for your office of accuser. If it were something pleasant to be said to us you would not be so ready." Or, "Is it that God forbids us some one thing more of the few indulgences to our wills that are left us? We thought we had already a sufficient number of the 'Thou shalt not,' but a complete law is long in making!" Or, "Is it some additional load to our long list of duties? Already we cannot turn any way, but there is something for us to do we don't like." Or, "Is there some new threatening of judgment and vengeance?" Now, such a spirit of remonstrance against God is common in ancient time and to our own: frightful as the spirit may seem when it is expressed in plain terms. (*John Foster.*)

CHAPTER XXIV.

VER. 1. The princes of Judah, with the carpenters and smiths from Jerusalem.—*The nobility of work*:—I. ALL LABOUR BECOMES TRULY NOBLE REGARDED AS THE SERVICE OF GOD. To regard labour simply as a stern necessity of human life is to convert the workman into a slave, and his toil into drudgery. The glory of the angels is found in the fact they are messengers of God. And all the work of our hand attains its highest glory wrought out in the love and fear of God. The apostle gives us the true point of view (Eph. vi. 6-8). Here we have God the Taskmaster. "Doing the will of God." Not only what we are pleased to call our highest work for Him, but our lowliest toil also, serving Him with two brown hands as Gabriel serves in the presence of the throne with two white wings. Here we have also God the Paymaster. "Whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the

same shall he receive of the Lord." God is a grand paymaster, He is a sure one, and rich beyond all hope are they who do His bidding. In the class-meeting a poor man said to me, "It was very strange, sir, but the other day, whilst I was looking after my horses, God visited me and wonderfully blessed me; it was very strange He should visit me like this in a stable." "Not at all," said I, "it is a fulfilment of the prophecy: 'In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses Holiness unto the Lord,' " &c. In an old book I was reading the other day the writer laughed at some commoner who had just been made a peer, because he had his coat of arms burned and painted even upon his shovels and wheelbarrows. In my reckoning, that was a very fine action, and full of significance. If a man is a true man he is a man of God, a prince of God; and he ought to put the stamp of his nobility on the commonest things with which he has to do. II. ALL LABOUR BECOMES TRULY NOBLE REGARDED AS A MINISTRY TO HUMANITY. Few men, comparatively, realise the social bearing of their toil, and therefore know it as an insipid thing, when in truth it is their rich privilege to taste in all their work the joy of a good Samaritan, for all conscientious work is an essential philanthropy. With one hand we work for ourselves, with the other for the race, and it is one of the purest joys of life to remember this. Let us be blind workers no more, but consciously, lovingly, do our daily work, rejoicing in the social glory and fruitfulness of it. Princes, smiths, carpenters, let us not forget we too toil for the larger happiness of all men, so shall we prove in our toil some of the sublime pleasure Howard knew when he opened the door of the prison, that Wilberforce felt striking off the fetters of the slave, that Peabody tasted when he built homes for the poor. III. ALL LABOUR BECOMES TRULY NOBLE REGARDED AS A DISCIPLINE TO OUR HIGHER NATURE. Many, alas! sink with their work, but the Divine design in the duty of life was the perfection of the worker. Our toil is to develop our whole nature. Our physical being. Our work is neither to pollute nor destroy, but to purify and build up the temple of the body. Sweat does not mean blood, and there is a blessing in the curse. Our work should develop our intellectual self also. Much of our business may become a direct mental education, and it need never hinder the flowering of the mind. But chiefly the work of life ought to subserve our spiritual perfecting. In all true work the soul works and gains in purity and power by its work. The carpenter's work tests his moral qualities, and whilst he builds with brick and stone, timber and glass, he may build up also character with silver, gold, and precious stones; the smith fashions his soul whilst he shapes the iron on ringing anvil; the husbandman may enrich his heart whilst he adorns the landscape; and the weaver at the loom weave two fabrics at once, one that the moth shall fret, the other of gold and fine needlework, immortal raiment for the spirit. The King of glory has consecrated the workshop by His presence and glorified work by His example. (*W. L. Watkinson.*)

Vers. 2, 3. *One basket had very good figs.*—*Two baskets of figs:*—I. THE SAME NATION MAY CONTAIN TWO DISTINCT CHARACTERS, YET BOTH MAY BE EQUALLY INVOLVED IN A NATIONAL VISITATION. There are laws of retribution in operation in relation to nations which, so far as the outward condition is concerned, are no respecters of persons. II. SUBMISSION TO DIVINE CHASTISEMENT WILL LEAD, IN TIME, TO DELIVERANCE FROM IT, WHILE RESISTANCE WILL BRING RUIN. Two members of a family may be suffering from the same disease; the physician will insist upon submission to his treatment from both his patients. If one refuses, he must not complain of the physician, supposing he grows worse. God desired to heal the Jewish nation of its idolatrous tendencies; for this purpose He had decreed that it should go into captivity. Those who submitted willingly are here promised that the discipline should be "for their good," and that they should be brought again to their own land; while those who resisted, would be "consumed from off the land that He gave unto them and their fathers." III. LESSONS. 1. In this life retribution to nations is more certain than to individuals. God can deal with individual characters in any world, therefore we sometimes find the greatest villains apparently unmarked by Him now. 2. Outward circumstance is no standard by which to judge God's estimate of character. Job's friends were not afflicted as he was, but God esteemed him far more highly than He did them. 3. Moral crime is commercial ruin to a nation. Israel lost God first, and then her national prosperity and greatness. A body soon decays when the life has departed, and a putrid carcase will soon be visited by the birds of prey. (*A London Minister.*) *What seest thou, Jeremiah?*—*Reflections on some of the*

characteristics of the age we live in :—It is not difficult to see the force and application of this homely but sententious little allegory. Jeremiah lived in those days of declension and disaster in which the invasion of Judea by the King of Babylon was not only threatened, but actually took place. He saw the departure of "the King of Judah, and the princes of Judah, with the carpenters and smiths, from Jerusalem," and these were all "carried away captive" to Babylon. Nevertheless, many of every class were left behind, and these were placed under the government of that weak and wicked king, Zedekiah. Those who were "carried away" comprised the best of the population with regard to intelligence, religious feeling, and patriotism. Their sorrows and afflictions humbled them, so that they repented of their idolatries and obtained mercy of the Lord. In due time the way was prepared for the return of the exiles to their own land; and there, under the leadership of such men as Ezra, Nehemiah, and Zerubbabel, they founded afresh a pious commonwealth, in which the worship of the true God was ever afterwards maintained down to the time of the coming of Christ. In them was fulfilled the promise contained in verses 4-7. On the other hand, the Jews who remained at home with Zedekiah "and his princes" revolted against God more and more. They abandoned themselves openly to licentiousness and idolatry. Their temper fiery and mutinous, their language blasphemous, their whole conduct infamous. (See vers. 8-13.) These were the evil figs, so evil that they could not be eaten. The point suggested to us by Jeremiah's vision is, that there occur periods, or special circumstances, in the religious life of nations, which tend to develop and force the maturation of character with unusual energy and astonishing rapidity. In such times, you do not find people merely good or bad; but the good are very good, and the evil very evil. Now, it is evident that no parallel whatever can be drawn between our position and circumstances in England at the present time and those of Judah in the days of Jeremiah. We are not, as a nation, suffering either from internal anarchy or from external assault. But still it may be, that other influences and conditions of society are at work, producing an exactly analogous result to that at the time referred to in the text. I. CERTAIN PECULIARITIES OF OUR TIMES AND POSITION MAY BE NOTED. 1. This is an age of extraordinary intellectual and social activity. The most absolute liberty of speech exists, and men shrink from the utterance of no opinion, the broaching of no speculation. This unusual activity and daring of thought produces rapid and extraordinary changes in both political and ecclesiastical affairs. Amid the astonishment and whirl of such events, it requires a great effort to keep the mind calm, and hold fast in our judgments, utterances, and actions to the sober requirements of sound principle and acknowledged truth (Prov. xvii. 27, margin). 2. The very full and clear religious light which we enjoy. 3. The corresponding increase of activity in the Church. All manner of special devices are being tried and carried out vigorously whereby to reach all classes, to instruct the most ignorant and reform the most vicious, whilst ancient and ordinary means of grace are sustained with unprecedented interest and efficiency. II. WHAT DO ALL THESE THINGS IMPORT? and what do they necessitate on our part individually? Truly we find here divers potent and stimulating agencies in operation, calculated to arouse us up to repentance and godly solicitude, and then to prompt us on to vigorous Christian life and action. If we yield to them, how fast and far may we soon be carried in the path of faith, in a career of usefulness! What bold, what firm, what fruitful Christians we must become if we enter fully into "the spirit of the times," considered as engaged on the side of Christ and His Gospel! But if we refuse to do so, if we set ourselves to resist these powerful influences, how strenuous must that resistance be! how determined and how self-conscious that action of the will which still fights against God and clings to worldliness and sin! Facts are in harmony with these reasonings. Illustrations abound on every side. In this earnest age you find earnest men both for good and evil. Was ever war conducted on so fearful a scale as we have lately witnessed? In our day, we have also seen such specimens of commercial roguery and robbery, conceived on so magnificent a scale, and executed under so clever and admirable a cloak of hypocrisy, as no previous age has ever presented to the world. On the other hand, look at the men who stand foremost in the van of religion and philanthropy. These are God's heroes; men are still living amongst us worthy of comparison with the spiritual heroes of ancient times, in regard to all that is noble in faith, self-denying in zeal, munificent in giving, or abundant in labours. These, indeed, are among the good figs, which by God's grace are very good: and to the production of such instances

of exalted and matured piety, the present times are not in the least unfavourable. One might speak of books, as well as men. And if, on the other hand, it be true that infidelity and immorality were never so speciously or so boldly advocated as now, in sensational novels, in shallow critiques, or in vulgar serials; so, again, we defy any age to show such noble and masterly treatises as are now written by men of sanctified learning and genius, either in exposition of the Scriptures, or in vindication of their contents. Then there are public institutions and societies to be looked at. If chapels are multiplied, so are theatres. Look at the state of our large towns and cities. Were ever such facilities for evil doing? such criminal attractions for the young? so many places where vice is seductive and sin made easy? The kingdom of Satan is as active and roused up to new exertions as is the kingdom of Christ. It is said that, in the early colonisation of Van Diemen's Land, one man took a hive of bees, and soon the island was filled with swarms, and both the trees and rocks dropped with honey; another took a handful of thistle-down, and ere long the country was overrun with prickly and gigantic weeds. Like such actions, are the deeds of all men now. Shall we, then, multiply honey-hives, or scatter thistles in the earth? Let us seek to be good, and do good: and then, behold what glorious possibilities belong to us, of being pre-eminently holy, blest and useful! (*T. G. Horton.*) *Figs good and bad*:—Events are divided. "What seest thou?" I see two kinds of events, one good, and the other vile: and there they are in life. It is so in families: how do you account for it that one son prays, and the other never saw the need of prayer? The one is filial; the other has a heart of stone. Look at life broadly. What seest thou, O prophet, O man of the piercing eyes, what seest thou? Two events, or series of events, one excellent, the other vile; one leading upward, the other downward. What seest thou? Heaven—hell. The vision is still before us; we need to have our attention called to it. He who deals in singularities, in isolations, never enters into the philosophy of Providence, the method of the sublime organisation which is denominated the universe. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 5. Whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good.—*The action of love*:—The Lord says He will send His people into captivity "for their good." How marvellous is the action of love! The parent sends away the child he cannot live without for the child's good; men undertake long and perilous and costly journeys that they may accomplish a purpose that is good. Jesus Christ Himself said to His wondering disciples, "It is expedient for you that I go away." Who can understand this action of love? It would seem to us to be otherwise: that it would be best for Jesus to remain until the very last wanderer is home. Are we not sent away? have we not lost fortune, station, standing? have we not been punished in a thousand different ways—chastised, humiliated, afflicted? have we not been suddenly surrounded with clouds in which there was no light—yea, and clouds in which there was no rain, simply darkness, sevenfold night? Yet it was for our good; it was that our vanity might be rebuked, that the centre of dependence might be found, that the throne of righteousness might be seen and approached. Let us look upon our afflictions, distresses, and losses in that light. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Outward circumstances no standard by which to judge of one's true state*:—The captives already in Babylon are compared to good fruit, such as is fit for use and sweet to the taste. The party in Jerusalem as yet free, is compared to bad fruit, unfit for use, and nauseous to the palate. And yet if one judged by the mere outward aspect of things, the state of the captives in the enemies' city seemed a much more undesirable one than that of their brethren in the metropolis of their own land. Hence we see that the good or evil of one's circumstances is not to be judged by outward appearances. Often what seems a peculiarly hard and distressing position proves to have been the very best for us. God humbles us, and tries us sorely at the first, in order to do us good in our latter end. (*A. R. Fausset, M.A.*)

Vers. 6, 7. For I will set Mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land.—*God's regard for His people*:—I. THE NATURE OF GOD'S DECLARATION RESPECTING HIMSELF, "I will set Mine eyes upon them for good." 1. This denotes—(1) His omniscience over them (*Job xxxiv. 21*, compared with *xxxi. 4*). (2) His providence for them (*2 Chron. xvi. 9*). (3) His grace to save them (*Rom. viii. 29*). 2. It implies—(1) Divine

personality—"For I" (Ezek. xxxiv. 11). (2) Divine attention—"Will set Mine eyes" (Psa. xxxii. 8). (3) Personal affection—"Upon them" (Ezek. xvi. 5, 6). (4) Great kindness—"For their good" (Isa. liv. 8). II. A DESCRIPTION OF THE DELIVERANCE HERE DECLARED, "I will bring them into this land" 1. Here we have the idea of distance (Eph. ii. 17). 2. How He brings them back. (1) By the death of His Son (Rev. v. 9). (2) By the obedience of His Son (Rom. v. 19). (3) By virtue of His intercession (Heb. vii. 25). 3. This is—(1) A rich land. (2) A large land. (3) A peaceful land. (4) A land of security. III. THE BLESSINGS DESIGNED FOR THEM ON THEIR RETURN. 1. Negatively—"Not pull them down." (1) Not condemn them (Rom. viii. 1). (2) Not visit their sins upon them (Heb. viii. 12). 2. Positively—"I will build them up." (1) The foundation of the building (1 Cor. iii. 11). (2) The dimensions (Rom. xi. 5). (3) The materials (Eph. ii. 1). (4) The cement by which this building is united (Col. ii. 2, 3). (5) The instruments employed in building (2 Cor. iv. 7). 3. These plants had been—(1) Fruitless. (2) Cumberers. (3) Injurious. Yet God did not pluck them up. 4. But He transplanted them to a superior soil: "I will plant them." (1) In a delightful situation (Psa. xlviii. 2). (2) In a good and fertile soil (Psa. i. 3). (3) Where there is plenty of sun and rain (Psa. lxxxiv. 11). IV. THE RESULTS OF ALL THIS. 1. "And I will give them a heart to know Me." (1) As a gracious God. (2) A covenant-keeping God. (3) A faithful God. (4) A mighty God. (5) And a God of salvation to His people. 2. "And they shall be My people." As proved by their—(1) Studying the Bible. (2) Offering up prayers and praises. (3) Attendance on His house. (4) Living to God. (5) And simply believing on Christ. 3. "And I will be their God." (1) By ruling in their understandings. (2) Subduing their wills. (3) And living in their hearts. 4. "For they shall return unto Me with their whole heart." (1) Positively—Nothing shall prevent them, for "they shall" return. (2) Cordially—Their "heart" shall be delighted in returning. (3) Personally—Each and all shall return in the same person, "unto Me." (4) Dissatisfaction—They return from all things sinful to God. (*T. B. Baker.*) **I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord.**—*Heart-knowledge of God*:—By this great promise of the text is not merely meant that God will lead the converted to know that there is a God, because that may be known without a new heart. Any man possessed of reason may know that there is a Supreme Being, who created all things and preserves the universe in existence. The text promises that the favoured ones shall know that God to be Jehovah. Man fashions for himself a god after his own liking; he makes to himself, if not out of wood or stone, yet out of what he calls his own consciousness, or his cultured thought, a deity to his taste, who will not be too severe with his iniquities, or deal out strict justice to the impenitent. The Holy Spirit, however, when He illuminates the mind, leads us to see that Jehovah is God, and beside Him there is none else. He teaches His people to know that the God of heaven and earth is the God of the Bible, a God whose attributes are completely balanced, mercy attended by justice, love accompanied by holiness, grace arrayed in truth, and power linked with tenderness. When the heart is content to believe in God as He is revealed, and no longer goes about to fashion a deity for itself according to its own fancies and notions, it is a hopeful sign. The main stress of the promise lies, however, in this: "I will give them a heart to know Me"; that is, not merely to know that I am, and that I am Jehovah, but to have a personal knowledge of Myself. It is not enough to know that our Creator is the Jehovah of the Bible, and that He is perfect in character, and glorious beyond thought; but to know God we must have perceived Him, we must have spoken to Him, we must have been made at peace with Him, we must have lifted up our heart to Him, and received communications from Him. If you know the Lord your secret is with Him, and His secret is with you; He has manifested Himself unto you as He does not unto the world. He must have made Himself known unto you by the mysterious influences of His Spirit, and because of this you know Him. I. THE SEAT OF THIS KNOWLEDGE—"I will give them a heart to know Me." Observe that it is not said, "I will give them a head to know Me." The first and primary impediment to man's knowledge of God lies in the affections. The heart is the seat of the blindness; there lies the darkness which beclouds the whole mind. Hence to the heart the light must come, and to the heart that light is promised. 1. I understand by the fact that the knowledge of God here promised lies in the heart, first, that God renews the heart so that it admires the character of God. The understanding perceives that God

is just, powerful, faithful, wise, true, gracious, longsuffering, and the like; then the heart being purified admires all these glorious attributes, and adores Him because of them. 2. The heart-knowledge promised in the covenant of grace means, however, much more than approval: grace enables the renewed heart to take another step and appropriate the Lord, saying, "O God, Thou art my God, early will I seek Thee." All the saved ones cry, "This God is our God for ever and ever: He shall be our guide even unto death." 3. All true knowledge of God is attended by affection for Him. In spiritual language to know God is to love Him. "He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love." It is the great passion of the renewed soul to glorify God, whom he knows and loves: knowledge without love would be a powerless thing, but God has joined this knowledge and love together in a sacred wedlock, and they can never be put asunder. As we love God we know Him, and as we know Him we love Him. Admiration, appropriation, affection are crowned with adhesion. To know a thing by heart is, in our common talk, to know it thoroughly. Memories of the heart abide when all others depart. A mother's love, a wife's fondness, a sweet child's affection, will come before us even in the last hours of life; when the mind will lose its learning and the hand forget its cunning, the dear names of our beloved ones will linger on our lips; and their sweet faces will be before us even when our eyes are dim with the shadow of approaching death. If we can sing, "O God, my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed," then the knowledge which it possesses will never be taken away from it. II. THE NECESSITY OF THIS KNOWLEDGE. 1. To know God is a needful preparation for every other true knowledge, because the Lord is the centre of the universe, the basis, the pillar, the essential force, the all in all, the fulness of all things. You may learn the doctrines of the Bible, but you do not know them truly till you know the God of the doctrines. You may understand the precepts in the letter of them, and the promises in their outward wording, but neither precept nor promise do you truly know until you know the God from whose lips they fell. The ancient sage said, "Man, know thyself." He spake well, but even for this man must first know his God. I venture to say that no man rightly knows himself till he knows his God, because it is by the light and purity of God that we see our own darkness and sinfulness. 2. The knowledge of God is necessary to any real peace of mind. Suppose a man to be in the world and feel that he is right every way except with regard to God, and as to Him he knows nothing. Hear him say, "I go about the world and see many faces which I can recognise, and I perceive many friends upon whom I can trust, but there is a God somewhere, and I know nothing at all about Him. Whether He be my friend or my foe I know not." If thoughtful and intelligent he must suffer unrest in his spirit, because he will say to himself, "Suppose this God should turn out to be a just God, and I should be a breaker of His laws! What a peril hangs over me. How is it possible for me to be at peace till this dreadful ignorance is removed?" He is the God of peace, and there can be no peace till the soul knows Him. 3. That this knowledge of God is necessary is clear, for how could it be possible for a man to have spiritual life and yet not to know God? If you do not know Him you are not a partaker of His grace, but you abide in darkness. Into His heaven you can never enter till He has given you a heart to know Him; do not forget this warning, or trifle with it. III. THE EXCELLENCY OF THIS KNOWLEDGE. 1. One of the first effects of knowing God in the soul is that it turns out our idols. God so enamours the soul of the converted man, so engrosses every spiritual faculty, that he cannot endure an idol, however dear in former times; and if perchance in some backsliding moment an earthly love intrudes, it is because the man has withdrawn his eye from the splendour of the Deity. 2. The second good effect of the knowledge of God is that it creates faith in the soul; to prove which I might give a great many texts, but one will suffice (Psa. ix. 10): "They that know Thy Name will put their trust in Thee." We cannot trust an unknown God, but when He reveals Himself to us by His Spirit, then to trust Him is no longer difficult; it is, indeed, inevitable. 3. This knowledge of God creates good works also (1 John ii. 3). A heart to know the Lord begets and nurtures every virtue and every grace, and is the basis of the noblest character, the food which feeds grace till it matures into glory. 4. To know God has over us a transforming power. Remember how the apostle writes (2 Cor. iii. 18). Every thought which crosses the mind affects it for the better or the worse, every glance is moulding us, every wish fashions the character. A sight of God is the most wonderfully

sanctifying influence that can be conceived of. Know God, and you will grow to be like Him. 5. The knowledge of God causes us to praise Him. "In Judah is God known; His name is great in Israel." It is not possible for us to have low thoughts of Him, or to give forth mean utterances concerning Him, or to act in a miserly way towards His cause, when we practically know Him. 6. The knowledge of God brings comfort, and that is a very desirable thing in a world of trouble. What saith the Psalmist? "God is known in her palaces for a refuge." 7. To know God also brings a man great honour. "Because he hath set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known My name." Think of it—"set on high," and set on high by the Lord Himself, and all as the result of knowing the name of the Lord. 8. The man who knows the Lord will have usefulness given him (2 Cor. ii. 14). We cannot teach others of things which we do not know ourselves. If we have no savour in us there cannot be a savour coming out of us. We shall only be a drag upon the Church in any position if we are destitute of the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus; but if we are filled with a knowledge of Christ, then the sweet savour of His name will pour forth from us as perfume from the flowers. IV. THE SOURCE OF THIS KNOWLEDGE. None but the Creator can give a man a new heart, the change is too radical for any other hand. It would be hard to give a new eye, or a new arm, but a new heart is still more out of the question. The Lord Himself must do it. 1. It is evidently a work of pure grace. He freely gives to whomsoever He wills, according to His own declaration, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." 2. It is evidently a work which is possible. All things are possible to God, and He says, "I will give it to them." He does not speak of it as a blessing desirable, but unattainable; on the contrary He says, "I will give them a heart to know Me." 3. It is a work which the Lord has covenanted to do (Hos. ii. 19; Jer. xxxi. 32-34). (C. H. Spurgeon.) *A believing knowledge of God*.—The manner of knowing the difference between believers and unbelievers as to knowledge, is not as much in the matter of their knowledge as in the manner of knowing. Unbelievers, some of them, may know more and be able to say more of God, His perfections and will, than many believers; but they know nothing as they ought, nothing in a right manner, nothing spiritually and savingly, nothing with a holy, heavenly light. The excellency of a believer is not that he hath a large apprehension of things, but that what he doth apprehend, which may perhaps be very little, he sees it in the light of the Spirit of God, in a saving, soul-transforming light: and this is that which gives us communion with God, and not prying thoughts, or curious raised notions. (J. Owen.) *To know God—a new, a gladdening experience*.—A touching story is told of the child of a French painter. The little girl lost her sight in infancy, and her blindness was supposed to be incurable. A famous oculist in Paris, however, performed an operation on her eyes and restored her sight. Her mother had long been dead, and her father had been her only friend and companion. When she was told that her blindness could be cured, her one thought was that she could see him; and when the cure was complete, and the bandages were removed, she ran to him, and, trembling, pored over his features, shutting her eyes now and then, and passing her fingers over his face, as if to make sure that it was he. The father had a noble head and presence, and his every look and motion were watched by his daughter with the keenest delight. For the first time his constant tenderness and care seemed real to her. If he caressed her, or even looked upon her kindly, it brought tears to her eyes. "To think," she cried, holding his hand close in hers, "that I had this father so many years and never knew him!" *They shall return unto Me with their whole heart*.—*The whole heart must be given to God*.—Suppose a mother gave her child a beautiful flower-plant in bloom, and told her to carry it to a sick friend. The child takes it away, and when she reaches the friend's door she plucks off one leaf and gives it to her, keeping the plant herself. Has she obeyed her mother's command? Then afterwards, once a day, she plucks off another leaf, or a bud, or a flower, and takes it to the friend, still retaining the plant. Did she obey the command of her mother? Nothing but the giving of the whole plant could fulfil the mother's direction. Now, is not that a simple illustration of what we give to God? He commands us to love Him with all our heart and with all our being, and we pluck off a little leaf of love now and then, a little bud or flower of affection, or one cluster of fruit from the bending branches, and give to Him, and we call that obeying. (J. R. Miller.)

CHAPTER XXV.

VER. 6. I will do you no hurt.—*No hurt from God*:—I. THE IMPORT OF THE PROMISE. 1. Such a promise can apply to none but the people of God. 2. The Lord's people are apt to fear He should do them hurt, and hence He kindly assures them of the contrary. We want more of that love to God which beareth all things at His hand, which believeth all good things concerning Him, and hopeth for all things from Him. 3. As God will do no hurt to them that fear Him, so neither will He suffer others to hurt them. If God does not change their hearts, He will tie their hands; or if for wise ends He suffers them to injure you in your worldly circumstances, yet your heavenly inheritance is sure, and your treasure is laid up where thieves cannot break through nor steal. 4. More is implied in the promise than is absolutely expressed; for when the Lord says He will do His people no hurt, He means that He will really do them good. All things to God's people are blessings in their own nature, or are turned into blessings for their sake; so that all the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies to do them (Gen. i. 20; Jer. xxiv. 5, 6; Rom. viii. 28).

II. THE ASSURANCE WE HAVE THAT THIS PROMISE WILL BE FULFILLED. 1. The Lord thinks no hurt of His people, and therefore He will certainly do them no hurt. His conduct is a copy of His decrees: He worketh all things according to the counsel of His own will, and therefore where no evil is determined, no evil can take place. 2. The Lord threatens them no hurt; no penal sentence lies against them. 3. He never has done them any hurt, but good, all the days of their life. Former experience of the Divine goodness should strengthen the believer's confidence, and fortify him against present discouragements (Judg. xiii. 23; Psal. xlii. 6, lxxvii. 12; 2 Cor. i. 10). (*B. Beddome, M.A.*)

Ver. 31. He will plead with all flesh.—*No excuse needed for faith in God*:—I. GOD PLEADS WITH MEN CHIEFLY THROUGH THE SPIRIT OF THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST. This part of our life is a probation, like being at school; it is an apprenticeship to eternal life, a life in which we are to be journeymen and masters of the work of being good and doing good. We are learners here. Some learn their life's lesson thoroughly, and others only partially. God means us to learn; and if a man will not do God's will, he can only learn by the bitter pain of experience. There are only two ways of learning—either by doing God's will, or by disobeying it; either way will bring us to our senses at some time or other, either in this world or in that which is to come. II. CHRISTIANITY URGES THAT IF WE BE WISE EVERY ONE WILL CHOOSE THE HIGHEST AIM OF LIFE. Unless we have some great object in view, our life is a task which is hard to bear; it is like being rubbed with sandpaper, everything seeming to be in unpleasant friction with us. Yet you cannot get a polish without friction; and so the friction of daily life that vexes and torments us, is an experience which is good for us. It is one of God's means of polishing us; but it is unpleasant, like having small pebbles in one's boots. It is, however, a needful discipline. But were we humbly and lovingly to do God's will, as you would have your little child do your will, life would not be a painful task, nor would it be a state of perpetual friction. III. CHRISTIANITY ALSO TEACHES US THAT GOD IS WORTHY TO BE BOTH ESTEEMED AND LOVED. IV. CHRISTIANITY SWEETLY TEACHES US OF THE OTHER LIFE. Have you ever lived in the country, and after being away for a time felt the joy of returning home? (*W. Birch.*)

CHAPTER XXVI.

VERs. 1-24. In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah.—*Afflictions, distresses, tumults*:—Jehoiakim was, perhaps, the most despicable of the kings of Judah. Josephus says that he was unjust in disposition, an evil-doer; neither pious towards God nor just towards men. Something of this may have been due to the influence of his wife, Nehushtha, whose father, Elnathan, was an accomplice in the royal murder of Urijah. Jeremiah appears to have been constantly in conflict with this king; and probably

the earliest manifestation of the antagonism that could not but subsist between two such men occurred in connection with the building of Jehoikim's palace. Though his kingdom was greatly impoverished with the heavy fine of between forty and fifty thousand pounds, imposed by Pharaoh-Necho after the defeat and death of Josiah, and though the times were dark with portents of approaching disaster, yet he began to rear a splendid palace for himself, with spacious chambers and large windows, floors of cedar, and decorations of vermilion. Clearly, such a monarch must have entertained a mortal hatred towards the man who dared to raise his voice in denunciation of his crimes; and, like Herod with John the Baptist, he would not have scrupled to quench in blood the light that cast such strong condemnation upon his oppressive and cruel actions. An example of this had been recently afforded in the death of Urijah, who had uttered solemn words against Jerusalem and its inhabitants in the same way that Jeremiah had done. But it would appear that this time, at least, his safety was secured by the interposition of influential friends amongst the aristocracy, one of whom was Ahikam, the son of Shaphan (xxvi. 20-24).

I. THE DIVINE COMMISSION. Beneath the Divine impulse, Jeremiah went up to the court of the Lord's house, and took his place on some great occasion when all the cities of Judah had poured their populations to worship there. Not one word was to be kept back. We are all more or less conscious of these inward impulses; and it often becomes a matter of considerable difficulty to distinguish whether they originate in the energy of our own nature or are the genuine outcome of the Spirit of Christ. It is only in the latter case that such service can be fruitful. There is no greater enemy of the highest usefulness than the presence of the flesh in our activities. There is no department of life or service into which its subtle, deadly influence does not penetrate. We meet it after we have entered upon the new life, striving against the Spirit, and restraining His gracious energy. We are most baffled when we find it prompting to holy resolutions and efforts after a consecrated life. And lastly, it confronts us in Christian work, because there is so much of it that in our quiet moments we are bound to trace to a desire for notoriety, to a passion to excel, and to the restlessness of a nature which evades questions in the deeper life, by flinging itself into every avenue through which it may exert its activities. There is only one solution to these difficulties. By the way of the cross and the grave we can alone become disentangled and discharged from the insidious domination of this evil principle, which is accursed by God, and hurtful to holy living, as blight to the tender fruit.

II. THE MESSAGE AND ITS RECEPTION. On the one side, by his lips, God entreated His people to repent and turn from their evil ways; on the other, He bade them know that their obduracy would compel Him to make their great national shrine as complete a desolation as the site of Shiloh, which for five hundred years had been in ruins. It is impossible to realise the intensity of passion which such words evoked. They seemed to insinuate that Jehovah could not defend His own, or that their religion had become so heartless that He would not. "So it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the Lord commanded him to speak unto all the people," that he found himself suddenly in the vortex of a whirlpool of popular excitement. There is little doubt that Jeremiah would have met his death had it not been for the prompt interposition of the princes. Such is always the reception given on the part of man to the words of God. We may gravely question how far our words are God's, when people accept them quietly and as a matter of course. That which men approve and applaud may lack the King's seal, and be the substitution on the part of the messenger of tidings which he deems more palatable, and therefore more likely to secure for himself a larger welcome.

III. WELCOME INTERPOSITION. The princes were seated in the palace, and instantly on receiving tidings of the outbreak came up to the temple. Their presence stilled the excitement, and prevented the infuriated people from carrying out their designs upon the life of the defenceless prophet. They hastily constituted themselves into a court of appeal, before which prophet and people were summoned. Then Jeremiah stood on his defence. His plea was that he could not but utter the words with which the Lord had sent him, and that he was only re-affirming the predictions of Micah in the days of Hezekiah. He acknowledged that he was in their hands, but he warned them that innocent blood would bring its own Nemesis upon them all; and at the close of his address he re-affirmed his certain embassage from Jehovah. This bold and ingenuous defence seems to have turned the scale in his favour. The princes gave their verdict: "This man is not worthy of death,

for he hath spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God." And the sickle populace, swept hither and thither by the wind, appear to have passed over *en masse* to the same conclusion; so that princes and people stood confederate against the false prophets and priests. Thus does God hide His faithful servants in the hollow of His hand. No weapon that is formed against them prospers. They are hidden in the secret of His pavilion from the strife of tongues. (*P. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

Vers. 8-16. When Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the Lord had commanded him, the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die.—*The characteristics of a true prophet*.—I. THE TRUE PROPHET HAS A STERN MESSAGE TO DELIVER (4-7). If they ally themselves with Egypt, the Temple will be made desolate, as Shiloh had been destroyed by the Assyrians at the deportation of Israel after the fall of Samaria, 710 B.C. Jerusalem will become a curse to all nations (will be recognised by all nations as having fallen by the curse of God). To prophesy smooth things in a sinful world is to be false to God. How often does even our blessed Lord denounce sin, and remind men of the wrath of God for it! (*Matt. xi. 21-24; xii. 41, 42; xxiii. 31-38, &c.*) II. THE TRUE PROPHET MAY NOT "DIMINISH A WORD" OF GOD'S MESSAGE, HOWEVER UNPOPULAR, OR UNPLEASANT, OR PERSONAL. 1. This message referred to the public policy of the nation. The morality of a nation as imperative as that of an individual. 2. Other messages assail the sins of classes, from the king to the humblest citizen. III. THE TRUE PROPHET WILL SPEAK FEARLESSLY. IV. THE TRUE PROPHET IS PROMISED THE SUPPORT OF GOD. V. THE TRUE PROPHET NEVER WAS AND NEVER CAN BE POPULAR, BUT MUST RAISE UP ENEMIES AGAINST HIMSELF. IV. THE TRUE PROPHET WILL SPEAK PEACE AS WELL AS WRATH IF MEN REPENT. (*J. Cunningham Geikie, D.D.*) *Prophetic virtues*.—"The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house." In this apology of the prophet thus answering for himself with a heroic spirit, five noble virtues, fit for a martyr, are by an expositor observed. 1. His prudence in alleging his Divine mission. 2. His clarity in exhorting his enemies to repent. 3. His humility in saying, "Behold I am in your hand." 4. His magnanimity and freedom of speech in telling them that God would revenge his death. 5. His spiritual security and fearlessness of death in so good a cause and with so good a conscience. (*John Trapp.*) *A saint's resignation, meekness, and cheerfulness in persecution*.—One thousand eight hundred years ago an aged saint was being led into Rome by ten rough Roman soldiers, to be thrown to the wild beasts in the amphitheatre. Can you imagine anything more dreary and deplorable? Was he unhappy? Did he count cruelty and martyrdom as evil? No. In one of the seven letters that he wrote on his way, he says: "Come fire and iron, come rattling of wild beasts, cutting and mangling and wrenching of my bones, come hacking of my limbs, come crushing of my whole body, come cruel tortures of the devil to assail me! Only be it mine to attain to Jesus Christ!" What are those words of St. Ignatius but an echo of the apostle's, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss that I may win Christ"? How well the early Christians understood these things by which we opportunists, cringing cowards, effeminate time-servers, as most of us are in this soft, sensuous, hypocritical age, have so utterly forgotten! (*Dean Farrar.*)

CHAPTER XXVII.

VERS. 4, 5. I have made the earth.—*God and the earth*.—I. God is the CREATOR of all earthly things: "The man and the beast that are upon the ground." The earth is not eternal, not the production of chance, not the work of many Gods. It has one Maker. This agrees with all true science. II. God is the SOVEREIGN DISPOSER of all earthly things. "Have given it unto whom it seemed meet unto Me." He might have built it and left it uninhabited, or He might have populated it with other creatures than those who tenant it now. He has given what He thinks fit of it to individuals, tribes, and nations. (*Homilist.*) *The earth made by God*.—I have in my house a little sheet of paper on which

there is a faint, pale, and not particularly skilful representation of a hyacinth. It is not half as beautiful as many other pictures I have, but I regard it as the most exquisite of them all. My mother painted it; and I never see it that I do not think that her hand rested on it, and that her thought was concerned in its execution. Now, suppose you had such a conception of God that you never saw a flower, a tree, a cloud, or any natural object, that you did not instantly think, "My Father made it," what a natural world would this become to you! How beautiful would the earth seem to you! And how would you find that nature was a revelation of God, speaking as plainly as His written Word! And if you are alone, in solitude, without company, desolate in your circumstances, it is because you have not that inner sense of the Divine love and care which it is your privilege to have, and which you ought to have. (*H. W. Beecher.*) **HAVE GIVEN IT UNTO WHOM IT SEEMED MEET UNTO ME.**—*Meetness before God*:—I. God is THE PROPRIETOR OF ALL. 1. Man's forgetfulness of this in daily life. 2. The harmony of man's being requires a sense of dependence. 3. Depression results from stopping short of God. II. WISDOM AND SOVEREIGNTY GO TOGETHER. 1. No comfort to know we live under an absolute sovereign. 2. God gives not according to seeming fitness. He sees deeper than what seems. III. THE UNERRING MIND OF GOD. 1. Cultivate an adoring spirit. 2. Rest on Him in simple belief. 3. Repose in God's law of meetness. (*P. B. Power, M.A.*) *The Divine distribution of the earth amongst men*:—I. In it He EXERCISES AN ABSOLUTE RIGHT. The earth, with all its minerals, fruits, productions, and countless tenants, is His. If He gives a thousand acres to one man and denies a yard to another, it is not for us to complain. II. In it He ACTS ACCORDING TO HIS OWN FREE CHOICE ALONE. He gives it not on the ground of merit to any man, for now He gave it to Nebuchadnezzar, one of the worst of men. The only principle in the distribution is His own sovereignty. What "seemeth meet" to a Being of Infinite wisdom and goodness must be the wisest and the most benevolent. Here let us hush all our murmurings, here let us repose the utmost confidence. Conclusion—The subject teaches us how we should hold that portion of the earth we possess, however small or great it may be. 1. With profound humility. What we possess is a gift, not a right. We are temporary trustees, not proprietors. He who holds the most should be the most humble, for he has the most to account for. 2. With practical thanksgiving. This indeed is all the rent that the Supreme Landlord requires from us, thanksgiving and praise. 3. With a solemn sense of our responsibility. It is given to us not for our own gratification and self-aggrandisement, but for the good of the race and the glory of God. 4. With a conscious dependence on His will. We are all tenants at will. We know not the moment when He shall see fit to eject us from His land. (*Homilist.*)

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Ven. 11. And the prophet Jeremiah went his way.—*Self in service* (with xxvi. 14):—We couple these passages together, because they lead our minds to the same important thought, namely, the laying aside of "self" by the servants of the Lord. Hananiah takes the yoke from off Jeremiah's neck, and breaks it, and so discredits him and his prophecy in the presence of the people. "And the prophet Jeremiah went his way." He left it to God to vindicate His own honour, which He did very soon—very terribly. Before the princes also, in chap. xxvi., he tells out uncompromisingly all the truth of God; he knew that he did so at the peril of his life. "As for me,"—he was not insensible to personal suffering, still himself he was as nothing—"behold I am in your hand, do with me as seemeth meet unto you." By this complete abnegation of "self" on the part of the prophet, we are led to consider some matters connected with "self" in our service. There is a young period in the Christian's life, when we are deceived by not seeing "self" at all; when we have no dread of it; when we never even suspect its existence. At this time, we mistake its energies for spiritual life, and often seek to carry out what is really the Lord's work, in the powers and energies of the flesh, i.e. "self." There is a period farther on, when we detect "self" partially. The Spirit of God has led us onward in our education, and

raised our standard, making us watchful and distrustful of "self" to some degree. Then comes a yet more advanced stage, when we see "self" to such an extent as to make us dread it greatly—when we see it ever intrusive, ever substituting motives low and mean for what should be holy and high; and we wage war with this "self," fully determined to put it down. There is also yet a more advanced state, when we have attained such a knowledge of the power of "self" that, while we war with, and repress it, we have come to know that here we shall never have done with it, and look forward to full deliverance only when we reach that land where there is perfect freedom. I. THE WRONG OPERATIONS OF "SELF" IN SERVICE. Much that we do may be done from the action of mere natural feelings—there may be nothing of God in it at all. A man may be gratifying only his own natural energy in all that seems so earnest and true. And when we allow "self" to influence us, we shall be subjected to disturbing influences. Self-love will be easily wounded in the rough contact with opposers of the truth. And our judgment will be warped. It is very hard to be calm, and judicial, when under the influence of strong personal feelings, and where personal interests are concerned. Self will also drive us on too far. We shall not know when "to go our way." We need not go far to detect some of the evil effects which flow from this wrong operation of "self" in service. It gives the enemy occasion to blaspheme. Satan continually attempts to confound persons and principles; men will look at the imperfect way in which we have manifested the principle, and not at the principle itself. Our infirmities become mixed up with the cause of God, and so far as they can, bring it into disrepute. And thus that saying becomes true—"religion suffers more from her friends than her enemies." II. THE EXCLUSION OF "SELF" FROM SERVICE. How can this be done? In the most favourable of cases only by degrees. But what is a man to do? 1. He must seek for enlightenment on this subject from the Holy Spirit. 2. Let him seek for a more perfect sympathy with Christ. If we have this, we shall become assimilated with Him—we shall grow like Him; His mind will transfuse itself into our mind—and the principles, on which He acted, will become ours. 3. And then the seeking for a true knowledge of our own insignificance is very important in putting down "self." We both think and act sometimes as though we were the first cause; and not only the first cause, but the final object also—as if all were to be by us, and for us—the axe thinks that it is doing all the work, and is independent of the one that heweth therewith. The very learning our insignificance will be helpful; and, when we have learned it in some degree, it will keep us, in proportion as the lesson has been learned, to our proper place. (P. B. Power, M.A.)

Ver. 13. *Thou hast broken the yokes of wood; but thou shalt make for them yokes of iron.*—*Yokes of wood and of iron*:—To throw off legitimate authority is to bind on a worse tyranny. Some kind of yoke every one of us must bend our necks to, and if we slip them out we do not thereby become independent, but simply bring upon ourselves a heavier pressure of a harder bondage. I. WE HAVE THE CHOICE BETWEEN THE YOKE OF LAW AND THE IRON YOKE OF LAWLESSNESS. Even a band of brigands, or a crew of pirates, must have some code. I have read somewhere that the cells in a honeycomb are circles squeezed by the pressure of the adjacent cells into the hexagonal shape which admits of contiguity. If they continued circles, there would be space and material lost, and no complete continuity. So, in like manner, you cannot keep five men together without some mutual limitations which are shaped into a law. Now, as long as a man keeps inside it he does not feel its pressure. A great many of us, for instance, who are in the main law-abiding people, do not ever remember that there is such a thing as restrictions upon our licence, or the obligation to perform certain duties; for we never think either of taking the licence or of shirking the duties. The yoke that is accepted ceases to press. Once let a man step outside, and what then? Why, then, he is an outlaw; and the rough side of the fence is turned outwards, and all possible terrors, which people within the boundary have nothing to do with, gather themselves together and frown down upon him. I need not remind you of how this same thesis—that we have to choose between the yoke of law and the iron yoke of lawlessness—is illustrated in the story of almost all violent revolutions. They run the same course. First the rising up of a nation against intolerable oppression, then revolution devours its own children, and the scum rises to the top of the boiling pot. Then comes, in the language of the picturesque

historian of the French Revolution, the type of them all—then comes at the end “the whirl of grapeshot” and the despot. First the government of a mob, and then the tyranny of an emperor comes to the people that shake off the yoke of reasonable law. II. WE HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN THE YOKE OF VIRTUE AND THE IRON YOKE OF VICE. We are under a far more spiritual and searching law than that written in any statute-book, or administered by any Court. Every man carries within his own heart two things, and two persons; the court, the tribunal, the culprit, and the judge. And here, too, if law be not obeyed, the result is not liberty, but the slavery of lawlessness. A great philosopher once said that the two sublimest things in the universe were the moral law and the starry heavens. And that law “I ought” bends over us like the starry heavens with which he associated it. No man can escape from the pressure of duty, and on every man is laid, by his very make, the twofold obligation, first to look upwards and catch the behests of that solemn law of duty, and then to turn his eyes and his strength inwards and coerce or spur, as the case may be, the powers of his nature, and rule the kingdom within himself. Now, as long as a man lets the ruling parts of his nature guide the lower faculties, he feels comparatively no pressure from the yoke. But if he once allows beggars to ride on horseback whilst princes walk—sense and appetite and desire, and more or less refined forms of inclination to take the place which belongs only to conscience interpreting duty—then he has exchanged the easy yoke for one that is heavy indeed. What does a man do when, instead of loyally accepting the conditions of his nature, and bowing himself to serve the all-embracing law of duty, he sets up inclination of any sort in its place? What does he do? I will tell you. He unships the helm; he pitches compass and sextant overboard; he fires up the furnaces, and screws down the safety-valve, and says, “Go ahead!” And what will be the end of that, think you? Either an explosion or a crash upon a reef! and you may take your choice of which is the better kind of death—to be blown up or to go down.

III. WE HAVE THE CHOICE BETWEEN THE YOKE OF CHRIST AND THE IRON YOKE OF GODLESSNESS. If you do not take Christ for your Teacher you are handed over either to the uncertainty of your own doubts or to pinning your faith to some man and enrolling yourself as a disciple who is prepared to swallow down whole whatsoever the rabbi may say, giving to him what you will not give to Jesus; or else you will sink back into utter indolence and carelessness about the whole matter; or else you will go and put your belief and your soul into the hands of a priest; or shut your eyes and open your mouth and take whatever tradition may choose to send you. The one refuge from all these, as I believe, is to go to Him and learn of Him, and take His yoke upon your shoulders. But, let me say further, it is better to obey Christ's commandments than to set ourselves against them. For if we will take His will for our law, and meekly assume the yoke of loyal and loving obedience to Him, the door into an earthly paradise is thrown open to us. His yoke is easy, not because its prescriptions and provisions lower the standard of righteousness and morality, but because love becomes the motive, and it is always blessed to do that which the Beloved desires. When “I will” and “I ought” cover exactly the same ground, then there is no kind of pressure from the yoke. Christ's yoke is easy because, too, He gives the power to obey His commandments. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

*The two yokes:—*I. MEN MUST WEAR SOME YOKE. In every stage of life—childhood, youth, manhood; and in every station of life—servants, masters, &c. 1. God has made and sustains us, and asks that we submit to His will. 2. With our passions and propensities, if we break the yoke it is meet we should wear, and do not serve God, we at once bend our necks to another yoke and serve slavishly our own selves. II. CHRIST'S YOKE IS AN EASY ONE TO WEAR. 1. The yoke of Christ is a right one. Serve Jesus Christ, and it is found that the Christian law is perfection itself. 2. The yoke of Christ is framed in our interest. To believe in Christ is the highest wisdom; to repent of sin is the most delightful necessity; to follow after holiness is the most blissful pursuit; to become a servant of Christ is to be made a king and priest unto God. 3. Christ's yoke is not exacting. He, in His grace, always gives us of His bounty when He asks of us our duty. 4. It is an easy yoke. Never did a man wear it but he always loved to wear it. 5. The bright example of Christ makes the yoke pleasant to bear. He Himself has carried the very yoke we bear, and we have blessed fellowship with Him in this. 6. All who have borne Christ's yoke have had grace given equal to the weight of the burden. Wolsey regretted that he had not “served God with half the zeal he had served his king,” but none

raised our standard, making us watchful and distrustful of "self" to some degree. Then comes a yet more advanced stage, when we see "self" to such an extent as to make us dread it greatly—when we see it ever intrusive, ever substituting motives low and mean for what should be holy and high; and we wage war with this "self," fully determined to put it down. There is also yet a more advanced state, when we have attained such a knowledge of the power of "self" that, while we war with, and repress it, we have come to know that here we shall never have done with it, and look forward to full deliverance only when we reach that land where there is perfect freedom. I. THE WRONG OPERATIONS OF "SELF" IN SERVICE. Much that we do may be done from the action of mere natural feelings—there may be nothing of God in it at all. A man may be gratifying only his own natural energy in all that seems so earnest and true. And when we allow "self" to influence us, we shall be subjected to disturbing influences. Self-love will be easily wounded in the rough contact with opposers of the truth. And our judgment will be warped. It is very hard to be calm, and judicial, when under the influence of strong personal feelings, and where personal interests are concerned. Self will also drive us on too far. We shall not know when "to go our way." We need not go far to detect some of the evil effects which flow from this wrong operation of "self" in service. It gives the enemy occasion to blaspheme. Satan continually attempts to confound persons and principles; men will look at the imperfect way in which we have manifested the principle, and not at the principle itself. Our infirmities become mixed up with the cause of God, and so far as they can, bring it into disrepute. And thus that saying becomes true—"religion suffers more from her friends than her enemies." II. THE EXPULSION OF "SELF" FROM SERVICE. How can this be done? In the most favourable of cases only by degrees. But what is a man to do? 1. He must seek for enlightenment on this subject from the Holy Spirit. 2. Let him seek for a more perfect sympathy with Christ. If we have this, we shall become assimilated with Him—we shall grow like Him; His mind will transfuse itself into our mind—and the principles, on which He acted, will become ours. 3. And then the seeking for a true knowledge of our own insignificance is very important in putting down "self." We both think and act sometimes as though we were the first cause; and not only the first cause, but the final object also—as if all were to be by us, and for us—the axe thinks that it is doing all the work, and is independent of the one that heweth therewith. The very learning our insignificance will be helpful; and, when we have learned it in some degree, it will keep us, in proportion as the lesson has been learned, to our proper place. (P. B. Power, M.A.)

Ver. 13. **Thou hast broken the yokes of wood; but thou shalt make for them yokes of iron.**—*Yokes of wood and of iron*:—To throw off legitimate authority is to bind on a worse tyranny. Some kind of yoke every one of us must bend our necks to, and if we slip them out we do not thereby become independent, but simply bring upon ourselves a heavier pressure of a harder bondage. I. WE HAVE THE CHOICE BETWEEN THE YOKE OF LAW AND THE IRON YOKE OF LAWLESSNESS. Even a band of brigands, or a crew of pirates, must have some code. I have read somewhere that the cells in a honeycomb are circles squeezed by the pressure of the adjacent cells into the hexagonal shape which admits of contiguity. If they continued circles, there would be space and material lost, and no complete continuity. So, in like manner, you cannot keep five men together without some mutual limitations which are shaped into a law. Now, as long as a man keeps inside it he does not feel its pressure. A great many of us, for instance, who are in the main law-abiding people, do not ever remember that there is such a thing as restrictions upon our licence, or the obligation to perform certain duties; for we never think either of taking the licence or of shirking the duties. The yoke that is accepted ceases to press. Once let a man step outside, and what then? Why, then, he is an outlaw; and the rough side of the fence is turned outwards, and all possible terrors, which people within the boundary have nothing to do with, gather themselves together and frown down upon him. I need not remind you of how this same thesis—that we have to choose between the yoke of law and the iron yoke of lawlessness—is illustrated in the story of almost all violent revolutions. They run the same course. First the rising up of a nation against intolerable oppression, then revolution devours its own children, and the scum rises to the top of the boiling pot. Then comes, in the language of the picturesque

historian of the French Revolution, the type of them all—then comes at the end “the whiff of grapeshot” and the despot. First the government of a mob, and then the tyranny of an emperor comes to the people that shake off the yoke of reasonable law. II. WE HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN THE YOKE OF VIRTUE AND THE IRON YOKE OF VICE. We are under a far more spiritual and searching law than that written in any statute-book, or administered by any Court. Every man carries within his own heart two things, and two persons; the court, the tribunal, the culprit, and the judge. And here, too, if law be not obeyed, the result is not liberty, but the slavery of lawlessness. A great philosopher once said that the two sublimest things in the universe were the moral law and the starry heavens. And that law “I ought” bends over us like the starry heavens with which he associated it. No man can escape from the pressure of duty, and on every man is laid, by his very make, the twofold obligation, first to look upwards and catch the behests of that solemn law of duty, and then to turn his eyes and his strength inwards and coerce or spur, as the case may be, the powers of his nature, and rule the kingdom within himself. Now, as long as a man lets the ruling parts of his nature guide the lower faculties, he feels comparatively no pressure from the yoke. But if he once allows beggars to ride on horseback whilst princes walk—sense and appetite and desire, and more or less refined forms of inclination to take the place which belongs only to conscience interpreting duty—then he has exchanged the easy yoke for one that is heavy indeed. What does a man do when, instead of loyally accepting the conditions of his nature, and bowing himself to serve the all-embracing law of duty, he sets up inclination of any sort in its place? What does he do? I will tell you. He unships the helm; he pitches compass and sextant overboard; he fires up the furnaces, and screws down the safety-valve, and says, “Go ahead!” And what will be the end of that, think you? Either an explosion or a crash upon a reef! and you may take your choice of which is the better kind of death—to be blown up or to go down. III. WE HAVE THE CHOICE BETWEEN THE YOKE OF CHRIST AND THE IRON YOKE OF GODLESSNESS. If you do not take Christ for your Teacher you are handed over either to the uncertainty of your own doubts or to pinning your faith to some man and enrolling yourself as a disciple who is prepared to swallow down whole whatsoever the rabbi may say, giving to him what you will not give to Jesus; or else you will sink back into utter indolence and carelessness about the whole matter; or else you will go and put your belief and your soul into the hands of a priest; or shut your eyes and open your mouth and take whatever tradition may choose to send you. The one refuge from all these, as I believe, is to go to Him and learn of Him, and take His yoke upon your shoulders. But, let me say further, it is better to obey Christ’s commandments than to set ourselves against them. For if we will take His will for our law, and meekly assume the yoke of loyal and loving obedience to Him, the door into an earthly paradise is thrown open to us. His yoke is easy, not because its prescriptions and provisions lower the standard of righteousness and morality, but because love becomes the motive, and it is always blessed to do that which the Beloved desires. When “I will” and “I ought” cover exactly the same ground, then there is no kind of pressure from the yoke. Christ’s yoke is easy because, too, He gives the power to obey His commandments. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The two yokes.*—I. MEN MUST WEAR SOME YOKE. In every stage of life—childhood, youth, manhood; and in every station of life—servants, masters, &c. 1. God has made and sustains us, and asks that we submit to His will. 2. With our passions and propensities, if we break the yoke it is meet we should wear, and do not serve God, we at once bend our necks to another yoke and serve slavishly our own selves. II. CHRIST’S YOKE IS AN EASY ONE TO WEAR. 1. The yoke of Christ is a right one. Serve Jesus Christ, and it is found that the Christian law is perfection itself. 2. The yoke of Christ is framed in our interest. To believe in Christ is the highest wisdom; to repent of sin is the most delightful necessity; to follow after holiness is the most blissful pursuit; to become a servant of Christ is to be made a king and priest unto God. 3. Christ’s yoke is not exacting. He, in His grace, always gives us of His bounty when He asks of us our duty. 4. It is an easy yoke. Never did a man wear it but he always loved to wear it. 5. The bright example of Christ makes the yoke pleasant to bear. He Himself has carried the very yoke we bear, and we have blessed fellowship with Him in this. 6. All who have borne Christ’s yoke have had grace given equal to the weight of the burden. Wolsey regretted that he had not “served God with half the zeal he had served his king,” but none

has ever bewailed the zeal with which he followed Christ! 7. Christians who have borne this yoke always desire to get their children into it. Often men say, "I do not want my sons to follow my trade, it is wearying, its pay is small," &c. III. THOSE WHO REFUSE CHRIST'S EASY YOKE WILL HAVE TO WEAR A WORSE ONE. 1. Turning from the right road, from the cry of rectitude, because it threatens shame or loss, will entail vaster after-losses. 2. Backsliders, by putting off the yoke of Christianity, have not improved their condition. 3. They who refuse the Bible and follow tradition. Do these perverts of the true Christian religion get an easier yoke? No; there are penances and mortifications, &c. 4. The self-righteous who attempt to work their own way to heaven. Self-righteousness is an iron yoke indeed. 5. Unbelievers, who will not believe the simple revelation of God, presently find themselves committed to systematic misbeliefs, which distract reason, oppress the heart, and trammel the conscience. 6. Lovers of pleasure. Pleasure often means lust, and gaiety means crime; and self-indulgence brings beggary and degradation. In the last tremendous day of Christ's coming to judgment, the Christian's yoke will be as a chain of gold about his neck; but sin, pleasure, will be as an iron yoke, a burden of enslaving woe. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 16. **This year thou shalt die.**—*Thoughts on death.*—1. Let men live ever so many years, some one year will be the year of their death. 2. Every year is a year of death to many; there never was a year since the abbreviation of human life, since the extensive propagation and dispersion of mankind over all countries on the face of the earth, which has not been a year of death to tens of thousands. 3. Last year was a year of death to very many. 4. This year, very probably, will be a year of death to some of us. This or the other tree may be cut down; this or the other branch may be lopped off, and fall to the ground. Let us see then that we be ready, that if cut down, it may be in mercy, not in wrath; that if plucked up by the root and transplanted, it may be to be transplanted in a far better soil, where the air is more genial, where the fruits are always ripe. 5. No one of us knows but God may be saying to him or her, "This year thou shalt die." Futurity is wisely hid from man; we know not the year or day of our death; we need therefore constantly to watch. 6. It may be in mercy or in wrath that God is saying to this or the other one, "This year thou shalt die." It was in wrath that this was said to Hananiah. 7. The year of one's death is a most eventful year to him. This dissolves our connection with the present world; it issues us into the world of spirits. If we are the Lord's people, it associates us with God, Christ, angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect in the state of glory and blessedness. 8. There is no outliving the appointed year of one's death. No distinction of rank, no worldly pre-eminence, no degree of riches, influence, or power, no plea of necessity, no supposed usefulness in civil or sacred society, can prevent death. 9. The year of one's death may come very unexpectedly. (Anon.) *Solemn thoughts.*—I. THIS SENTENCE IS DOUBTLESS EXPRESSIVE OF THE DECISION OF GOD CONCERNING MANY THIS YEAR. 1. The page of history affords no record of a single year in which death desisted from his work of destruction. 2. The last year of many is now commended. 3. Various are the means by which God's design will be executed. II. NO INDIVIDUAL CAN BE CERTAIN THAT THIS DOES NOT EXPRESS GOD'S DECISION CONCERNING HIMSELF. 1. Utterly impossible for us to know who are, or are not, included in God's appointments. 2. The circumstances of some render it most probable that this year will be their last. 3. Doubtless those who think least of death, and confidently reckon on future years, will find this sentence fulfilled. III. IT IS THE DUTY AND INTEREST OF ALL TO USE WISELY THE GRACIOUS HOURS THEY ENJOY. 1. What is it to die? To pass from this state of being into the immediate presence of our Maker and Judge. 2. Am I prepared to die? 3. Begin the year with earnest preparation. (J. Bunten.) *A sermon on the New Year.*—It is highly probable, that if some prophet, like Jeremiah, should open to us the book of the Divine decrees, one or other of us would there see our sentence, and the time of its execution fixed. "Thus saith the Lord, This year thou shalt die." There some of us would find it written, "This year thou shalt enjoy a series of prosperity, to try if the goodness of God will lead thee to repentance." Others might read this melancholy line, "This year shall be to thee a series of afflictions: this year thou shalt lose thy dearest earthly support and comfort; this year thou shalt pine away with sickness, or agonise with torturing pain, to try if the kind severities of a Father's rod will reduce thee to thy duty." Others, I hope, would read the gracious decree, "This

year, thy stubborn spirit, after long resistance, shall be sweetly constrained to bow to the despised Gospel of Christ. This year shalt thou be born a child of God, and an heir of happiness, which the revolution of years shall never, never, terminate." Others perhaps would read this tremendous doom, "This year My Spirit so long resisted, shall cease to strive with thee; this year I will give thee up to thine own heart's lusts, and swear in My wrath thou shalt not enter into My rest." Others would probably find the doom of the false prophet Hananiah pronounced against them: "Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die." I. THIS YEAR YOU MAY DIE. 1. Your life is the greatest uncertainty in the world. 2. Thousands have died since the last New Year's Day; and this year will be of the same kind with the last; the duration of mortals; a time to die. 3. Thousands of others will die: it is certain they will, and why may not you? 4. Though you are young; for the regions of the dead have been crowded with persons of your age; and no age is the least security against the stroke of death. 5. Though you are now in health and your constitution seems to promise a long life; for thousands of such will be hurried into the eternal world this year, as they have been in years past. 6. Though you are full of business, though you have projected many schemes, which it may be the work of years to execute, and which afford you many bright and flattering prospects. 7. Though you have not yet finished your education, nor fixed in life, but are preparing to appear in the world, and perhaps elated with the prospect of the figure you will make in it. 8. Though you are not prepared for it. 9. Though you deliberately delay your preparation, and put it off to some future time. 10. Though you are unwilling to admit the thought. Death does not slacken his pace towards you, because you hate him, and are afraid of his approach. 11. Though you may strongly hope the contrary, and flatter yourself with the expectation of a length of years. II. WHAT IF YOU SHOULD? If you should die this year, then all your doubts, all the anxieties of blended hopes and fears about your state and character will terminate for ever in full conviction. If you are impenitent sinners, all the artifices of self-flattery will be able to make you hope better things no longer; but the dreadful discovery will flash upon you with the resistless blaze of intuitive evidence. You will see, you will feel yourselves such. This year you may die: and should you die this year, you will be for ever cut off from all the pleasures of life. Then an everlasting farewell to all the mirth, the tempting amusements and vain delights of youth. Farewell to all the pleasures you derive from the senses, and all the gratifications of appetite. Then farewell to all the pompous but empty pleasures of riches and honours. The pleasures both of enjoyment and expectation from this quarter will fail for ever. But this is not all. If you should die this year, you will have no pleasures, no enjoyments to substitute for those you will lose. Your capacity and eager thirst for happiness will continue, nay, will grow more strong and violent in that improved adult state of your nature. And yet you will have no good, real or imaginary, to satisfy it; and consequently the capacity of happiness will become a capacity of misery; and the privation of pleasure will be positive pain. If you die this year, you will not only be cut off from all the flattering prospects of this life, but from all hope entirely, and for ever. If you die in your sins, you will be fixed in an unchangeable state of misery; a state that will admit of no expectation but that of uniform, or rather ever-growing misery; a state that excludes all hopes of making a figure, except as the monuments of the vindictive justice of God, and the deadly effects of sin. III. IS IT POSSIBLE TO ESCAPE THIS IMPENDING DANGER? 1. Your case is not yet desperate, unless you choose to make it so; that is, unless you choose to persist in carelessness and impenitence, as you have hitherto done. 2. You all know that prayer, reading, and hearing the Word of God, meditation upon Divine things, free conference with such as have been taught by experience to direct you in this difficult work; you all know, I say, that these are the means instituted for your conversion: and if you had right views of things, and a just temper towards them, you would hardly need instruction or the least persuasion to make use of them. (S. Davies, D.D.)

CHAPTER XXIX.

VER. 1. Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent.—*Messages to exiles.*—I. THE VERY FACT THAT A MESSAGE WAS SENT TO THEM UNDER AN EXPRESS DIVINE APPOINTMENT WAS CONSOLATORY. Wherever God's children are scattered, the written Word is to them a source of permanent encouragement. In the severest ways of justice God does not forget His own children, but has in reserve ample consolations for them, when they lie under the common judgment. II. THE PARTICULAR PROVIDENCE OF GOD, APPEARING ON THEIR BEHALF UNDER ALL THEIR CALAMITIES, WAS A SOURCE OF CONSOLATION. 1. He is the Lord of hosts, of all the armies above and below, and yet is the God of Israel; and though He permits their captivity, He does not break His relation to them—their covenant-God still, though under a cloud. 2. He assumes the active agency in their dispersion. "I have caused them to be carried away." Certainly it must be a great sin which induces a loving father to cast his child out of doors. But sin is a great scatterer, and is always followed by a driving away and a casting out. Yet the fact of God's being the agent in their dispersion is referred to as a ground of consolation; since it reconciles us to our troubles to see the hand of God in them, and to trace an all-gracious and merciful design in them. III. THE PROMISE OF THE STABILITY AND SECURITY OF THEIR SOCIAL AND DOMESTIC INTERESTS WAS GIVEN. IV. THE PROSPECT OF A CERTAIN AND FAVOURABLE ISSUE TO THEIR TRIALS (ver. 11). (*S. Thodey.*)

Ver. 7. Seek the peace of the city.—*The best Christians the best citizens.*—1. They know that the prosperity of the whole is their own prosperity. They do not, therefore, selfishly seek their own advantage. 2. They actually labour with all diligence for the furtherance of the common good. 3. They employ for this end the power of Christian prayer. (*Naegelsbach.*) *The duties of Christians to their country.*—I. WHAT ARE THE THINGS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY TO THE SECURITY AND PROSPERITY, THE TRUE GLORY AND HAPPINESS, OF OUR COUNTRY? 1. The true honour of a nation, like that of the individual, lies in character. 2. The security and prosperity of our nation are inseparably associated with the advancement of religion among the people. II. WHAT ARE THE BEST MEANS FOR SECURING THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE ESSENTIAL TO OUR COUNTRY'S HIGHEST WELFARE? 1. General diffusion of education. "Education is a better safeguard of liberty than a standing army." 2. Equally essential that the people be virtuous. Knowledge is power, but unsanctified power is power for evil. 3. The general distribution of the Bible—the great instrument for enlightening the conscience and purifying the heart. 4. Preaching the Gospel. Our nature is a wreck, a chaos, which the Cross of Christ alone can adjust. 5. Prayer (2 Chron. vii. 13, 14; Psal. cvi. 23; Exod. xxxii. 10). III. WHAT ARGUMENTS MAY ENFORCE THE DUTIES OF PERSONAL AND COMBINED ACTIVITY IN SEEKING THE HIGHEST GOOD OF OUR LAND? 1. Because our own individual good is intimately connected with its general happiness and prosperity. "For in the peace thereof ye shall have peace." 2. We shall thereby recommend the religion we profess. 3. The work of supplying our land with the preached Gospel, and with religious institutions, is the most important work to which Christians can devote their energies. (*Samuel Baker, D.D.*) *The civil obligations of Christian people.*—When a man becomes a Christian does he cease to be a member of civil society? Allowing that he be not the owner of the ship, but only a passenger in it, has he nothing to awaken his concern in the voyage? If he be only a traveller towards a better country, is he to be told that because he is at an inn which he is soon to leave, it should not excite any emotion in him, whether it be invaded by robbers, or consumed by flames before the morning? "In the peace thereof ye shall have peace." Is not religion variously affected by public transactions? Can a Christian, for instance, be indifferent to the cause of freedom, even on a pious principle? Does not civil liberty necessarily include religious, and is it not necessary to the spreading of the Gospel? (*W. Jay.*)

VERS. 8-13. I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.—*The thoughts of God to His people, peace and not evil.*—These words were addressed to the Jews, when they were captives in Babylon. It is very delightful when we have kind

thoughts of our fellow-men ; for suspicion is always a great misery. But it is especially delightful to have kind thoughts of God, when we possess enlarged and noble conceptions of His excellency and glory. I. THE GROUND AND REASON OF OUR SUSPICION RESPECTING GOD, THAT HE HAS UNKIND INTENTIONS OR EVIL THOUGHTS TOWARDS US. The chief, if not the only cause, is sin. Wicked men know that the wages of sin is death ; that sin must be cancelled, or God is against them, and they are ruined. But what is the evil which men anticipate from God, and in respect to which they entertain suspicions ? There is the evil of affliction. This is the sense in which the text is to be taken. It relates to temporal evil, the evil of calamity, losses, changes, and disasters. And why should men fear or anticipate evil in this form ? We are not to forebode anything. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. Take no thought for the morrow. We hear often of pleasures disappointed, and of hopes unrealised. Might we not speak of evils anticipated which never come ? Then there is an ulterior evil ; that which is far off, or apparently more remote. Are you afraid of death, or of dying ? Are you afraid, when Christ has said, He that believeth in Me shall never die ; I am the resurrection and the life ; I will raise you up at the last day ? Are you afraid of eternity, of which we hear so much, and know so little ? I ask, is the bird afraid, when the shell opens, and he begins to feel the soft sweet plumage grow ? Is the newborn child afraid, when it comes into this world of sin and sorrow ? And shall you be afraid to awake and emerge, anywhere in God's great empire, anywhere or at any time, in His unbounded and infinite dominion ? Are we afraid of the love of God ? God is love. Christ is love. God invites you and me in love. He says, Come, and I will bless you. Come, and I will pour My Spirit upon you. Come, and I will make you happy, and call you sons and daughters. Come, and I will save you, and I will soon put you in possession of heaven. II. THE MANNER IN WHICH IT PLEASES GOD TO CONTRADICT THESE SUSPICIONS, AND TO DENY THAT THERE IS ANY TRUTH IN THEM. Suppose you are a wicked man : what does God say ? Forsake your evil ways. I will multiply to pardon. Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die ? I desire not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn and live. God thinks no evil : if so, could He not crush and extinguish thee, O man, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye ? His thoughts towards thee are thoughts of peace, and not of evil. Then to the backsliders He says, Return, O backsliding children ; I will receive you graciously, and love you freely. Are you penitent ? He will give you beauty for ashes ; the oil of joy for mourning ; the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. You say that you are sinful, and not worthy of being called a child. What does God say ? Bring the best robe. Take off the filthy garments. Put the fair mitre on his head. O God of peace ! how peaceful, how pacific Thou art ! You may have had changes. You may have passed through storms ; but the darker the cloud, the brighter is the rainbow of promise that is stretched across it. And God intends to give His people everlasting peace. III. THE EXPECTED END. What is it ? To the Jews in Babylon, it was restoration to the temple and the altar, to the priests, and to the sacrifices ; and by the Jews this "end" was realised. To the Hebrews of later times, the expected end is recovery to greater blessings. They are forsaken for a small moment ; but with great mercy they will be gathered in again. The expected end, both to Jews and Gentiles, is the millennial light, repose, and happiness. The expected end is the end of all sin. It is to endure no more conflicts, to undergo no more labours ; to be wise by intuition : to possess boundless knowledge, and perfect purity, derived immediately from Him who is the source and fountain of all purity and all perfection. They who go in, shall never go out again. (*J. Stratten.*) *God's thoughts of peace, and our expected end* :—I. THE LORD'S THOUGHTS TOWARDS HIS PEOPLE. 1. It is noteworthy that He does think of them, and towards them. Observe that this Scripture saith not, "I know the thoughts that I have thought toward you." It would be possible for you to have thought out a plan of kindness towards a friend, and you might have so arranged it that it would henceforth be a natural fountain of good to him without your thinking any more about it ; but that is not after the method of God. His eye and His hand are towards His people continually. It is true He did so think of us that He has arranged everything about us, and provided for every need, and against every danger ; but yet He has not ceased to think of us. His infinite mind, whose thoughts are as high above our thoughts as the heavens are above the earth, continues to exercise itself about us. "The Lord hath been mindful of us," and He is still mindful of us. The Lord not only thinks of you,

but towards you. His thoughts are all drifting your way. This is the way the south wind of His thoughts of peace is moving: it is towards you. A person may happen to do you a good turn; but if you are sure that he did it by accident, or with no more thought than that wherewith a passing stranger throws a penny to a beggar, you are not impressed with gratitude. But when the action of your friend is the result of earnest deliberation, and you see that he acts in the tenderest regard to your welfare, you are far more thankful: traces of anxiety to do you good are very pleasant. Have I not heard persons say, "It was so kind and so thoughtful of him"? Do you not notice that men value kindly thought, and set great store by tender consideration? Remember, then, that there is never a thoughtless action on the part of God. His mind goes with His hand: His heart is in His acts. 2. The thoughts of God are only perfectly known to Himself. It would be a mere truism for God to say, "I know the thoughts that I think toward you." Even a man usually knows his own thoughts; but the meaning is this: when you do not know the thoughts that I have towards you, yet I know them. "Truly the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." God alone understands Himself and His thoughts. We stand by a powerful machine, and we see the wheels moving this way and that, but we do not understand its working. What does it matter? He who made the engine and controls it, perfectly understands it, and this is practically the main concern; for it does not matter whether we understand the engine or not, it will work its purpose if he who has the control of it is at home with all its bands and wheels. Despite our ignorance, nothing can go wrong while the Lord in infinite knowledge ruleth over all. The child playing on the deck does not understand the tremendous engine whose beat is the throbbing heart of the stately Atlantic liner, and yet all is safe; for the engineer, the captain and the pilot are in their places, and well know what is being done. Let not the child trouble itself about things too great for it. Leave you the discovery of doubtful causes to Him whose understanding is infinite; and as for yourself, be you still, and know that Jehovah is God. 3. The Lord would have us know that His thoughts toward us are settled and definite. Sometimes a man may hardly know his own thoughts, because he has scarcely made up his mind. The case is far otherwise with the only wise God. The Lord is not a man that He should need to hesitate; His infinite mind is made up, and He knows His thoughts. With the Lord there is neither question nor debate. "He is in one mind, and none can turn Him." His purpose is settled, and He adheres to it. He is resolved to reward them that diligently seek Him, and to honour those that trust in Him. 4. God's thoughts toward His people are always thoughts of peace. He is at peace with them through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. He delights in them; He seeks their peace, He creates their peace, He sustains their peace, and thus all His thoughts toward them are peace. Note well the negative, which is expressly inserted. It might have appeared enough to say, "My thoughts are thoughts of peace." Yes, it would be quite sufficient when all things are bright with us; but those words, "and not of evil," are admirably adapted to keep off the goblins of the night, the vampires of suspicion which fly in the darkness. 5. The Lord's thoughts are all working towards "an expected end," or, as the R.V. has it, "to give you hope in your latter end." Some read it, "a future and a hope." God is working with a motive. All things are working together for one object: the good of those who love God. We see only the beginning; God seeth the end from the beginning. He regardeth not only the tearing up of the soil with the plough, but the clothing of that soil with the golden harvest. He sees the after consequences of affliction, and He accounts those painful incidents to be blessed which lead up to so much of happiness. Let us comfort ourselves with this. II. THE PROPER ATTITUDE OF GOD'S PEOPLE TOWARDS THEIR LORD. 1. You will all agree with me when I say that our attitude should be that of submission. If God, in all that He does towards us, is acting with an object, and that object a loving one, then let Him do what seemeth Him good. 2. Next, let our position be one of great hopefulness, seeing the end of God, in all He does, is to give us "a future and a hope." We are not driven into growing darkness, but led into increasing light. There is always something to be hoped for in the Christian's life. 3. Our relation to God should, next, be one of continual expectancy, especially expectancy of the fulfilment of His promises. "I will perform My good Word toward you." His promises are good words: good indeed, and sweetly refreshing. When your hearts are faint, then is the promise emphatically good. Expect the Lord to be as good as His good Word. 4. Again, our position

towards God should be one of happy hope as to blessed ends being answered even now. Affliction is the seal of the Lord's election. I remember a story of Mr. Mack, who was a Baptist minister in Northamptonshire. In his youth he was a soldier, and calling on Robert Hall, when his regiment marched through Leicester, that great man became interested in him, and procured his release from the ranks. When he went to preach in Glasgow, he sought out his aged mother, whom he had not seen for many years. He knew his mother the moment he saw her; but the old lady did not recognise her son. It so happened that when he was a child, his mother had accidentally wounded his wrist with a knife. To comfort him she cried, "Never mind, my bonnie bairn, your mither will ken you by that when ye are a man." When Mack's mother would not believe that a grave, fine-looking minister could be her own child, he turned up his sleeve and cried, "Mither, mither, dinna ye ken that?" In a moment they were in each other's arms. Ah, the Lord knows the spot of His children. He acknowledges them by the mark of correction. What God is doing to us in the way of trouble and trial is but His acknowledgment of us as true heirs, and the marks of His rod shall be our proof that we are not bastards, but true sons. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *God's thoughts* :—

I. GOD THINKS OF HIS PEOPLE. That seems a very simple thing to say, does it not? It is as sublime as it is simple! God thinks of His people. Though so occupied—I had almost said, "though so busy,"—God finds time and opportunity to give thought to His children. He numbers the hairs of our head; He knows every inch of our path; our sorrows and our joys are all calculated and catalogued by Him. He knows our uprising and our downsitteing, our going out and our coming in. What is there of which He has not perfect cognisance? What is there in which He is not interested? Oh, wonder of wonders, that this busy God of ours knows us, loves us, cares for us, enters into the petty details of our fleeting life, and counts no grief too slight for us to take to Him in prayer. The current of His thoughts sets our way. Like a great warm gulf-stream, the loving thoughts of God lave the shores of every believing soul, and bring life and verdure to the full, by means of their helpful influences.

1. This is the more wonderful, when we remember how sinful we are. He sees and knows all about you, and you He loveth still.

2. I learn hence, also, that God thinks very definitely and deliberately about His people.

3. Best of all is it He thinks so tenderly about us. "Thoughts of peace." It is He who has made peace possible 'twixt God and man, for He longs to have us reconciled to Him. It is Jesus who has made peace by the death of His Cross. It is the Holy Ghost who speaks peace to troubled hearts and consciences. It is His kind providence that keeps us in perfect peace, our minds being stayed on Him.

II. GOD'S THOUGHTS CONCERNING HIS PEOPLE ARE OFTEN OF A PRIVATE NATURE. The emphasis of this verse should come upon the personal pronoun. "I know the thoughts that I think towards you." They are hidden from you. "My way," says God, "is not yet discovered. My purposes remain unrevealed." None can know perfectly the mind and will of God. How can we reach to such an awful height? How can we plunge into such abysmal depths?

1. Let the fact that God knows His thoughts satisfy our curiosity. It is childish in the extreme to lift the plant that has been lately put into the ground, and it will fail to grow if treated thus. It is childish—is it not?—to break the drum-head, in order to discover whence the music comes. But we are not less childish who want to know what God has not revealed, and who are not content to do His bidding without saying, "But why?" The why and the wherefore may not concern us. But the duty does concern us. Let us hasten in the way of His commandment.

2. This, also, should calm our restlessness. Let the spirit of patience possess you. Wait, wait, wait, till God sees fit to bless. 3. Meanwhile, let there be no distrust. It is fear that misconstrues the purposes of God. It is unbelief that misinterprets the words and ways of Jehovah. Even when things appear to be against us, let us trust and not be afraid.

III. WHEN GOD THINKS, HE THINKS TO PURPOSE. "To give you an expected end." God always works to an end, and with a motive. Here He speaks about the people's dreams. They were mere dreams—"the baseless fabric of a vision." But God has no dreams. His thoughts are honest, earnest, fruitful, resultful. Moreover, His works ever agree with the thoughts from which they spring. God does not leave His people to haphazard, nor does He do anything by halves. Trust Him in all His works and ways, and you will see that "as for God, His way is perfect." When He sets Himself to make a world, He rests not till He has made it perfectly, and can pronounce it good. When He sets Himself to destroy sinful men, He makes a clean sweep of them, whether

it be with flood or flame. And when He comes from heaven to redeem a sinful race of men, His tears do not stop, nor does His blood cease flowing, till He can cry, "It is finished." (*Thomas Spurgeon.*) *God's thoughts* :—God's thoughts are like God,—they are wonderful as Himself, and worthy of Himself. His ways are the results of His thoughts, and their revelation to us. Creation, in all its vastness and completeness, is the thought of God,—a thought that embraced not only the great outlines, but all the details of the work of His Word,—a thought that did not require to be supplemented or enlarged. Providence, in its heights and depths, its lengths and breadths, is His thought,—a thought that takes in the entire history of our race, and is ever at work to bring about one great purpose, one glorious design. Redemption, in all its surpassing glory, is His thought,—a thought of which the whole Gospel is the revelation. **I. GOD'S THOUGHTS MUST BE REVEALED.** They are known only to His Spirit, "for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." These deep things are known to us, for God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit. We are permitted to know the thoughts of God that have had reference to ourselves; we are assisted in our conceptions of these thoughts, and it is wonderful to be told that they come into our minds, that they dwell in our hearts, and that we have communion with the thoughts of God. God is ever at work in the world, not only on its great stage, but on the narrow platform of our own dwellings; and we are permitted, in our brief lives, to see the impressions that are thrown off from the mind of God, the thoughts of God, in the dispensations of His providence. "Many, O Lord my God, are Thy wonderful works, and Thy thoughts which are to us-ward." God has spoken to man. He spake unto the fathers by the prophets, but He hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son. All that God has to say cannot be spoken; all that He has to reveal cannot be told us in words. We must have the death as well as the life of Jesus. **II. GOD'S THOUGHTS ARE REVEALED, AND THEY ARE THOUGHTS CONCERNING US.** However wonderful these thoughts, they might not concern us, they might not be about us; they might be about angels, and not about men,—about other worlds, and not this small province in God's empire. But these thoughts become to us of the greatest moment, when we are told that they are about us—that God thought of us long ago—that before the world began, the thoughts of God were concerning us. How is man magnified by this very fact! **III. WHAT IS THE CHARACTER OF THESE THOUGHTS CONCERNING US?** 1. Sometimes we think God's thoughts towards us are evil, because His ways are so full of mystery. We see the means to the end—we do not see the end. But the way to it is dark and sorrowful, and the events by which it is to be brought about, we baptise by the name of evil. 2. God's thoughts are eminently practical. They are thoughts to an end. God is "wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." God alone could originate the thoughts that fill His mind; He only can accomplish them. He does not merely think,—He speaks, He works, and fulfils His designs. **IV. GOD HAS THE MOST PERFECT ACQUAINTANCE WITH HIS OWN THOUGHTS, AND WITH THEIR CHARACTER.** 1. "I know the thoughts that I think toward you." The Infinite Mind knows no change. God's thoughts are the same to-day as yesterday; and hence His promises are like thoughts that have just been breathed in our world; and His gifts and calling are without repentance. 2. Let us acquaint ourselves with these thoughts. We have the record. We have the words of Him who spake as never man spake. Let us get these Divine thoughts into our minds, that our thoughts may be quickened and strengthened, that we may think the thoughts of God, that we may have communion with the mind of God. **V. IF GOD HAS PLACED HIS THOUGHTS BEFORE OUR MINDS, LET US PLACE OUR THOUGHTS BEFORE GOD.** Let us not only think about Him, but to Him. Let us thus have fellowship with Him. **VI. LET US SO ACT AND LIVE, AS TO CARRY OUT AND EXEMPLIFY GOD'S THOUGHTS.** "The grace of God has appeared to us, teaching us that we should deny ungodliness." Let us profit by its teaching; let us act out its teaching by living Godlike. (*H. J. Revis.*) **To give you an expected end.—God's future and hope for human race:—** **I. THE HUMAN RACE IS UNDER DIVINE TRAINING FOR A BLESSED AND GLORIOUS FUTURE.** God cannot create a single creature to hate and to leave in sin and misery, and if He could, how could He be God? **II. LET US WITH REVERENCE AND HUMILITY TRY TO LEARN SOMETHING OF GOD'S GREAT THOUGHTS RESPECTING THE FUTURE OF FALLEN MEN.** Try to think of the future of God's lost children in the light of what He has done for them. If we consider it in the light of the Incarnation of the Son, His heavenly teaching, His mighty works, and His

voluntary sufferings, we shall never despair. Think further of what God is doing through His Spirit; for He is through His Spirit enlightening men's minds, leading them to the truth, convincing them of sin, and purifying the nature and perfecting the character of believers. If earthly fathers are so anxious for making a worthy and honourable future for their children, is it likely that the Divine Father will be heedless about the future of His children? No; that cannot be. In all the sufferings, trials, and discipline of the present, He has their future perfection, happiness, and glory in view. 1. Holiness of nature. 2. Perfection of character. 3. Perfection of service. 4. Perfection of joy. (*Z. Mather.*) **Ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart. — Divine purposes fulfilled in answer to prayer:—**I. A CERTAIN DANGER DECLARED (vers. 8, 9). We have here the same caution which the Redeemer subsequently gave, to "beware of false prophets." In all ages have they appeared, and most disastrous have been the effects produced by their teaching (*Ezek. xiii. 10-14*). II. A BLESSED DELIVERANCE PROMISED. 1. The grounds on which it rested. "For thus saith the Lord." 2. The time of their return is expressly declared (ver. 10). God's time is always the best. 3. In their restoration the Divine faithfulness would be strikingly manifested. "I will visit you," &c. 4. The procuring cause of their deliverance was the boundless compassion of Jehovah (ver. 11). III. AN IMPORTANT DUTY ENJOINED. Prayer. 1. It is a duty Divinely ordained. 2. It is a duty to the observance of which the greatest encouragement is afforded. "I will hearken unto you." 3. This duty, in order to be successful, must not be attended to in a formal and lifeless manner. (*Anon.*) **Captivities and how to improve them:—**I. WE MAY DESCRIBE EVERY REAL AFFLICTION WHICH COMES UPON THE CHRISTIAN AS A CAPTIVITY. To be in a condition which we never should have voluntarily preferred, or to be held back, by the power of something which we cannot control, from that which we eagerly desire to do,—is not that the very thing in an experience which makes it a trial? Take bodily illness, for example, and when you get at the root of the discomfort of it, you find it in the union of these two things: you are where you do not want to be, and where you would never have thought of putting yourself, and you are held there, whether you will or not, by the irresistible might of your own weakness. The same thing comes out in every sort of affliction. You are, let me suppose, in business perplexities. Well, that is not of your own choosing. If you could have accomplished it, you would have been in quite different circumstances. But, in spite of you, things have gone crooked. You have been carried from the Jerusalem of comfort to the Babylon of perplexity, by no effort of yours, nay, perhaps, against the utmost resistance on your part, and now you can do nothing. So sometimes, also, our providential duties are a kind of affliction to us. We had no choice in determining whether we would assume them. They came to us, unbidden, at least, if not undesired, and they have chained us to themselves, so that when we are asked to take part in some effort for the benefit of others we are compelled to say "No." II. EVERY CAPTIVITY OF WHICH THE CHRISTIAN IS THE VICTIM WILL HAVE AN END. "Time and the hour run through the roughest day." "Be the day weary, or be the day long, at last it ringeth to evensong." It is but a little while, at the longest, and we shall be where "sorrow and sighing shall for ever flee away." This state of limitation, this conflict between our aspirations and our abilities, is not to last for ever. Not for ever shall we be in bondage to the weakness of the body, hampered by its liability to disease, and hindered by its proneness to fatigue. Not always shall we be at the mercy of the unscrupulous and dishonest. Not continually shall we be held down by the encumbrances that overweight us here on earth. For in the fatherland above we shall work without weariness, and serve God without imperfection. But, while there is much in this view of the case to sustain us, we must not lose sight of the moral end which God has in view in sending us into our captivity. Ah! how many of our idolatries He has rebuked and rectified by our captivities! We had been worshipping our reputation, and lo! an illness came which laid us aside, and our names were by and by forgotten, as new men came to the front; and then, learning the folly of our false ambition, we turned from the idolatry of self to the homage of Jehovah. Or, we had made an idol of our business; but now it is in ruins, and as we see the perishableness of earthly things, we turn to Him who is unchanging and eternal. Or, we had made a god of our dwelling, and by some reverse of fortune it is swept away from us, just that we might learn the meaning of that old song of Moses (*Psa. xc. 1*). How many portions of His Word, also, have been explained to us by

our trials! There is no commentator of the Scriptures half so valuable as a captivity. It unfolds new beauties where all had appeared to be beautiful before; and where formerly there was what we thought a wilderness, it has revealed to us a fruitful field. III. IF WE WOULD HAVE SUCH RESULTS FROM OUR CAPTIVITY, THERE ARE CERTAIN IMPORTANT THINGS WHICH WE MUST CULTIVATE. 1. A willing acceptance of God's discipline, and patient submission to it. The impatient horse which will not quietly endure his halter only strangles himself in his stall. The high-mettled animal that is restive in the yoke only galls his shoulders; and every one will understand the difference between the restless stalling of which Sterno has written, breaking its wings against the bars of its cage, and crying, "I can't get out," "I can't get out," and the docile canary that sits upon its perch and sings as if he would outrival the lark soaring to heaven's gate, and so moves his mistress to open the door of his prison-house and give him the full range of the room. He who is constantly looking back and bemoaning that which he has lost, does only thereby unfit himself for improving in any way the discipline to which God has subjected him; whereas the man who brings his mind down to his lower lot, and deliberately examines how he can serve God best in that, is already on the way to happiness and to restoration. 2. Unswerving confidence in God. If we doubt Him we at once become the prey to despondency, impatience, and rebellion. Confidence in your physician is itself more than half the cure, and trust in God is absolutely essential if we would gain benefit from His discipline. Yet because a change in men's conduct toward us is usually the indication of a difference in their disposition toward us, we think that God has ceased to care for us when He puts us into trial or sends us into captivity. But it is not so. To-day the medical man gives his patient liberty to take anything he chooses; to-morrow he cuts off all indulgence, and uses severe and painful remedies; but does he care the less for him because he thus changes his treatment, or has his purpose regarding him undergone an alteration? Not at all. In both cases he is equally earnest to have his health restored. And it is quite similar with God in His dealings with His people. 3. Fervent prayer. No calamity can be to us an unmixed evil if we carry it in direct and fervent prayer to God, for even as one in taking shelter from the rain beneath a tree may find on its branches fruit which he looked not for, so we, in fleeing for refuge beneath the shadow of God's wing, will always find more in God than we had seen or known before. It is thus through our afflictions that God gives us fresh revelations of Himself; and the Jabbok ford, which we crossed to seek His help, leads to the Peniel, where, as the result of our wrestling, we "see God face to face," and our lives are preserved. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Finding God*:—To search after God is really to educate oneself. To know God requires that we should be educated in the Divine qualities. The knowledge of God is not something outside of us, and far removed from us. It is revealed in us, and by some quality that is within us. Now, to search after God has always been considered or spoken of as a work involving the expenditure of great zeal and intensity; and the question arises, Is it so difficult for men to know God? Fellowship and a knowledge of God are the food of the soul; they are the conditions of a true and large manhood; and are we pushed so far from Him by the intrinsic difficulties of knowledge that we cannot know Him? We surely can know God by the use of our ordinary senses so far as He is made manifest in the exterior world, as the Maker, as the Sustainer, as the Architect, and the Engineer; we behold what He is by what He has done; and yet, we have thus approached but a very little way toward Him. Can we, then, by sitting down to contemplation, can we by any such method as that of the laboratory, or that analysis which the philosopher employs, draw out a more perfect knowledge of God? Only in after stages, and only in a subsidiary sphere, can men gain knowledge by the internal philosophical method. It succeeds other methods, and methods of more importance. So the difficulty of searching after God is real; but it is not the kind of difficulty which men suspect. It is not that God is purposely hidden. It is because the overruling of our lower nature, the subjugation of pride, the restraint of vanity, the putting down of avarice, the overcoming of the fever of ambition, and the regulation of the passions—it is because these things are so difficult, that the strife and the seeking are made necessary by the required formation of a God-like nature in ourselves; for we shall see God only through so much of the impartation of the Divine nature as is given to us and received by us. The Divine qualities—the qualities of truth, justice, mercy, long-suffering, love, kindness, self-sacrifice, disinterested benevolence—these can be appreciated only by those

who have something of them in themselves ; and when we seek after God to know Him, we are seeking really to know ourselves, and to fashion ourselves. It is a work of self-education through which we come to a knowledge of the supreme Being ; and this does require searching. How, then, do men seek after God ? They have been told that the knowledge of God, that the presence of God in their souls, is quite necessary for their safety in death, and for their remission from hell in the life that is to come ; and out of the most selfish or the most superstitious feeling they often make a languid and feeble search after God purely for protective purposes—not from honour ; not from love ; not from conscious weakness to be imputed ; not from a sense of their inferiority and a desire of aggrandisement by things that make nobility in the soul ; not from any worthy purpose, but that they may have a barrier to keep off the avalanche of death. There are others who join with me in denouncing folly upon such, who are scarcely better, although they are frivolous in a higher mood. There are many who seek after God as poets seek after conceits. They love God as they love music ; they love Him as they love the chant of the singer, or the effusion of the smooth-rhymed poet ; and only thus do they seek after God. To them He is a vision ; He is a floating cloud ; He is a spring morning ; He is a thundering sea ; He is a landscape ; He is a poem ; but He is not Jehovah ; He is not Father ; He is not Governor, or Judge, or Rewarder. Well, there be others that seek after God, as a philosopher seeks after a proposition, disentangling intellectual conceptions, framing new ideas in some collected form into a speculative and philosophic God—a God of propositions ; a God of attributes ; a God of syllogisms ; a logical God ; a rhetorical God ; a demonstrative, conceptional God. Whatever may come through the moulds of the intellect they employ in building up a bloodless God, a soulless God, a God of abstractions ; and they think when they have hedged Him in with one and another and another distinction sharply drawn, and have clearly rounded out their conception, that they have sought after God, and that they have found Him—and God laughs. For who by such searching can find out God ; as if a man who never talked with you, who never walked with you, who never worked with you, who never lived with you, and who was never loved by you ; as if one that had no personal acquaintance with you could ever out of his own consciousness deduce a correct idea of what you are ! Searching for God with one's heart is the way to find Him out ; for God is discerned by the heart. That is the temple in the soul of God ; and only they that enter into the searching of God by the heart can come near to Him or know Him. All they who seek after God then, irresolutely, occasionally, with fluctuating zeal, for selfish ends, dreamily, imaginatively, poetically, or by speculation and the lines of a dry philosophy—all such come short. They never can reproduce God. Only they who have framed in themselves some conception of high moral qualities, and have learned out of their own experience to frame a notion of God for the sake of making that notion their governor, their schoolmaster—only they can reproduce God. Frame a conception of God as of a Father full of pitifulness, full of tenderness, full of gentleness, full of wrath, but wrath that protects ; full of severity, but the severity of a father for the cleansing of his son ; frame a conception of God as reigning not to destroy but to recover, not to beat down but to lift up, not to shut men in prisons but to open the prison-doors, not to weld shackles or to impose them, but to break them ; frame a conception of God which is eminent in characteristics of motherhood, and give to it the magnitude of infinity ; and then when these moral qualities are once established in thy sympathy and in thy thought, and magnified by the imagination, and lifted into the heavenly sphere, and thou mayest bow down before it, and say to it, "Thou God of reason, Thou God of compassion, Thou God of infinite love, Thou God whose thoughts rain bounty, Thou God who livest not for Thyself but for Thy creatures, Thee I behold ; to Thee I submit, because Thou art infinitely good beyond all conception. Thee I worship and Thee I obey." And then, having framed some such initial conception of God, be thou trained into the same likeness, and develop in thyself whatever is in harmony with this image of the Creator. You find portrayed in the Gospels the mind and will of God. That men may know Him personally, four lives are given of the Lord Jesus Christ, besides the interpretations and comments that are found in the letters and epistles. Study earnestly that slight yet wonderful sketch and portraiture of this superior Being. Keep it before your mind until you have a distinct conception of the personality of the Lord Jesus Christ. The critical and determinative question with you is this : Wilt thou have such an One to rule over you ? Are you willing to lift, in your

conception, into the heavenly places, such an idea of God as you derive from the Lord Jesus Christ? Are you willing to say, "Thy will, and not mine, be done"? Are you willing to take this oath and covenant of allegiance, never to be broken, "I dedicate my life to the fulfilment of Thy commands, and to the development in myself of Thy disposition"? If you are, you have found your God. The moment you have this conception of a loving Being, with a determinate moral character, who requires of you a corresponding moral character, and the moment there is in you a genuine volition and purpose to love and obey such an One, the work is begun, and you have been introduced to your Master. Now, after that, the very first step which you take in your attempt to act justly, you will be environed by the bands and hoops of society; by its imperfections; by the injustice which custom always imposes; and you will have a conflict with the prevailing tendencies by which you are surrounded. Your large and Christian conception of justice will stand in marked contrast with the contracted and worldly conception of justice which is prevalent; and you will become a reformer; and you will feel, "I must take up my cross; and if I follow Christ I must suffer." Yes, you must suffer if you would enjoy. Not that you are to suffer as if religion itself were a suffering, for religion itself is just the opposite; but you are coming out of a state of ignorance and bondage into a state of knowledge and freedom. You are going toward the right; and having once come to the right, it will be a blessing; for the right is a reward in over-measure. Your first impulse should be to act beneficently; and there is to be a power of beneficence in your soul. You should have a feeling that you are not your own. You that are strong should bear with the weak. You should carry one another's burdens. You should manifest towards your fellow-men the disposition of love. Working out, then, your conception of God little by little; gathering conceptions of the Divine Being from all that is good and high and noble in practical life, and bringing back to yourself as motives in your own soul corresponding qualities, that your nature in its measure may become like God, growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, you will find that your sense of the Divine Presence purifies itself, cleanses itself, augments itself, makes itself more and more powerful, until the time comes in which you can say, literally, "I walk with God. My God made the heavens and the earth. He is a God of force, and a God of tranquillity. My God is father and mother to my thought. He is all that is transcendent in patience and meekness and goodness; and not because He is inert; not because He is weak; for He will by no means clear the guilty. He upholds the right. He stands for the oppressed. He is a God who is determined that good shall prevail as against evil. But He works with a mother-heart, by tears, by groans, by death itself. He gives Himself for the poor, and the outcast, and the sinful, and the needy. He bore our sins in His own body; and by His stripes we are healed." (*H. W. Beecher.*) *Seekers directed and encouraged*:—I. TO THE UNCONVERTED. Our text has a word for you. You have lost your God: you are at a distance from Him; your sins have separated you from your Maker, and nothing will ever be really right—till you get back to your God. The prodigal said, "I will arise and go to my father," and some such spirit must be in you, or we cannot hope well of you. You must search after the Lord. You are allowed to search for Him, and what a privilege that is. When Adam sinned, he could not go back to Paradise, for with a flaming sword in his hand there stood the mailed cherub to keep the way that he might not touch the tree of life. But God, as far as the garden of His mercy is concerned, has moved that fiery sentinel, and Jesus Christ has set angels of love to welcome you at mercy's gate. You may come to God, for God has come to you. He has taken upon Himself your nature, and His name is Emmanuel, God with us. Search for Him, and you must find Him, for so stands His own Word, "Ye shall seek Me, and find Me." The text, however, demands that our searching after God should be done with all our heart. There are several ways of seeking God which must prove failures. One is to seek Him with no heart at all. This is done by those who take their book and read prayers, never thinking what they say; or who attend a dissenting place of worship, and hear another person pray, but never join in it. If any of you have fallen into a formal religion, and seek the Lord without your heart, your seeking is in vain. Some seek God with a false heart. Their piety is an affectation of feeling, and not deep soul-work; it is sentimentality, and not the graving of God's Spirit upon the heart. God grant us to be saved from a lie in the heart, for it is a deadly canker, fatal to all hope of finding the Lord. Some seek Him, too, with a double heart—a heart and a heart, as the Hebrew puts it. If one

oar pulls towards earth and the other towards heaven the boat of the soul will revolve in a circle of folly, but never reach the happy shore. Beware of a double heart. And some seek God with half a heart. They have a little concern, and are not altogether indifferent; they do think when they pray, or read, or sing, but the thought is not very intense. Superficial in all things, the seed is sown in stony ground, and soon it is withered away, because there is no depth of earth. The Lord save us from this! Now, ye that are seeking Christ, remember that if you would find Him you must neither seek Him without heart, nor with a false heart, nor with a double heart, nor with a half heart, but "Ye shall find Me," saith the Lord, "when ye shall search for Me with all your heart." What did Jesus say?—"The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Heaven's celestial bastions must be stormed by downright importunity. But why is it that when men search with all their heart they do find God? I will tell you. The only way in which we can find God is in Jesus Christ. There He meets with men, but nowhere else, and to get to Jesus Christ there is nothing on earth to be done but simply to believe in Him. The saving Word is near thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, and that is why when men seek the Lord with their whole hearts they find Him, for before they called the Lord was ready to answer. Jesus was always ready; but other wishes and other thoughts made the seeker unready. Sins were there, and lusts of the flesh, and all manner of hamper to hinder the man. When a man comes to seek God with all his heart, he lets those things go, and soon sees Jesus. Then, too, a man becomes teachable, for when a man is in earnest to escape from danger he is glad enough to be told by anybody. I charge you, then, you that seek the Lord, to be whole-hearted in it, for you cannot expect peace and joy in the Holy Ghost till all those straggling affections and wandering desires are tied up into one bundle, and your entire being is eager in the search for God in Christ Jesus. II. THE BACKSLIDER. Backsliders, you have left your Lord. Oh, you who once made a profession of religion, I cannot understand how you can dare to think of the judgment day, for you will not be able to plead ignorance, for you knew the truth and professed to believe it. If a prince of the blood were sent to a common gaol, what a misery it would be to him. I pity every man who has to work upon the treadmill, so far as he can deserve pity, but most of all the man who has been delicately brought up and scarce knows what labour means, for it must be hard indeed to him. Ah, you delicate sons and daughters of Zion, you whose mouths were never stained with a curse, and whose hands have never been defiled with outward sin, if your hearts be not right with God, you must take your place with the profane and share with them. What say you to this? Do you say, "I would fain return and find acceptance in Christ"? To you the text speaks expressly. Then shall you "find Me when ye shall search for Me with all your heart." III. My last word is to YOU, THE MEMBERS OF THIS CHURCH. Thus saith the Lord, "Ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart." (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Heart searchings*:—

1. Man, through all the ages of time, has been influenced by a principle of reform. The pathway of the generations has been trodden amidst the Babel-tongued shouts of "Progress!" True progress has ever been characterised by diligent research. So we may well-nigh estimate the excellence of acquirement by intensity of endeavour to attain, and calculate worth by the economics of moral labour.
2. This searching is the child of necessity. For possession begets desire; the perfecting of one design reveals the incompleteness of another, or the converse; the failure of one scheme throws into bolder relief the success of another.
3. The searching, to be successful, must also be thorough: "with all your heart." The discoveries of insincerity are accidental. "Heart searchings" are illumined by the light of heaven.
4. Application—(1) The ultimate and inevitable object of search, "Me." (2) The certainty of success assured, dependent only upon the one condition named, i.e. earnestness, "Ye shall find Me." (3) "Searching" is not always strenuous exertion; study the night of systematic inaction. "Canst thou by searching (alone) find out God?" "Wait patiently for Him." "Stand still and see the salvation of God." (4) Note the individual reference of the text: "Ye shall seek Me, and find Me," &c. (*Preacher's Analyst*.) *Searching with all the heart*:—Kepler, first in fact and in genius of modern astronomers, deservedly called "the legislator of the heavens," sought with all his heart to solve astronomical problems. With agony he strove to enter the straight gate and narrow way that led to the secret chamber of science, and explain the enigmas of six thousand years. Vainly did the secrets of planetary and stellar worlds seek to

elude him. He forged key after key, that he might unlock the doors of these mysteries. His courage and patience transfigured even failure into success. If one theory proved inadequate, there was at least one less to try, and so the limits became narrower within which truth would be found. He exhausted eight years of toil, only to prove worthless nineteen successive experiments. At last, driven to abandon the circular orbit, he founded his twentieth hypothesis on the curve which is next to the circle in simplicity, namely, the ellipse, and as all the conditions were met, the problem was solved. Bursting with enthusiasm, he cried: "O Almighty God, I am thinking Thy thoughts after Thee!" Pressing his research further, he established his second and third laws, and, almost wild with triumph, exclaimed: "Nothing holds me! I will indulge my sacred fury! The book is written to be read either now or by posterity; I care not which! It may well wait a century for a reader, since God has waited six thousand years for an observer." If Kepler was the minister of science, Agassiz was her missionary. He had no time to make money; but was found wandering alone on Pacific slopes, a pilgrim, to gather specimens of flora and fauna, minerals and metals, shells and pebbles, for the cabinets of science. What would not such zeal accomplish in religion! (*A. T. Pierson.*) *Concentration of heart*:—A broken heart is a great blessing, when it is broken by contrition for sin; but a divided heart is often a fatal disease. One secret of success in life is concentration; and many of our young men find it out too late. The founder of the Vanderbilt family bent his whole powers upon money-making, and left the richest family on the Continent. Sir Isaac Newton's famous explanation of his splendid success was, "I intend my whole mind upon it." Prof. Joseph Henry, of Washington, our great Christian scientist, used to say: "I have no faith in universal geniuses: my rule is to train all my guns on one point until I make a breach." In these days of hot competition there is no room on the street for any man who puts only a fraction of himself into his business.

CHAPTER XXX.

VER. 7. *It is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it.*—*Jacob's trouble*:—There is not a malady in human life, but we find its antidote in the Bible; not a wound, but we find its balm; not a spiritual sickness, but we find its remedy there. If there is no time of trouble to Jacob, what deliverance could Jacob want? Of what use is a promise of rest to the weary and heavy-laden, unless a man finds himself burdened and oppressed? A promise of salvation is only of value for those who feel their need of it; and an assurance of deliverance is only precious to such as are made sensible of their danger. The language of our text relates primarily and literally to the languishing state of the Church—to the captivity of Israel's tribes—to Jacob's trouble on account of the desolation of their city, and the destruction of their temple; and it is not only promised to them that their trouble should be blessed to them, but also that they should be saved out of it. We notice, first, the time of Jacob's trouble; secondly, the timely deliverance promised, "He shall be saved out of it"; and thirdly, the evidence and display of the truth and faithfulness of God towards Israel and Jacob. 1. Some may inquire why the truth and faithfulness of God should be brought forward. I do not intend to present you with a catalogue of Jacob's troubles; they are too numerous. I will, however, mention a few. (1) The trouble here spoken of is of a public nature. In its literal sense, it was the distress, calamity, degeneracy, of the Lord's people—the scattering and desolation of His inheritance by captivity. I have but a sorry opinion of that man's spirituality who is not troubled for Jacob's, not grieved for Joseph's, not afflicted for Zion's low, degenerate, sunken, miry condition. It is to my mind, amid all the enjoyments of my soul in Christ, a source of daily trouble. But this degeneracy is not the worst feature in Jacob's trouble. There is such an awful determination evinced to unite the Church and the world, to amalgamate two whom God has separated in His Word, purposes, and dispensations, with the highest and broadest wall of separation. (2) But Jacob's trouble is not only of a public character; it is also of a personal nature. There is spiritual trouble when a man is first awakened—when the Lord Jesus convinces him of sin, and discovers the spirituality and extent of the Divine

law. This is, indeed, a time of trouble ; but here is the mercy—he shall be delivered out of it. He that melted your heart will form Christ there, the hope of glory. He that gave you the knowledge of your sins will also give you the knowledge of His Son. Again, it is a time of trouble when the soul is in legal bondage. What a time of trouble, of fear, sorrow, anxiety, dread, gloom, and dismal forebodings do souls in legal bondage pass through, till the Son of God comes Himself and makes them free. Again, it is a time of personal trouble when the soul is led into the field of battle, and foiled by the enemy. Again, it is a time of personal trouble when we are called to walk in darkness. (3) Again, there is a time of providential trouble. It was a time of providential trouble to Joseph when sold by his brethren, falsely accused by his mistress, thrown into a dungeon by his master. It was a time of providential trouble to David, when he was hunted by Saul, betrayed by Doeg, threatened to be stoned by his own people, when Ziklag was burned, when driven into the wilderness as a fugitive, and expelled from his throne, family, and palace by his wicked son—but he shall be saved out of it. There were times and troubles to Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Paul, and all the apostles. 2. The timely deliverance. He shall be saved out of it. There is a threefold method in which God saves Jacob out of his trouble. Sometimes by causing his troubles to terminate with a word. He speaks the word, "Peace, be still," and not a wave rolls, nor a wind breathes. Sometimes He causes their troubles to terminate by taking the sons of Jacob out of them to glory, and raising them above the reach of them for ever. Sometimes by teaching them how to trust and triumph in Himself; as David says, "Though I walk in the midst of trouble Thou wilt revive me." What a marvellous deliverance God effected for His people in the days of bloody Mary. Then there were multitudes of godly men in prison, under sentence to the fire, and expecting the faggots every moment to be kindled, when God suddenly summoned that cruel queen into His presence. Elizabeth succeeded, and His people were rescued. Remember, whether trial is domestic, personal, spiritual, temporal, or circumstantial, a Father's wisdom directs it, a Father's love superintends it, and a Father's word will scatter it. And remember, whatever method God may adopt to save you out of your trouble, you, as a son of Jacob, will be enabled to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." Sometimes He delivers them by teaching them how to trust Him, and triumph in Him in the midst of troubles. Look at Gideon and his conquest over the Midianites, without a spear, a bow, dart, javelin, sword, arrow, lance, or any weapon of war—with nothing but lamps and pitchers he overcomes them. How different are the troubles of Jacob and Esau, of Isaac and Ishmael, of the Christian and the worldling, of a child and an enemy. The troubles of the worldling are not few. He is liable to all the calamities of life. He has no God to flee to, no sympathising High Priest. Place a Christless man in my circumstances, despair and anguish will be his portion ; but a man that shall be saved if he has my God. Is there any relation to, any likeness to, Jacob's sons to be found in you? Is there any distinction between you and Esau? Is there any personal, spiritual difference between you and the world? Can you give an affirmative answer to these questions? If so, the promise and oath of God are on your side ; and, however deep or long your troubles may be, you shall be saved out of them. (*J. Irons.*)

Ver. 11. *I will correct thee in measure.*—*Correction in measure* :—I. The text gives us GOD'S LAW OF CORRECTION ; and remember, first of all, that it is a law. It is not a passion ; it is not a surprise on the part of the Ruler Himself : it is part of His very goodness ; it is quiet, solemn, inexorable, everlasting. The steadfast law of the universe is, that though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished. This is a law, it is not a caprice ; it is a necessity of goodness, and not a burst of passion. All things fight for God ; they are very loyal to Him. The stars in their courses utter His testimony ; the winds as they fly are vocal with His name ; the earth will open her mouth with eager gladness to swallow up the populations that lift their hands against Him. Let us begin with things known, with the patent and indisputable facts of life,—and amongst those facts you will find the hell which follows broken law, the earth that casts out the soul that is not holy,—and thence proceed step by step into the holy place where the altar is, and the speaking blood, and the Father, and the strange light of eternity. There is but one true line of progress : it begins with Moses, it ends with the Lamb—Moses and the Lamb ; Law and Grace ; and in the last eternal

song we shall find in one grand line, "Moses and the Lamb," a marvellous harmonisation, the up-gathering and reconciliation of all things; the old ark built again; the law within, the mercy-lid covering it. Law and Mercy—Moses and the Lamb—these combine the whole purpose of the movement of the Divine mind and love. II. So far we have looked at the stern fact of law: we now come to WHAT IS SAID ABOUT IT. It is a law of measured correction: "I will correct thee in measure." At this point grace gets hold of law and keeps it back. Law can never stop of itself. The law is the same at the end as at the beginning. It cannot palter, it cannot compromise, it cannot make terms; it grinds, bruises, destroys. If a sinful world were left absolutely to the operation of law, it would be crushed out of existence. But the law is under mercy. We are spared by grace, by grace we are saved. The grace was accomplished before the sinner was created. The atonement is not the device of an afterthought: the Lamb was slain from before the foundation of the world. Have we penetrated the gracious meaning of that astounding mystery? Before we can understand anything of the atonement, we must destroy the very basis and the relations of understanding, as it is too narrowly interpreted; we must think ourselves back of time, of space, of foundations, worlds, sinners. Great is the mystery of godliness—God manifest in the flesh. "Correction in measure" is God's law now. May the time not come when the measure will be withdrawn and the correction will take its unlimited course? That will be hell, that will be destruction. III. WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS "MEASURE"? It is the Gospel. There is a higher law than the law of death. The law of life is not changed: it is enlarged over all the sins and shortcomings and crimes of life. "Where sin abounds, grace doth much more abound." Grace says, "There has been great sin: now for my enlargement." And she enlarges her offers of mercy, and her signs of pity, and her opportunities of return, until the sin flee away—that which is great becomes little. Life is more than death, as the heaven is high above the earth. Death is only a partial law; the universal law is life, and it is for God to set that infinite law in motion. Here we enter upon the mysteries of Deity; here we touch the altar of the atonement. I will accept my chastening; I deserve it. This is my sweet, great faith—that no punishment ever overtakes me that is not a sign of God's watchfulness, and of God's care over my life. I have never suffered loss, social dishonour, inward compunction, without being able to say, "This is the Lord's doing, and not man's. The man did not know what he was doing to me; he was seized by God and set to do this work for my punishment—my education." Let us have no whining, no complaining, no retaliation. The man that smote you was sent to smite you. Avenge yourself by deeper confession, by larger, loftier prayer. (J. Parker, D.D.)

Vers. 17-19. **I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the Lord.**—*God's love in restoration*:—Most times in Scripture the voice of God is the voice of love. The sterner words come forth as of necessity, on compulsion. How wonderful in the text is the tenderness with which God speaks, what marvellous considerateness for natural human feelings, for the peculiarities, if I may so speak, of human feelings, when, in promising to renew and to restore, He speaks not only of restoration, but of restoration on the very spot, restoration with the least possible loss, the least possible wrench to natural feeling,—restoration of the city on the ruinous heap, on the old foundation; not merely life again, but life where they had lived of old, the hearth to be raised where the hearth had burned of old, and home where home had been, not one joy or sorrow of association being lost, no change of place, no severance of old ties and thoughts, but all the round of life to begin again on the very site where the days had gone round before. Great mercy would it have been, if the decayed city, with its palaces and homes, had been rebuilt at all, and on other spots, in other places not known or loved before; but as there would have been a certain sorrow in changing the place of habitation, in making a new home, and on looking back on the bare desert plots where the city had once stood, so God, promising restoration, so promises it, that there should not be one cloud upon the heart in seeing the walls again built, not one touch of sorrow and regret to mingle with the joy. And how has it been with the Church of Christ, of which these words of the prophet, in a second and a spiritual sense, doubtless speak? There is no branch of the Church, alas! which has not failed at times in its high part, which has not at times sunk down into listlessness and sloth, which has not at times had

an evil activity and an unwise zeal, which has not at times wasted its high gifts, spilt them as it were like water on the ground, suffered its lamp to burn low or to glare with an unhealthy light, which has not at times grudged alms, or been faint in prayer, or worshipped the world, or dressed itself out in gorgeous robes of worldly greatness, or been self-indulgent, or lax in its view of Christian verities. And yet no branch of the Church has been without its calls and recalls, its revival, whether of its spiritual life or of its form and order, its gracious renewings, its waterings from on high with the heavenly dew, that it might again look strong, again battle with the world, again bear noble witness, again do noble deeds, again show the power of a living faith, again unite itself with heaven by its warm and frequent prayers, again preach Christ crucified by its own crucifixion of all earthly affections, and the manifestation of all saintly ways and tempers. (*Bishop Armstrong.*) *Blessed promises for dying outcasts* :—The promises of this verse will be exceedingly sweet to those who feel their personal need of them ; but those who boast that they are neither sick nor wounded will take no interest in this comfortable word. I. Taken in connection with the verses which precede it, our text describes a class of men and women who are in a **SERIOUS FLIGHT**. These people suffer under two evils. They are afflicted with the distemper of evil, and also by dismal disquietude of conscience. They have broken God's commandments, and now their own bones are broken. They have grieved their God, and their God is grieving them. 1. They are sick with sin, and that disease is one which, according to the fifth and sixth verses, brings great pain and trouble into men's minds when they come to their senses, and know their condition before God. Sin felt and known is a terrible kill-joy : as the simoom of the desert smites the caravan with death, and as the sirocco withers every herb of the field, so does a sense of sin dry up peace, blast hope, and utterly kill delight. This disease, moreover, is not only exceedingly painful when the conscience is smarting, but it is altogether incurable, so far as any human skill is concerned. Neither body, soul, nor spirit is free from its taint. At all hours it is our curse and plague ; over all places it casts its defiling influence ; in all duties it injures and hinders us. To those who know this there is a music sweeter than marriage-bells in these words,—“ I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds.” The incurable shall be cured ; the insatiable malady shall be stayed. How gracious is it on God's part to pity a creature infected with this vile distemper ! How good of Him to regard our iniquity rather as a sickness to be healed than as a crime to be punished ! 2. I told you of a double mischief in this plight, and the second mischief is that this person has been wounded for his sin. His wounds are of no common sort, for we are told in the fourteenth verse that God Himself has wounded him. There is such a thing as cruel kindness, and the opposite to it is a loving cruelty, a gracious severity. When the Lord brings sin to remembrance, and makes the soul to see what an evil it has committed in transgressing against God, then the wound bleeds, and the heart breaks. The smart is sharp, but salutary. The Lord wounds that He may heal, He kills that He may make alive. His storms wreck us upon the rock of salvation, and His tempests drive us into the fair havens of lowly faith. Happy are the men who are thus made unhappy ; but this for the present they know not, and therefore they need the promise, “ I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the Lord.” The blows are not only on the conscience, but when God is in earnest to make men flee from their sins, He will smite them anywhere and everywhere. He takes away the delight of their eyes with a stroke ; the child, the husband, the wife, or the friend is laid low ; for the Lord will fill our houses with mourning sooner than leave us in carnal security. II. A **SPECIAL INTERFERENCE**. The poor creature is in desperate dolour ; but the God of pitying love comes in, and I beg you to notice the result. 1. This interference is, first of all, Divine. The infinite Jehovah alone can speak with that grand Ego, and say, “ I will,” and again, “ I will.” No human physician who was worthy of the name would speak thus. He would humbly say, “ I will attempt to give you health ; I will endeavour to heal your wounds ” ; but the Lord speaks with the positiveness of omnipotence, for He has the power to make good His words. 2. Note, that since this interference is Divine it is effectual. What can baffle the Lord ? Can anything perplex infinite wisdom ? Is anything difficult to almighty power ? He speaks, and it is done : He commands, and it stands fast. When therefore God says, “ I will restore health unto thee,” health will visit the wretch who lies pining at death's door. When He says, “ I will heal thee of thy wounds,” the deep cuts and gashes are

closed up at once. 3. Observe that this interposition performs a work which is most complete, for it meets the two-fold mischief. He will heal both disease and wound. 4. Notice, too, how sovereignly free this promise is. It does not say, "I will restore health unto thee if"—No, there is no "if"; and there is no mention of a fee. Here is healing for nothing. Jesus comes to give us health without money and without price, without pence or penance, without labour or merit. 5. Notice that, although it be thus free and unconditional, yet it is now a matter of covenant certainly, for God has made the promise, and He cannot turn from it. To every guilty sinner, conscious of his guilt, who will come and confess it before God, this promise is made to-day, "I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds." III. A SINGULAR REASON. He says, not "Because you were holy," or "Because you had good desires"; but "Because they called thee an outcast." Who were they? Why, the mockers and blasphemers: the Lord actually transforms the venom of asps, which was under the tongues of the malicious, into a reason for His mercy. This clearly shows how God hates the very notion of merit; but it also shows that He will find a reason for mercy somewhere. 1. This roused the Lord's pity. "Oh," He said, "has it come to this? Have they dared to call My Beloved 'an outcast,' and say that no man seeketh after her? I will seek her, and heal her, and restore her, for I cannot endure such tauntings." Now, if there is a poor sinner in the world, upon whom other sinners, who are just as bad in their heart, begin to vent their scorn, and say, "She is an outcast"; then the God of mercy seems to say, "Who are you that you should talk like this? You are as vile yourselves, and yet you dare to look down upon this poor, selected one, as if she were so much worse than you. Therefore, I will save that despised one, and will have mercy upon the rejected." 2. God's jealousy is aroused against those who despise His people and speak ill of them. It is one thing for a father to chasten his boy; but if, when he is out in the streets, a stranger begins to kick him, his father declares that it shall not be. He arouses himself to defend his child, the same child that just now he smote so heavily. That is a fair parallel to the case of our God. He will chasten His people in measure, but the moment that their enemies call them outcasts He turns His anger another way and releases His people. Oh, how blessedly does good come out of evil! How graciously He causes the wrath of man to praise Him. He restores health to Zion, and heals her wounds because she is called an outcast. IV. A LITTLE SUITABLE ADVICE. I will suppose that I have those before me who have felt their disease and their wound, and have been healed by the God of mercy. I would recommend them to attend to certain matters. 1. Take care that you live very near your Physician. I notice that patients come up from the country when they are suffering with serious complaints, and they take lodgings near a medical man who is in high esteem for such cases as theirs. Now, the Lord has healed your wound, and restored health to you, therefore abide in Him; never leave Him, nor live far away from Him, for this old disease of yours may break out on a sudden, and it will be well to have the Healer close at hand. It will be best to entertain Him constantly beneath your roof, and within your heart; for His presence is the wellspring of health to the soul. 2. I recommend you often to put yourself under His searching examination. Go to this great Physician, and ask Him to look into your hidden parts, to search you, and try you, and see what wicked way may be in you, that He may lead you in the way everlasting. 3. I recommend you from personal experience to consult with this Doctor every day. It is a wise thing before you go downstairs into the world's tainted atmosphere to take a draught of His *Elizir vite*, in the form of renewed faith in Him. I am sure at night it is an admirable thing to purge the soul of all the perilous stuff which has accumulated through the day by full confession and renewed confidence. 4. Lay bare your case before Him; conceal nothing; beg of Him to deal with you according to His knowledge of your case. Make a clean breast that Christ may make a sure cure. 5. Then I should very strongly recommend you always to obey the prescriptions of the great Healer. "Whosoever He saith unto you, do it." The Lord Jesus must be received as a whole, or not at all. 6. Take care also to exercise great confidence in this Physician. Your cure is working wondrously when you trust in Jesus heartily. Distrust is what you have to fear; faith is your strength. 7. When you are healed, as I trust you are already, speak well of your Benefactor. When you were restored from sickness the other day, you were quite able to inform your friends as to that new medicine which acted like a charm, and you found a tongue to speak well of your doctor; and I am sure

you have ability enough to declare the wonderful works of the Lord in your case. "Oh, but I could not embellish the tale!" Do not attempt to embellish it; for that would only spoil it. Tell the story as simply as possible. I think it is of Mr. Cecil that I have read the following incident. A friend came from some distance to inform him of a medicine which was to relieve him of his disorder. This friend told him all about it, and having done so, entered into conversation upon the current matters of the day. The result was that Mr. Cecil was greatly interested in the talk, and when his friend was gone, he quite forgot every ingredient of the wonderful medicine. Beware of allowing the many things to drive the one thing needful out of your friend's mind. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 18-20. **I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small.**—*The Church's encouragement in times of depression*:—I. A REPRESENTATION OF THE CHURCH IN A STATE OF GREAT DEPRESSION AND AFFLICTION. 1. Consternation and dismay are evinced. There is "the voice of trembling," and the agitation of "fear," at the apprehension of approaching calamities. "Every man" is represented "with his hands upon his loins," the symptoms of agonising pain; and "all faces are turned unto paleness," the effect of extreme alarm. 2. Desolation and ruin are also intimated. Their "bruise was incurable, and their wound was grievous"; for they were "wounded" by the hand of "an enemy,—with the chastisement of a cruel one." II. THE ENCOURAGING PROMISE HERE GIVEN TO THE CHURCH OF HER RESTORATION TO PEACE AND PROSPERITY. 1. Tranquillity and protection; or, "peace in all her borders" (ver. 10). 2. The renewal of her religious privileges (vers. 18, 22). 3. The increase of her converts (ver. 19). 4. The joy of her members is next promised;—and this follows as a matter of course. 5. The destruction of her enemies. (*R. Bond.*)

Ver. 21. **And their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them.**—*The choice of their rulers the privilege of the people*:—1. The power of choosing their own rulers is a privilege which but very few of mankind have ever enjoyed. There is not one nation in all Asia and Africa which enjoys the power of electing its own rulers; and scarcely one in all Europe which enjoys this privilege in its full extent. 2. The power of choosing their own rulers is a privilege which all nations who are destitute of it wish to enjoy. 3. It must be a great privilege to any people, to have the power of choosing their best men to rule over them. Rulers who understand the genius and disposition of their people, who are acquainted with their laws and constitutions, who have a comprehensive view of their various interests and connections, and who are men of tried integrity, are well qualified to fill every department of government. No people can desire better rulers than these; and such as these, the power of election gives them the best opportunity of appointing to office. 4. It is a great privilege for a people to have a power of choosing their own rulers, because good rulers are a very great blessing. They are the guardians of all that a people hold most dear and sacred; and so can do them greater service, and more essentially promote their temporal good, than any other men in any other public or private stations of life. Reflections—1. No nation which chooses its own rulers can be enslaved without its own consent. The privilege of election is the grand palladium of civil liberty. 2. If a people who choose their own rulers have not good rulers, it must be owing to their own fault. If they choose their best men, there can be no doubt but their rulers will be good. 3. A people who choose their own rulers, cannot reasonably expect to have better rulers than themselves. 4. This subject directs us where to look for the origin of the political distresses and embarrassments in which we have been, and still are, involved. They have originated from the abuse of the power of election. 5. This subject suggests to us the best, and perhaps the only possible way of alleviating present, and of preventing future calamities. The way is, wisely and faithfully to improve our important privilege of election, and commit the direction of our national concerns to greater and better men. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *The blessing of freedom*:—Our subject is the blessing of freedom; the advantages of that political condition in which we are placed. There are various causes in operation which tend to lessen in us the due sense of these advantages. Extravagance of praise; asserting too much with regard to any principle; overdrawn statements of its nature, and perpetual boasting of its effects, are likely in all cases, sooner or later, to bring about a reaction. The abuses of the principle of liberty also; the out-

breakings of popular violence, mobs, and tumults, prostrating the law under foot; and the tyranny, moreover, of legal majorities; and, withal, the bitter animosities of party strife, and the consequent incessant fluctuations of public policy, constantly deranging the business of the country; all these things are leading some to say, but with more rashness than wisdom, "I must think, that even political oppression and injustice, which should make all strong, and firm, and permanent, would be better than that state of things in which we live." Add to all this, that the blessings which are common, like the air we breathe and the light of day—blessings which are invested with the familiar livery of our earliest and most constant experience—are apt to pass by us unregarded; while the evils of life, calamities and concussions of the elements, shipwrecks, and storms, and earthquakes, rise into portentous and heart-thrilling significance; and we see another and final reason why the advantages of our political condition are liable to be undervalued. The first step which I shall take in defending the ground which we as a nation have taken, will be carefully to define it. What is the principle of a democratic or representative government? It is, that no restraints, disabilities, or penalties shall be laid upon any person, and that no immunities, privileges, or charters shall be conferred on any person, or any class of persons, but such as tend to promote the general welfare. This exception, be it remembered, is an essential part of our theory. Our principle is not, as I conceive, that no privileges shall be granted to one person more than to another. If bank charters, for instance, can be proved to be advantageous to the community, our principle must allow them. It is upon the same principle that we grant acts of incorporation to the governors of colleges, academies, and hospitals, and to many other benevolent and literary societies: it is upon the ground that they benefit the public. And what is government itself, but a corporation possessing and exercising certain exclusive powers for the general weal? Again, I maintain that our democratic principle is not that the people are always right. It is this rather: that although the people may sometimes be wrong, yet that they are not so likely to be wrong, and to do wrong, as irresponsible, hereditary magistrates and legislators; that it is safer to trust the many with the keeping of their own interests, than it is to trust the few to keep those interests for them. Let me now proceed to speak of liberty as a blessing, and the highest blessing that can appertain to the condition of a people. 1. I value our political constitution because it is the only system that accords with the truth of things, the only system that recognises the great claims and inalienable rights of humanity. 2. I value our liberty, and deem it a just cause of thankfulness to Heaven, because it fosters and develops all the intellectual and moral powers of the country. 3. I value political liberty because of that which a free and unfettered energy obtains, it gives the freest and amplest use. What is the effect, nay, what is the design of a despotic Government, but to deprive the people of the largest amount that it can, or dare, of the proceeds of their honest industry and laudable enterprise? Under its grossest forms, it levies direct contributions; in its more plausible administration it levies taxes; but in either case its end is the same—to feed and batten a few at the expense of the many. Let me not be told, that differences in the form of government are mere matters of speculation; that they have very little to do with our private welfare; that a man may be as happy under one form as another. I think it was on occasion of our revolution that Dr. Johnson put forth some such oracle as this; but it is not true; it may pass for good-nature, or for smooth philosophy, if anyone pleases so to call it, but it is not true. What more obvious interest of human life is there, than that a man's labour shall produce for him the greatest possible amount of comfort; that he should enjoy, as far as it is compatible with the support of civil order, the proceeds of his toil? Labour, honourable and useful as it is, is not so very agreeable that a man should recklessly give it for that which is not bread. And that he emphatically does who gives it for pensions, sinecures, and monopolies, and establishments, and wars, which benefit him not at all. 4. I should not exhaust the subject, even in this most general view of it, if I did not add one further consideration in behalf of freedom; a consideration that is higher and stronger than any reason—I mean, the intrinsic desirableness of this condition to every human being. In this respect, freedom is like virtue, like happiness; we value it for its own sake. God has stamped upon our very humanity this impress of freedom; it is the unchartered prerogative of human nature. (*O. Dewey, D.D.*) **Who is this that engaged his heart to approach**

unto Me?—Who is this?—I. The question of our text is asked TO DIRECT ATTENTION TO THIS GLORIOUS PERSON. "Who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto Me? saith the Lord." The person who must draw near to God must be one of ourselves. It is clear that a fit representative for men must be himself a man. In Adam we transgressed and died to God: in another Adam must we be restored. Now, where is this man to be found? "Who is this?" If he is to come of ourselves, where is he? Not among this assemblage; nor if all the myriads that dwell on the face of the earth could be gathered together would there be found one who could undertake this enterprise,—“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” Nor is it merit alone that is needed, for he that would approach unto the Lord as mediator must be prepared with strength to suffer. Who can sustain the load of human sin? Who can endure the indignation of the Lord against iniquity? Assuredly none of us could do it: the fire would consume him as stubble. Oh, for an interposer; but where can he be found? Now look at the context, and you will see that the person who must approach to God for us must be a prince-priest; for He is called “their glorious One” and “their Governor,” and yet it is said of Him, “I will cause Him to draw near,” which work of drawing near is in other places ascribed to priests, for these God had set apart for the service of His sanctuary. The person, then, must be a priest, and yet a prince. Who is He, and where is He? You know Him—the true Priest of God, not of the order of Aaron, and the King eternal, immortal, invisible, King of kings, and Lord of lords. It is He that engaged His heart to draw near to God on our behalf. The question, however, may be answered in another way, so as to bring out more clearly the matchless Person whom our hearts adore. It was necessary that He who should draw near to God should be chosen to that office by God Himself, and should be qualified for it by Divine power. “I will cause Him to draw near, and He shall approach to Me.” Now, is there any one among us all that God has ever chosen to represent our fellow-men as their mediator, acting as the head of the race, and as such entering into the immediate presence of God on his own merits? We have not, I hope, the presumption to imagine such a thing. “There is one Mediator between God and man, the Man, Jesus Christ.” Moreover, to close this description, He was not only appointed of God and qualified, but He was one who was willing to undertake the task and ready to pledge Himself to it. He voluntarily covenanted to do it, as it is written, “Lo, I come; in the volume of the Book it is written of Me, to do Thy will, O God: yea, Thy law is My delight.” II. TO EXCITE ADMIRATION OF HIS MATCHLESS WORK. If Jesus Christ is to approach to God for us, it is clear that He must come down into our condition, for He must first descend or He cannot ascend. He descended into our depths to engineer a way from the lowest to the highest, to come back from Bashan, and from the depths of the sea, leading the van of the armies of His chosen as they return unto God with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. This lowly place being taken, behold our Lord actually approaching unto the offended Majesty on high. Though found in fashion as a man, and by reason of His becoming a curse for us, denied the presence of the Father, so that He cried in anguish, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” yet He did approach unto God: He did come near; nay, He remaineth near, able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him. Our Lord with all His heart desired to do this: He “engaged His heart” to perform it. But why this readiness, this eagerness? Love is the one reply. His heart was occupied with love to God and love to man, and He could not rest till He had restored the broken concord between these divided ones. With all the forcefulness of His Divine nature, and with all the energy of His perfect humanity, He was resolved to bring men back to God. Having thus determined that He would approach unto God on our behalf, He took all the consequences. A correct reading of the passage would be, “Who is this that hath pledged his heart or his life to approach unto Me? saith the Lord.” If you take the meaning of the word “heart” to be life, since the heart is the source of life, then we read that our Lord pledged His life, put His life in surety that He would approach unto God, the Judge of all, and bring us near to Him. When He came as the representative of sinful men—then vengeance with its sword must smite Him, and He was willing to be smitten. And now to-day, beloved, Jesus Christ rejoices to think that He has approached unto God on our behalf, and made eternal amity between God and man. Let us rejoice with Him. Let us become happy in fellowship with our God. III. TO AROUSE

YOUR INTEREST IN THE SWEET RESULTS OF JESUS CHRIST'S HAVING APPROACHED TO GOD FOR US. The first result is found in the chapter. Read that twenty-second verse. "Who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto Me? saith the Lord. And ye shall be My people, and I will be your God." That is, because our royal High Priest approached unto God for us, therefore we who were called outcasts, we whose wound was incurable and grievous, we that were utterly ruined and undone; we, believing in this Jesus, shall in Him become the people of God. I seem to see in my spirit that old legend of Rome worked out in very deed. So saith the story: in the Roman Forum there gaped a vast chasm which threatened the destruction of the Forum, if not of Rome. The wise men declared that the gulf would never close unless the most precious thing in Rome was cast into it. See how it yawns and cracks every moment more horribly. Hasten to bring this noblest thing! For love of Rome sacrifice your best! But what, or who is this? Where is a treasure meet for sacrifice? Then Curtius, a belted knight, mounted his charger, and rightly judging that valour and love of country were the noblest treasures of Rome, he leaped into the gulf. The yawning earth closed upon a great-hearted Roman, for her hunger was appeased. Perchance it is but an idle tale: but what I have declared is truth. There gaped between God and man a dread abyss, deep as hell, wide as eternity, and only the best thing that heaven contained could fill it. That best thing was He, the peerless Son of God, the matchless, perfect man, and He came, laying aside His glory, making Himself of no reputation, and He sprang into the gulf, which there and then closed, once for all. One great result of Christ's having died is to leave us a way of access, which is freely opened to every poor, penitent sinner. Come. Are you using that way of access? Do you use it every day? Having used it, and thus having drawn near to God, do you dwell near to God? Do you abide in God? Is God the main thought of your life, the chief delight and object of your being? (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

CHAPTER XXXI.

VIII. 1. At the same time, saith the Lord, will I be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people.—*Religion in the home*:—The family is a primal and universal institution, which stands alone distinct and apart from all others. Men voluntarily create States or Churches, but God putteth men in families. The relations of husband and wife, parent and child, brother and sister, are altogether different in origin and character from those of the ruler and the ruled, whether in civil or religious society. They began when men were created. They cannot and will not cease until the race ceases to exist. They are recognised, therefore, and they are the only associations which are so recognised in the announcement of those fundamental precepts of moral law, which we properly separate from all the other rules given to the children of Israel through Moses, and call the Ten Commandments. But it is not even in these solemn commands that the sacred and impressive character of these relations is best gathered. It is rather their frequent employment in one form or other to illustrate the relation which the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ sustain to us, which invest them with peculiar sanctity and suggestiveness. As we find the mother's self-oblivion and undying love to her babe used to set forth the yet more enduring tenderness of God to us, so is the pity with which the father regards even his sinful children made the type of that inexhaustible compassion which pardons all human transgressions. As we hear our blessed Lord addressing us as His brethren, and are taught that in order to make His brotherhood complete He was tempted in all respects like as we are, or have the ineffable love with which He regards His Church, and binds it to Himself in loving fellowship represented by the union of the bridegroom and the bride, so is the family the image of that glorious fellowship to which all true souls belong—the family in heaven and earth called after the name of Christ. I. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FAMILY RELATION. It is in the wise ordering of the home, the purifying of the affections in which all its relations and influences have their root, the upholding of the authority which ought ever to be maintained within it, that States and Churches alike have the best security

for their peace and prosperity. 1. The feelings which are cultivated in well-regulated households and make men good sons, husbands, and fathers, are those which, when exercised in a different direction, make them good citizens and true patriots; whereas on the other side the selfishness which brooks no restraint, listens to no voice but that of its own passions, and seeks no end but their indulgence, is not more hostile to the peace and purity of the home than it is fatal to the order and progress of the nation. The most absolute collapse of a State which modern times has seen was preceded by a weakening of family ties and obligations, and the most extraordinary national development is that of a people whose loyalty to their country is not less remarkable than their devotion to their homes, and among whom, from the Emperor on the throne to the meanest of his subjects, attention to domestic duties is placed among the cardinal virtues, and the enjoyment of home happiness is esteemed one of the choicest blessings.

2. While the home is the best training-ground for the citizen, even more, if possible, ought it to be the best nursery for the Christian, and its teaching and discipline the right preparation for the Church. At all periods and in all countries where there has been any strong manifestation of the power of godliness, the family has been one of its centres. It is not suggested that religious feelings can be transmitted. But it is manifest that the traditions, the associations, the beliefs and practices, and the reputation of a family may—where there is anything marked and distinctive—certainly will, materially affect each of its members. The piety of Lois and Eunice could not become the possession of Timothy, but who can doubt that he was affected by it? It must have done much, to say the least, towards creating the atmosphere by which his early life was surrounded, and so far have influenced his subsequent career. To be born into a family where the love of God reigns is itself no small privilege. From the very dawn of intelligence one thus situated is in the midst of circumstances all tending to produce in him sentiments of reverence and devotion. He will not believe in Christ because father and grandfather believed before him, and if he were, on this account alone, to adopt a Christian creed and name, his faith would be as idle as the words in which it might be professed. He does not, cannot become a man eminent for goodness because the world or the Church looks to him thus to uphold the honour of the family name, and if he sought to do so inspired by no other motive, his life, with all the outward excellence he might discover, would be nothing more than a hollow pretence, himself no better than the whited sepulchres of the old Pharisaism. But with all this, who will undertake to deny the power which even the family traditions of goodness, and still more the associations of the house set apart to God, must, in many cases, exert? They are as a chain of forts, which defend the soul against the assaults of sin. They are influences which predispose a man to listen to the truth, and if they may be resisted, even if by some they are hardly felt at all, they must surely place a man in a more favourable position than if his first ideas of religion were of a tyranny to be resisted, a fanaticism to be pitied, or an hypocrisy to be despised, in every case a power which the soul should steadily resist. They are voices speaking to the heart, and appealing to many of its strongest motives and best affections.

II. THE WAY IN WHICH FAMILY PIETY IS TO BE CULTIVATED. 1. Its foundation manifestly is parental influence. The influence which a parent exercises over his children may be composed of many elements, but the predominant one in the majority of cases must be personal goodness. I met some time ago one, now himself the head of a household and the son of an excellent father, whose praise, as I personally know, had long remained in the church in which he was an office-bearer. As we were conversing of him, the son, addressing me with strong feeling, said, "It was my father's life which saved me from being drawn away from the faith. I was, while yet a youth, thrown into the society of those who made a practice of sneering at religion as a folly or a delusion, and at all its professors as hypocrites. I thought I knew my father better, but they talked so confidently that I resolved to watch. For two years I did watch with an anxious and ever-observant care, and in what I saw of my father's holy life I found an answer to the taunts and doubts of my companions." It was a high testimony, and the truth of it was confirmed by the consecration of a large family to the service of Christ. The thought it suggests, indeed, may, in the aspect of it, be disquieting enough to parents. If the eyes of their household are thus continually upon them, and if its judgment on the Gospel be formed on the ground of what it sees in them, what reason is there for anxiety, even for trembling, lest the impression given be such as to prevent the truth from having

its rightful power on the hearts of their children and servants! Children, of all others, are quick to detect a contrast, if such there be, between the outward deportment, especially in the presence of Christian friends or on religious seasons, and the predominant temper of the life; and the parent who thinks to atone for a prevailing worldliness by occasional outbursts of religious emotion, may at least be sure that his family will not be imposed on by these periodical fits of devotion. But if they will not give credit for a high degree of piety because of a few manifestations of spirituality which are out of accord with the general tenor of life, neither will they be led by occasional imperfections, and even inconsistencies, to ignore the evidence of spirit and character, supplied by daily conduct. 2. It must be manifested, however, in the whole conduct of the family, and perhaps in nothing more than in the ambitions which are cherished in relation to it and the means adopted for their realisation. Professions of supreme love to God, even though supported by many acts which are in accordance with them, will tell for very little if there is abundant proof that what a man desires, first and above all, for his children is not that they should be true Christians, but that they should be rich, or fashionable, or famous. Here is the secret of many failures, which at first seem almost unintelligible. There are parents who, to outward appearance, and to the best of their own belief, have trained their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; but the teaching has not been successful, and those who are disappointed in its results complain, or, at least, wonder, that the promise is not fulfilled. They have given instruction in the doctrines of the Gospel; they have led their children to the house of God; they have sought by precept and entreaty to influence them on God's behalf—but without success. What can be the cause? If they would look deeper and with less prejudiced eyes, it would not be hard to find. Their children are what they have made them. I have heard of some who have been more anxious about the manners and deportment of their children or pupils; others more concerned about the society into which they can get admittance; others more intent on their outward prosperity than their religion. Ought they to be surprised if the young learn the lesson and act accordingly? 3. I include under one point family influences, whether in the way of instruction, or discipline, or worship. Two remarks only will I throw out. (1) There should be a religion of the household; not only should the individual members personally recognise and seek to meet the claims of Christian duty, but there should be religious service rendered by the family as a whole. There should be the family gathering for daily worship, and the household, as a body, should present itself before God in His house. (2) There comes a time when the authority of the parent can be enforced only by moral suasion, but in those earlier and more tender years, when children are not simply to be advised, but ruled, the wise head of a household will feel that he is but exercising the right which God Himself has given, or rather, let us say, discharging the trust which God has committed to him as a steward, when he gathers his children around him, whether at the family altar or in the family pew. But this raises the question of that parental rule which it was never more necessary to maintain than at the present time. If the Son of God Himself learned obedience by the things which He suffered. He has, by that submission, taught a great lesson, which neither parents nor children should forget. (*J. G. Rogers, D.D.*)

Ver. 3. **I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.**—*Everlasting love*:—I. OUR ONCE DESOLATE AND MISERABLE CONDITION BY NATURE. Were we not captives? yea, bond-slaves? All our happiness consisted in forgetting ourselves. Everything marked us as, in the worst sense, slaves. Some of us professed to despise the opinions of men, and yet, what were we but the slaves of men? What did we pursue? Nothing but the applause of men. What were we afraid of? Nothing but their censure. How afraid of singularity, when we first perhaps had some thoughts concerning our souls. What was this but slavery? Look at the lives we led. We lived but for ourselves. Self was our Nebuchadnezzar, who took possession of the city, our walls, and got all for himself. Self, perhaps, in some decent, moral form, but still self; the fleshy, unregenerate, corrupt, carnal self. Was not this the greatest slavery? And who was the master, the grinding tyrant of this slave? To whom had we sold ourselves for nought? Who was it that led us captive at his will? (2 Tim. ii. 25, 26.) II. THE LOVE WHICH GOD HAS TOWARDS HIS TRUE ISRAEL. And what is its peculiar character? It is Sovereign and Dis-

tinguishing. 1. It is a Love bounded by His Will. His most wise, righteous, and holy Will (Exod. xxxiii. 19). 2. It is personal and individual. "I have loved thee." Thee, a poor sinner, a prodigal; thee, a poor, unprofitable servant; thee, a poor backslider in heart too oft; thee, too much, too frequently ungrateful;—yet have I loved thee—yes, thee, notwithstanding all; thee, singly and alone, as if there were no other; thee, as one of the innumerable family, the many sons whom I will bring to glory. 3. It is effectual and overcoming. "With loving-kindness have I drawn thee." Ah, how gently, how tenderly, how silently, sometimes mysteriously, but ever in love. 4. This love is everlasting. Time never know its beginning, eternity shall never know its end. Closing remarks:—1. All religion consists in individuality. Religion is a personal thing. (1) It is so in our confessions (2 Sam. xii. 13). (2) It is so in our standing before God (Luke xviii. 13). (3) So is it in the consolations of the Spirit (Gal. ii. 20). 2. All the blessings of present salvation spring from God's everlasting love. (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*) *Secret drawings graciously explained:—*I. GOD'S DEALINGS WITH US ARE NEVER UNDERSTOOD TILL HE HIMSELF APPEARS TO US. He must speak, or we cannot interpret His acts. Though all things in the field and the garden show what the sun doeth, yet none of these "fruits put forth by the sun" can be perceived till the sun himself reveals them. For first, man is not in a condition to perceive God till God reveals Himself to him. By nature we are blind Godward; yea, deaf, and in all ways insensible towards the great Spirit. The Lord said of Cyrus, "I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me"; and even so may He say of many an unconverted man, "I warned thee, and aroused thee, and drew thee when thou wast not aware of Me." Besides this, we are so selfish that, when God is drawing us to Himself, we are too much absorbed in our own things to notice the hand which is at work upon us. We crave the world, we sigh for human approbation, we seek for ease and comfort, we desire above all things to indulge our pride with the vain notion of self-righteousness. And, therefore, we look not after God. Moreover, God must explain His dealings to us by revealing Himself to us, because those ways are in themselves frequently mysterious. He does not usually begin by giving the man light, and peace, and comfort. No, but he sorely plagues him with "darkness that might be felt." He makes sweet sin to become bitter; He pours gall into the fountains of his carnal life till the man begins to be weary of the things which once contented him. Full often the Lord fitteth the arrows of conviction to the string, and shooteth again, and again, and again, till the soul is wounded in a thousand places, and is ready to bleed to death. The Lord kills before He makes alive. But I say again, how could we expect unspiritual men to see the hand of the Lord in all this? God must reveal Himself to the man, or else he will not discover the hand of the Lord in the anguish of his spirit. This appearance of the Lord must be personal. "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me." True knowledge of God is always a Divine operation, not wrought at second-hand by instrumentality, but wrought by the right hand of the Lord Himself. "No man can come to Me," saith Christ, "except the Father which hath sent Me draw him"; and no man understands those drawings except the same Father shall come unto him, and manifest Himself to him. Till we know the Lord by personal revelation, we cannot read His handwriting upon our hearts, or discern His dealings with us. This appearance needs to be repeated. The text may be read as a complaint on the part of Israel. Israel says, "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me"—as much as to say, "He has not appeared to me lately." Of old He was seen by brook, and bush, and sea, and rock; when Jacob met Him at Jaddok, and Moses in the wilderness at the burning bush; but now His visits are few and far between. "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me." Oh, that He would appear now! I pray at this time that those of you who are mourning after that fashion may be able to rise out of it. It is not the Lord's desire that He should be as a stranger in the land, or as a wayfaring man that tarrieth but for a night. He is willing to abide with us. His delights are with the sons of men. This appearance is ever an act of mighty grace. The text might be read, "The Lord appeared from afar to me." So He did at the first. What a great way off we were from God, but behold the Beloved came, like a roe or a young hart, leaping over the mountains, skipping upon the hills! He came to us in boundless love when we lay at death's dark door, the fast-bound slaves of hell. He can and will come again. If He came to us from far, He will surely come again now that He has made us nigh. Expect Him to come to you on a sudden. Pray for the immediate revelation of God Himself

to your spirit in a way of joy and transport that shall set your soul in rapid motion towards the Lord. Should the Lord return to you in gracious manifestation, take care that you do not lose Him again. If the Bridegroom deigns to visit you, hold Him fast. II. When the Lord does so appear, WE THEN PERCEIVE THAT HE HAS BEEN DEALING WITH US. "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." What exceeding love the Lord showed to us before we knew Him! Let us now look back and remember the love of long-suffering, which spared us when we delighted in sin. The Lord did not cut us off in our unbelief; therein is love. The next admirable discovery is the Lord's restraining grace. We now see that the Lord held us back from plunging into the deepest abysses of sin. Blessed be God for those crooks in my lot which kept me from poisonous pleasures! So, too, we now see the preparations of grace, the ploughing of our hearts by sorrow, the sowing of them by discipline, the harrowing of them by pain, the watering of them by the rain of favour, the breaking of them up by the frosts of adversity. These were not actually grace, but they opened the door for grace. We now see how in a thousand ways the Lord was drawing us when we knew Him not. The text chiefly dwells upon drawings. I beg you to refresh your memories by recollecting the drawings of the Lord towards you while you were yet ungodly. Often these were very gentle drawings: they were not such forces as would move an ox or an ass, but such as were meant for tender spirits; yet sometimes they tugged at you very hard, and almost overcame you. Drawing supposes a kind of resistance; or, at any rate, an inertness; and, truly, we did not stir of ourselves, but needed to be persuaded and entreated. Some of you will recollect how the Holy Spirit drew you many times before you came to Him. The Lord surrounded you as a fish is surrounded with a net; and though you laboured to escape you could not, but were drawn more and more within the meshes of mercy. Do you remember when at last the Holy Spirit drew you over the line; when at last, without violating your free will, He conquered it by forces proper to the mind? Blessed day! You were made a willing captive to your Lord, led in silken fetters at His chariot-wheels, a glad prisoner to almighty love, set free from sin and Satan, made to be unto your Lord a lifelong servant. III. WE PERCEIVE THAT LOVING-KINDNESS WAS THE DRAWING FORCE. "Therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." At first we think God has dealt sternly with us, but in His light we see light, and we perceive that the drawing power, which has brought us to receive mercy, is the Divine loving-kindness. Love is the attractive force. What multitudes of persons have been drawn to the Lord first by His loving-kindness in the gift of His dear Son! The loving-kindness of God as seen in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus draws men from sin, from self, from Satan, from despair, and from the world. Next, the hope of pardon, free and full, attracts sinners to God. "Thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven thee," makes a man run after Christ. I have known others drawn to the Lord by another view of His loving-kindness, namely, His willingness to make new creatures of us. The prayer of many has been, "Create in me a clean heart, O God"; and they have been charmed by hearing that whosoever believes in Jesus is born again, to start on a new life, ruled by a new principle, and endowed with a new nature, sustained by the Holy Spirit. Oh, the loving-kindness of the Lord! You may measure heaven; you may fathom the sea; you may plunge into the abyss, and tell its depth; but the loving-kindness of the Lord is beyond you. Here is an infinite expanse. It is immeasurable, even as God Himself is beyond conception. It is everywhere about us, behind, before, beneath, above, within, without. Every day the Lord loads us with benefits. IV. THEN WE LEARN THAT THE GREAT MOTIVE OF THE DIVINE DRAWINGS IS EVERLASTING LOVE. Let your spirit lie and soak in this Divine assurance: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." Take it up into yourself as Gideon's fleece absorbed the dew. Notice, the Lord has done it. It is an actual fact, the Lord is loving you. Put those two pronouns together, "I" and "thee." "I," the Infinite, the inconceivably glorious—"thee," a poor, lost, undeserving, ill-deserving, hell-deserving sinner. See the link between the two! See the diamond rivet which joins the two together for eternity: "I have loved thee." See the antiquity of this love: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." I loved thee when I died for thee upon the Cross, yea, I loved thee long before, and therefore did I die. I loved thee when I made the heavens and the earth, with a view to thine abode therein: yea, I loved thee before I had made sea or shore. There is a beginning

for the world, but there is no beginning for the love of God to His people. Nor does that exhaust the meaning of "everlasting love." There has never been a moment when the Lord has not loved His people. There has been no pause, nor ebb, nor break in the love of God to His own. That love knows no variableness, neither shadow of turning. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." You may take a leap into the future, and find that love still with you. Everlasting evidently lasts for ever. We shall come to die, and this shall be a downy pillow for our death-bed, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." When we wake up in that dread world to which we are surely hastening, we shall find infinite felicity in "everlasting love." When the judgment is proclaimed, and the sight of the great white throne makes all hearts to tremble, and the trumpet sounds exceeding loud and long, and our poor dust wakes up from its silent grave, we shall rejoice in this Divine assurance: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." Roll on, ye ages, but everlasting love abides! Die out, sun and moon, and thou, O time, be buried in eternity, we need no other heaven than this, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love"! (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Three wonders:—I. A GREAT WONDER. 1. The object mentioned. "Thee." Most unworthy. 2. The attribute displayed. Love. What is it? 3. The person speaking. "I," whom ye have—(1) Doubted. (2) Despised. (3) Disregarded. II. A GREATER WONDER. "With an everlasting love." Wonderful to love us at all. More wonderful to love us with such a love. This love is everlasting in its—1. Counsels. 2. Conquests. 3. Continuance. 4. Consequence. III. THE GREATEST WONDER. "Therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." To send food to the hungry, is gracious in the wealthy; but to bring the hungry in the kindest manner to the royal table—this is wonderful indeed. We shall see here—1. A wonderful display. "I have drawn thee." Here is inferred our helplessness and unwillingness to come. God draws by many means. 2. A wonderful instrument. "Loving-kindness." The heavenly magnet. Kindness does not always go with love. God saves us. Here is kindness. But He does so in the best possible way. In the tenderest, most gentle manner. 3. A wonderful reason. "Therefore." God's reason is in Himself. Our salvation the fruit of everlasting love, and nothing else. Should we not love Him? (*W. J. Mayers.*)

Divine philanthropy before all time:—I. UNCREATED MEN ARE THE OBJECTS OF DIVINE LOVE. Men in actual existence are not everlasting; they are only creatures of a day, mere shadows passing upon the earth. But in the mind of the Infinite they are eternal. 1. Because He loved them He created them. 2. Because He loved them He created them what they are. He made them capable of enjoying every kind of happiness of which we have any conception. II. CREATED MEN ARE THE SUBJECTS OF DIVINE LOVE. 1. God's love in nature has a power to draw men to Him. His love in nature appears in two forms. (1) In the form of utility. Nature ministers to man's necessities and gratifications. (2) In the form of beauty. What is beauty, but the costume of love, the pictures and statues of love, nay the voice, the winning music of love? 2. God's love in mediation has a power to draw men to Him. The incarnation of Christ is at once the effect, the channel, and the instrument of Divine love, and the Divine love that draws with a moral magnetism of the highest measure. (*Homilist.*)

Constraining love:—I. THE LOVE OF GOD TOWARDS US. "From everlasting to everlasting" is the love, like the existence, of the living God. Simple, childlike faith in this grand truth is an essential element in all personal religion (1 John iv. 16). The life of the newborn soul may be said to begin with the uprising of this knowledge, this faith. II. THE PRACTICAL EXPRESSION OF GOD'S LOVE. 1. An external revelation (John iii. 16; 1 John iv. 9). Open your heart to the influence of the Cross of Calvary, comprehend in some measure the sacred sorrow of Him who there took the burden of our sins upon Him that He might bear them all away, and you can never doubt the "everlasting love" wherewith the Father loves you. 2. An internal force. Even in his Divine relations man is not a being to be compelled by resistless force to move in any path chosen for him, but one who is endowed with the wondrous power of yielding in response to persuasive influence a free and willing service (Hos. xi. 4). That is the noblest kind of persuasive influence which appeals not so much to our fears as our desires, which awakens not terror but love. (*Homiletic Magazine.*)

God's love for man:—I. His love for man is PERSONAL. "I have loved thee." 1. The distinguishing constitution He has given him. He has endowed him with more faculties of enjoyment than any other creature in the universe possesses. He has given him intellect, by which he

can enjoy the pleasures of meditation; social affection, by which he can enjoy the blessings of friendship; religious affinities, by which he can have sympathy with the source of all life and blessedness. 2. His wonderful mercy in the mediation of His Son. II. His love for man is ETERNAL. 1. Humanity had nothing to do with exciting it. 2. Christ had nothing to do with procuring it. Christ's mediation was the effect, not the cause of God's love for man. His mediation was no afterthought. The Lamb was slain before the foundation of the world. III. His love for man is ATTRACTING. 1. How attracting it is in its nature! Kindness is always attractive; and its attracting power is always in proportion to its spontaneity, disinterestedness, and magnanimity. 2. How attracting it is in its manifestation! Look at it—(1) In nature. The world overflows with Divine kindness. (2) In revelation. (*Homilist.*) *Everlasting love revealed:*—This startling remembrance came to Israel at a time when her sorrows were very great, and her sins were greater still. She dwelt with hope upon that Divine assurance of irrevocable favour: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." When earthly joys ebb out, it is a blessed thing if they make room for memories of heavenly visitations and gracious assurances. When you are at your lowest, it may happen that then the God of all grace comes in, and brings to your remembrance the love of your espousals, and the joy of former days, when the candle of the Lord shone round about you. At the same time, it was not merely a time of inward sorrow, but a period of refreshing from the presence of the Lord; for Jehovah was speaking in tones of sovereign grace, and pouring forth great rivers of promises, and seas of mercy. Sometimes you pour water down a dry pump, and that sets it working so that it pours forth streams of its own; and so, when our gracious God pours in His love into the soul, our own love begins to flow, and with it memory awakes, and a thousand recollections cause us to bring to mind the ancient love wherein we aforesaid delighted, and we cry, "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me." I. THE MARVELLOUS APPEARING. "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me." Here are two persons; but how different in degree! Here we have "me," a good-for-nothing creature, apt to forget my Lord, and to live as if there were no God; yet He has not ignored or neglected me. There is the High and Holy One, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, and He has appeared unto me. Between me and the great Jehovah there have been communications; the solitary silences have been broken. "The Lord hath appeared," hath appeared "unto me." Do I hear some asking; How is this? I understand that God appeared to Israel, but how to me? Let me picture the discovery of grace as it comes to the awakening mind, when it learns to sit at the feet of Jesus, saved by faith in the great sacrifice. Touched by the Spirit of God, we find that the Lord appeared to each one of us in the promises of His Word. Every promise in God's Word is a promise to every believer, or to every character such as that to which it was first given. Furthermore, "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me," in the person of His Son. God came to each believer in Christ Jesus. Say, "Yes, eighteen hundred years ago and more, the Lord in the person of His dear Son appeared unto me in Gethsemane, and on Calvary as my Lord, and my God, and yet my substitute and Saviour." Since that, the Lord has constantly appeared unto us in the power of His Holy Spirit. Do you remember when first your sin was set in order before your tearful eyes, and you trembled for fear of the justice which you had provoked? Do you remember when you heard the story of the Crucified Redeemer? when you saw the atoning sacrifice? when you looked to Jesus and were lightened? It was the Holy Spirit who was leading you out of yourself; and God by the Holy Spirit was appearing unto you. Now, we hold this appearance in precious memory: "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me." Many things are preserved in the treasure-house of memory; but this is the choicest of our jewels. How gracious, how glorious was the appearance of God in Christ Jesus to our soul! This appearance came in private assurance. To me it was as personal as it was sure. I used to hear the preacher, but then I heard my God; I used to see the congregation, but then I saw Him who is invisible. I used to feel the power of words, but now I have felt the immeasurable energy of their substance. God Himself filled and thrilled my soul. I cannot help calling your attention to the fact, that the Lord came in positive certainty. The text does not say, "I hoped so," or "I thought so"; but, "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying." To me it is bliss to say, "I know whom I have believed." My soul cannot content herself with less than certainty. I desire never to take a step upon an "if," or a "peradventure." I want facts, not fancies. II. THE MATCHLESS

DECLARATION. "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love." 1. Here is a word from God of amazing love. Jehovah saith, "I have loved thee." Think it over. Believe it. Stagger not at it. If the husband should say to his wife, "I have loved thee," she would believe him: it would seem only natural that he should do so. And when Jehovah says to you, a feeble woman, an unknown man, "I have loved thee," He means it. 2. Note, next, it is a declaration of unalloyed love. The Lord had been bruising, and wounding, and crushing His people, and yet He says, "I have loved thee." These cruel wounds were all in love. 3. This statement is a declaration of love in contrast with certain other things. What a difference between the false friendship of the world and sin, and the changeless love of God! You have provoked Him to jealousy by gods which were no gods, but He has never ceased His love. What a miracle of grace is this! How sweetly does immutability smile on us as we hear it say, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love"! 4. Thus, our text is a word of love in the past. "I have loved thee." We were rebels, and He loved us. We were dead in trespasses and in sins, and He loved us. We rejected His grace, and defied His warnings, but He loved us. The matchless declaration of the text is a voice of love in the present. The Lord loves the believer now. Whatever discomfort you are in, the Lord loves you. The text is a voice of love in the future. It means, "I will love thee for ever." God has not loved us with a love which will die out after a certain length of time: His love is like Himself, "from everlasting to everlasting." This is a declaration of love secured to us—secured in many ways. Did you observe in this chapter how the Lord secures His love to His people, first, by a covenant? Further, this love is secured by relationship. Will you dart your eye on to the ninth verse, and read the last part of it? "I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn." A man cannot get rid of fatherhood by any possible means. His love is pledged again by redemption. Read the eleventh verse, "For the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he." Would you see the indenture of God's covenant love? Behold it in the indented hands and feet of the Crucified Redeemer. This is a declaration of love Divinely confessed. The Lord has not sent this assurance to us by a prophet, but He has made it Himself—"The Lord hath appeared." Notice, that it is love sealed with a "yea." God would have us go no further in our ordinary speech than to say "yea, yea"; and surely we may be content with so much from Himself. His "yea" amounts to a sacred asseveration: "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love." III. THE MANIFEST EVIDENCE. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." Here are drawings mentioned. Have you not felt them? These were drawings resulting from love. He drew us because He loved us with an everlasting love. Other drawings of Divine goodness are resisted, resisted in some cases to the bitter end, and men justly perish; but the drawings of everlasting love effect their purpose. Here are drawings mentioned: these were drawings from God. How sweetly, how omnipotently, God can draw! We yield to the drawings because they come from the Lord's own hand, and their power lies in His love. As the drawings come from God, so are they drawings to God. Blessed is he whose heart is being drawn nearer and nearer to the Most High. The Lord assures us that these are drawings of His loving-kindness. However He draws, it is in love; and whenever He draws, it is in love. These drawings are to be continuous. "With loving-kindness have I drawn thee"; and He means to do the same evermore. Such a magnificent text as ours ought to make us consider two things. The first is, Is it so? Am I drawn? If God loves you with an everlasting love, He has drawn you by His loving-kindness: is it so or not? Has He drawn you by His Holy Spirit, so that you have followed on? Are you a believer? Do you carry Christ's cross? You have been drawn to this. Then take home these gracious words: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." If you have not been so drawn, do you not wish you were? But, child of God, if you know these drawings, and if it be true that God loves you with an everlasting love, then are you resting? "I have a feeble hope," says one. What? How can you talk so? He who is loved with an everlasting love, and knows it, should swim in an ocean of joy. Not a wave of trouble should disturb the glassy sea of his delight. What is to make a man happy if this will not? (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The Christian drawn unto God*.—I. "I HAVE LOVED THEE." The love of God differs from curs, and this in two respects

1. It is more abundant. Our love partakes of this narrowness of our nature—it can embrace but a few objects and it cannot travel far. But God is an infinite Being. He fills all space with His presence; there is no limit to His capabilities. His love is accordingly an infinite love. Our love is a taper, shining on a few objects only and on those dimly; the love of God is a sun, throwing its light wide as it is His good pleasure to throw it, pervading His universe, brightening and warming and gladdening millions on millions of objects as easily and effectually as one. 2. It is also a free, self-moving love. It rises spontaneously in His mind, as water rises in a fountain. It requires nothing in any object, no merit or amiableness or beauty or anything else, to call it forth. II. “I HAVE LOVED THEE WITH AN EVERLASTING LOVE.” There never was a period when God did not live and did not love you. He loved you before your father or mother or any one else loved you; He loved you before you were born; He loved you before the earth or the heavens were created; He loved you in the very first moment He loved at all. Would you tell how old His love to you is? You must first tell how old the Ancient of days Himself is. Would you measure His love to you? It must be with a line which can stretch to the beginning of eternity on the one hand, and reach to the end of it on the other. III. “I HAVE DRAWN THEE,” the Lord says; and this is very naturally and beautifully said here. Real love, we know, is always of a drawing nature. Its tendency ever is to bring near to us, or to lead us near to the object we love. “Give me my infant,” the tender mother says. “Let me if possible have my children around me,” says the affectionate father. So the Lord says here, “I have loved you, and therefore, because I have loved you, I have drawn you, drawn you to Myself.” When the soul at last turns to Christ and through Christ to God, it is because God in some way is working on that soul, and attracting and drawing it. IV. The Lord tells us in the text how HE DRAWS HIS PEOPLE TO HIM. “With loving-kindness have I drawn thee.” “My love to thee is so strong, that it not only impels Me to draw thee to Me, but it influences Me in all My conduct while drawing thee.” We may assign a twofold meaning to the words, regarding them as descriptive both of the means which the Lord employs to bring His people to Him, and of the manner in which He deals with them while bringing them. He will draw them by His loving-kindness, and He will draw them by that lovingly, most kindly and tenderly. (*C. Bradley, M.A.*) *New revelations of old truths*:—I. A REVELATION HAS BEEN MADE TO US OF DIVINE TRUTH. In a strange land, when the shadows of evening come on, the traveller has sometimes the consciousness that he is passing through the fairest scenes, he instinctively feels that the darkness is hiding from him the most wonderful revelations of nature. So we sometimes feel that we are in the presence of great truths, that have yet to be revealed to us. We feel, long before we understand. Our hearts burn within us, when we listen to words, the full meaning of which we do not comprehend. How strange it is, that when we have listened to the words of truth, we sometimes feel as if visions we had dimly seen were realised, or our confused thoughts were put into shape, and expressed in words, as if this was what we had heard before, or were on the point of thinking out for ourselves. Truth seems like the language of childhood, as if we were familiar with its tones, and had lived a former life, where we had heard its voice before. The heart recognises it as Divine. II. WE HAVE NEW REVELATIONS OF AN OLD TRUTH. With every Divine appearance came a revelation. He who appeared of old to the Church breathing words of love, hath in these last days spoken unto us. That last appearance was the most perfect expression of love, that last revelation left nothing unsaid that even Divine love could say. How much has love said in this world—how much it says to you this day. You have not found out yet the depth, the full significance of its revelations. You know something, you may know far more. The more you love, the more you will be capacitated for manifestations of love. We need new, constant assurances of the Divine love. We cannot live in the past alone. Do you ask why are new revelations necessary? Why is it not enough to be told once that God loves us? Why must we be told again and again? I answer, we should require assurances of love from a friend if we felt that our affinities with his pure nature were anything but entire, that we often pained him by our recklessness, and prevented his intercourse with us by our indifference; and surely, with all my frailties and sins, with the deep consciousness of my unworthiness, I need God to tell me that He loves me, and I want Him to repeat the assurance. There is, moreover, a peculiar sensitiveness about love; it craves for fresh utterances,

for strong, unequivocal assertions, just as Jonathan caused David to swear again, because he loved him as his own soul; so the love of God is so essential to us that we cannot live without it, we prize it above all things, and hence we long to hear, in the depths of our souls, the words, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love." III. THE LOVE OF GOD IS EVER NEW. It is an everlasting love. God loved you long before you realised His love. You have, perhaps, sometimes thought that He loved you because you loved Him: it is quite the reverse; you love Him because He first loved you. God will still love through all changes—in sorrow, in sickness, in old age, in death. God will love us for ever. His loves is always fresh; it is the same to-day as yesterday, and to-morrow it will be as to-day. IV. IT IS GOD'S LOVE THAT ATTRACTS MEN. This love draws. Men yield to this Divine power. This is the power of the Gospel; this subdued, this won you. What melted that heart of ice,—what, but the warm breath of love? What drew you, but the cords of love that were entwined about your heart? (*H. J. Bevis.*) *Love everlasting*.—What is love? Is it not delight in an object, and is it not desire to promote the well-being of an object? The love of God answers to these definitions. Some resolve love into self-love. We delight in what we love, therefore, say some, we love for the delight. But this is a serious error which may be refuted by a thousand facts. Just think of the facts by which you may refute this error. And let me here make two remarks concerning love generally.—First, its existence is universal, except as sin reigns and checks it; and, secondly, its work and its service are multiform and extensive. Men love, angels love, and God is love. We feel, and observe, and mark its existence on earth; we hear of it in heaven; and we know that there is but one place tenanted by beings capable of love who do not love, and that place is hell; and we also know that there is but one class of human beings from which it has departed, namely, souls that are lost. Love! It gushes forth from the throne of God; flows round the universe, and rises again to the level of its source. Like an inverted tree, it roots in heaven, and yet drops its fruit upon this wide world, and upon beings in the lowest terrestrial estate. Nor is love, to drop our figure, inactive or useless among the children of men even in their low estate. It unites, as in conjugal life, two streams of being and makes them one,—it causes the mother to forget her anguish and to make her bosom the refuge and the strength of helpless infancy—it makes parents ministering angels, and children bright morning stars in the household firmament—it creates all that is meant by home—it impoverishes itself to enrich others, and exposes itself to danger to protect and otherwise to serve others—it feeds the hungry; clothes the naked; shelters the homeless; takes charge of the orphan; attends at the sick-bed in the face of contagion; visits the captive in prison; weeps at the grave; builds hospitals; erects almshouses, asylums, and places of worship—it instructs, warns, entreats, reproves, consoles, and in ten thousand forms ministers to the creature while it worships the Creator—it renders benefits to the sinner and serves the Saviour; it intercedes on earth and it offers praise in heaven; it weeps here, it rejoices in the world above. Thus love, sanctified and directed by the Saviour of man and by the Spirit of all grace, makes God dwell in the man, and it causes the man to dwell in God. Such, speaking generally, is love. And love is everlasting. It is eternal—it ever will be, as it always hath been. As a principle it is eternal. It will never die. It will never die from the human heart. In all redeemed human spirits love will live an eternal life. Some emotions will pass away as the clouds; others will abide as the blue firmament itself; and among these love in redeemed humanity will have the pre-eminence. Now, connect these ideas of love with the everlasting love of God. Jehovah here says, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." Only the love of God is from everlasting. The love of unfallen angels and of redeemed men hath immortality—it is to everlasting, but not from everlasting. God's love alone hath eternity—eternity embracing past, present, and future. There are four things which we would notice here concerning the everlasting love of God. 1. It is not derived, or imparted, or excited by us in the sense of being awakened by us. We are the occasion in part of its being aroused and expressed, but it is not a derived or imparted love. Ours is a love that is as a spark from the great fire that burns in God's heart, fire of love that is underived, self-existent, independent. 2. It is perfect, it is impossible to add anything to it, nor could anything be taken from it without rendering it imperfect, it is as complete as love can be found. 3. Instead of being divorced from the other attributes and affections of God, it is allied with them

all—love and self-existence, love and independence, love and omnipotence, love and boundless wisdom, love and unspotted purity, love and undeviating righteousness. 4. In all respects is the love of God, Godlike—equal with God. Verily, that man is loved whom God loves. What though no creature may care for him, if God loves him he is loved for ever, and infinitely loved; he is loved with all the strength of the Divine affection; on the other hand, he knows not what it is to be loved in perfection, who does not know and believe the love of God for us. Just look further, at the love of God when embracing sinful men, and notice three things about it. 1. It is personal in its objects. He loves you individually; and His loving a large number is by His loving each one in that number. 2. Although embracing sinners, the love of God is discriminating, and pure, and righteous love. It delights where it can delight, and seeks the good of its object in every form, and in the highest degree. 3. The love of God follows those whom it embraces. It was prolonged to the seed of Abraham beyond numerous apostasies and spiritual adulteries; it is prolonged to us beyond seasons of declension and of backsliding. The love of God goes after us. It follows us into every new relationship, into every new duty, into every new trial, into every new temptation, into fresh provocation, and claims upon God's forbearance; it follows us through life into death, and through death into immortality. (*S. Martin.*)

Divine love.—I. DIVINE LOVE IS A FACT; there can be no doubt of the teaching of Scripture on this subject. The God of the Bible is a God of love, He is a Father in heaven, He cares for men, watches over them, guides them, saves them. What more beautiful symbols of Divine love and watchfulness can there be than that of the Good Shepherd in search of those who have wandered away from Him—of the lost sheep; and when He finds the lost one He lays it on His shoulder rejoicing. This attitude of Divine love is the very core of the Gospel; and it is surely a blessed truth for us, although it is sometimes hard for us to realise it. 1. It may seem strange, yet it is true, that there are hearts who can more readily feel that God is angry with them than that God really loves them. The instinct of conscious guilt is fear, and when the sense of sin is strongly awakened, we are apt to turn away from God and to feel as if God must hate us. 2. We feel, as it were, in other moments that the human heart is strangely inconsistent. We feel as if the powers of nature were strong in us, and the sense of sin dies down; we feel as if God would overlook our sins, and that we are not so sinful after all; we feel as if we might trust to His goodness, as if it were, so to speak, good nature. But this is equally inconsistent with true spiritual experience. To all that is evil in human life and human history, whether in Gentile or in Jew, God is a consuming fire. II. GOD LOVES US EVERLASTINGLY. The fact of Divine love is not only sure in itself, it is never uncertain in incidence. Whatever appearances there may seem to the contrary, it is still there. No cloud can extinguish it, however it may obscure it; no misery, born of the depths of human despair, no tragedy of human agony or of human crime, can make that love doubtful; it is still there, it is around us, it is with us; its everlasting arms are holding us even when we cannot feel it, and grasping us in its soft embrace although our feet may be bleeding and sore with the hardness of the road along which we travel. All sorrow is a gift, and every trouble that the heart of man has, an opportunity. You may not know this now, you may never know it, and yet it is true. God's love knows no relenting. "My will for you is a will of good without variableness or shadow of turning." "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love." Just a few words only as to the last point—"I have loved thee; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." III. THE LOVE OF GOD IS INDIVIDUAL; it is personal; it is the love of one loving heart to another; it is no mere impersonal conception of supreme benevolence; it is the love of a father to a child, the love of a mother to a daughter; it would not be love otherwise, for it is a distinguishing idea of love that it discriminates its object. How personal always was the ministry of our Lord! "Come unto Me." "Take up My cross." "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" (*Principal Tulloch.*)

The love of God.—I. A DECLARATION OF GOD'S LOVE. God is love; that is His nature—love in the abstract; not simply loving, kind, tender, benevolent, good, but love. This love displays itself in Christ. The fatherhood of God is nowhere seen in its royalty, but it is in its exhibition in Jesus Christ. This love He declares has this peculiarity—that it is everlasting. 1. It had no birthday. Go back through a past eternity, still you find no date for its commencement. Find out a day when the Lord Jesus was not loved by the Father, and you have the day

when the Church was not loved by Him; you will arrive at the time when His love first began to the Church, for He says, "Thou hast loved them as Thou hast loved Me, and Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world." It foresaw all the rebellion, backslidings, frailties, sins, infirmities—everything that would characterise the individual upon whom that love rested; and yet the Lord loved you, because He would love you; and that is the only reason that love itself can assign, because He would keep the covenant which He made with His own Son for you. 2. As it had no birthday, so it has no changing day. Like its Author, it is immutable, unvarying. There is nothing that can occur in reference to the objects on whom God's love is fixed that He did not foresee, and there is no change that can occur in the Divine mind as to any improvement in His plan and order of government, or manifestation of mercy to man. (1) This love bestowed upon you the greatest blessings before conversion. Strange to say, and yet it is a great and solemn truth, that while you were an enemy it gave you Christ—gave you the Spirit to regenerate you. Love, ere you were born, was manifested towards you—made the covenant, formed the plan of mercy by which you might be saved. (2) This love changes its dispensations, not its nature. Who questions a father's love when he corrects a rebellious son? Who doubts the teacher's love when he compels his pupil to apply his mind to the subject of instruction? So God acts. If it be necessary to make you diligent in His service, to overcome temptation, to draw you away from the world and its vanities and its corruptions, He may deprive you of property, He may remove an idol, He may stain your pride, He may bereave you of one who is as your own soul, He may prostrate your honour in the dust, He may suffer your own family to rise against you; and the very spring of all this is love. 3. It has no dying day. Love is a golden chain, one end of which is fixed to God's throne in eternity past, and the other end to His throne in eternity to come. This love of God is a bond not to be dissolved, a union never to be broken, a depth which cannot be fathomed, a height which can never be scaled, a length which can never be traversed, a breadth which cannot be measured, a science that passeth all knowledge, a fire which many waters cannot quench, a flame which the floods cannot drown, a sovereign stronger than death, a constrainer which cannot be overcome, a breastplate which cannot be pierced, a safeguard which casts out all fear, an inhabitant that can never be removed, a preventive to every evil, a catholicon for all woe. "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life," &c. II. THE MANNER IN WHICH THIS LOVE IS DISPLAYED; or the evidences by which we may ascertain that we possess it. 1. See how with loving-kindness He has drawn you in the paths of providential arrangement! Begin with the earliest dawn of memory: why were you drawn to such a school? Why did you form such friendships? Did not that love draw you to a situation, a locality as foreign to your thoughts as can well be, give you prosperity, make you influential, happy and blessed, and a blessing to others? What a constraint, often inexplicable, has it put upon your inclinations to accomplish an object which, had it been granted, you afterwards saw would have been your ruin! But the cord stayed you, the love was thrown around you to keep you back. Afflictions, too, have been some of the most beneficial cords of love that have visited you—cords which confined your aspirations and checked your vanity, taught you to pray, taught you to sympathise with others, taught you to love. 2. In the progress of regeneration this is wondrously manifested. 3. In the experimental enjoyment of His favour we see this Divine discovery. Your life has consisted of so many steps from one manifestation of Divine love to another. 4. Practical remarks. (1) Every soul who hears me may be interested in this love. (2) How humbling the contrast of our love to God! How inconstant, how feeble, how spiritless is our love! (3) Let us imitate God in His dealings with us. If we would prevail with others, we shall find that the cords of love are better than the rod of Moses. Neither ministers nor private Christians can scare men into the ways of godliness; no threats will frighten a man to be holy. (*J. Sherman.*) *Everlasting love*:—I. THE GREAT SOURCE OF REDEMPTION—"everlasting love"—love without beginning, love without change, and love without end. 1. Everlasting love is love without a beginning. The eternity of Divine love is a subject which we cannot fathom, but we may look at it in relation to our own being. Go back behind creation, before the Divine will had generated a single atom of matter, and in that very mind we discover ourselves in a perfect, living, actual conception. Our subjective being was embraced, nourished, and delighted in by "everlasting love." The

love of God is not an emotion of delight created by the appearance of comeliness, but delight itself; not an emotion excited by beauty, but beauty itself. There is a tendency in the human mind to thrust itself behind the birthday of time, and fall—where? Into the arms of “everlasting love.” 2. “Everlasting love” is love without change. Man, in relation to the eternity of God, must be regarded as a whole. “Everlasting love” embraces that whole. Our first impulse is to regard it as encircling the pure and the innocent, but turning aside from the disobedient and simple. It is not so, for the Word says, “God so loved the world.” Sin has transformed a paradise into a wilderness, a heaven into a hell, but sin cannot change “everlasting love.” That explains it all. 3. “Everlasting love” is love without end. On every Mohammedan tombstone the inscription begins, “He remains,” i.e., God. To-day we will write on every gravestone, The love of God remains. Ah, there are many gravestones besides those in the churchyard. You may imagine inscriptions like these: “To the memory of friendship”; “To the memory of parental and filial affection”; “To the memory of marriage sacredness and devotion.” But those fires, which once burnt brightly, have gone out for want of fuel, or for something that is worse. Should there be an aching void or bitter disappointment because former sources of affection have dried up, let us not turn to the devil to supply their places, but let us turn to the “everlasting love” of God. II. THE METHOD OF REDEMPTION. “Therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.” We sometimes think that our Heavenly Father deals with us harshly, or unkindly. Yes, why the cross and not the crown? You see the child running in from the garden full of tears, and saying, “Something has hurt me.” On examination it is found that a thorn is in one of the fingers. Then the gentlest of hands will endeavour to extract it. When she is doing so, the child will cry out, “Oh, mother, you hurt me.” Ah, it is not the mother that hurts, but the thorn. When God takes out the thorn, we think that He hurts us. Not so, it is the thorn. Even God cannot take sin out of the heart but that it will give pain. 1. In dealing with the attractions of “everlasting love,” we must bear in mind the fact that we can only be saved by attraction. Graco begins its work by transforming the heart into the image of the Son of God. One grain of the Saviour’s love in that heart will leaven the whole. The sinner must be made willing to part with his sin. The power to effect this comes from God, but it can only be applied when the willing cry rends his heart, “Lord, save, or I perish.” 2. Consider the particular form which God’s loving-kindness has assumed in order to attract man to virtue. Under what aspects has mercy appeared unto men? We look back, and see an altar, and a victim, and a priest. But we soon learn that these are only types, yet, God’s mercy pursued man in times of yore, and does now, and everywhere. To-day, it is not altar, victim, or priest; but the Son of God, in a body like our own, and bearing up under the vicissitudes of life. In Christ Jesus we have the picture of loving-kindness. Sometimes that picture is in words of sympathy, of love, of encouragement, and inspiration. “Never man spake like this Man.” At other times the picture is in deeds,—the most gracious and marvellous. The sick are healed. The blind see. The deaf hear. The dead live. Is the picture overdrawn? (T. Davies, M.A.) *The place of love among Divine attributes*:—According to the Catechism of the Westminster Assembly, “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.” A very comprehensive and noble definition, no doubt! yet did it never strike you as strange that there is no mention of love here? This appears a very remarkable omission, as remarkable as if an orator, who undertook to describe the firmament, left out the sun, or an artist in painting the human face, made it sightless, and gave no place on the canvas to those beaming eyes which impart to the countenance its life and expression. Why did an assembly, for piety, learning, and talents, the greatest perhaps that ever met in England, or anywhere else, in that catalogue of Divine attributes, assign no place to love? Unless we are to understand the term “goodness” as comprehending love, the omission may be thus explained and illustrated. Take a globe, and observing their natural order, lay upon its surface the different hues of the rainbow; give it a rapid motion around its axis, and now the colours vanish. As if by magic the whirling sphere instantly changes into purest white, presenting to our eyes a visible and to our understanding a palpable proof that the sunbeam is not a simple but a compound body, thread spun of various rays which, when blended into one form light; so all the attributes acting together make love, and that because God is just, powerful, holy, good,

and true, of necessity, therefore, "God is love." (*T. Guthrie, D.D.*) *The wonder of Divine love* :—Is it not an unheard-of wonder that so strong a stream of infinite love should run underground for so many years, and that so many rebellions all that while should not dam it up, but that it should hold on its course uninterrupted, and work out all that had obstructed the current of it, and at last bubble up at a time designed, and save, and wash, and purify the wretched, defiled creature? (*T. Goodwin.*) *The love of Christ perennial* :—They tell us that the sun is fed by impact, from objects from without, and that the day will come when its furnace flames shall be quenched into grey ashes. But Christ's love is fed by no contributions from without, and will outlast the burnt-out sun, and gladden the ages of ages for ever. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The love of God suggested by human love* :—Would that we might understand the meaning of the expression, "The love of God." It is hinted at in this world. Passing along the streets, one hears the words of a song or catches the strains of a piece of music being played, and he says, "That is from Beethoven or Mozart, I recognise the movement." So in this life, we catch strains of the love of God. We behold it in the mother's disinterested, self-denying love; we see it in the lover's glow, and in the little child's innocent affection; but these things are only hints. *The magnetic influence of God's loving-kindness* :—What a delightful thing it is to be drawn. Scarcely anybody likes to be driven, but there are very few who don't in their hearts enjoy the drawing process. Cast round about the heart those mysterious cords of love, as soft as silk, and yet as strong as steel; ah! they can't be resisted, and the wonder of it is that there is any desire to resist them. Love has conquered us. These cords have been let down from heaven to encircle us and lift us up out of the pit, just as was done to Jeremiah when he was in the pit; they let ropes down, and presently he was drawn up to life and liberty again. Ah, yes, it was the Cross that drew most of us. What a magnet is the story of the Cross! The power of the atonement has been felt by all of us who have believed, so that we were made willing to enter into the blessing of God. Some of us scarcely know how, but we found ourselves beneath the blood-stained tree. We turned our back upon it for many a year, but it turned us round at last. Blessed be the name of our loving Saviour! these cords are still drawing men to Jesus. I wonder how any one can resist the love of God in Jesus Christ! I saw some little children in a Brixton street the other day playing with a magnet. It was evidently a new toy, and they found much pleasure in this little instrument. What amused me was, that one child ran and brought a stone, another a piece of glass, to see if the magnet influenced them. You know, of course, the result; but the children did not know—they were experimenting. It seems as if we ministers are too much like those dear little ones. We have a magnet, but oh, how few there are who yield to the attracting power! The fault is not with the instrument, for Christ has said, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me." Your hearts need changing; there is not as yet in you anything that responds to the call; nothing that answers to the message of His love. Oh! I pray you, ere you rest to-night, fall on your knees and implore God to touch your heart till the story of the Cross moves it and Jesus wins it. (*Thomas Spurgeon.*) *The attractive power of kindness* :—A new teacher came to the little school district, who was the beginning of a new order of things to others as well as Dwight L. Moody. She opened the exercises the first morning with prayer, and that made a great impression upon the boys. But they were still more astonished when she told them that she intended to have good order, and yet have it without whipping any one. Ere long Dwight had broken one of the rules, and was asked to remain after school. He supposed she had decided to whip him in private, and expected the usual punishment. To his surprise, as soon as they were alone, the teacher began to talk in the kindest way to him, telling him how it grieved her to have him disobey. This was harder on Dwight than a whipping. Finally she said, "I have made up my mind that if I cannot rule the school by love, I will give it up. I will have no punishment. If you love me, try and keep the rules, and help me in the school." This was too much for Dwight, and he surrendered at once. "You will never have any more trouble with me," he answered, "and I will whack the first boy that makes you any trouble!" And "whack" him he did, the very next day, to the surprise of his companions and the consternation of the teacher.

Ver. 6. Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion unto the Lord our God.—

The watchman's message to Israel:—I. THE MESSAGE OF THE WATCHMEN. 1. The Jewish people had been overthrown, taken captive, and dispersed. They were therefore to all appearance a forsaken people, their land bereft of its inhabitants was desolate, and they were removed from all they held most dear to them on earth, from the glory of their former national independence, and from the temple in which they and their fathers had worshipped through many generations. But they were to be restored to their old places, to the land of all others they held most sacred, to their former worship with all its wondrous beauty, and to the national distinctions and privileges which had so long marked their history. Some effort on their part was however necessary, they were to arise and then go up to Zion unto the Lord their God. And in Him too we find the motive of all our efforts to arise from thoughtlessness and folly, and the object worthy of our life's battle and of our life's journey. We pray you to think upon this. When you are asked to awake out of spiritual sleep,—when you are told the night is far spent and the day of God's judgment is fast coming,—when any public or private duty is urged upon your attention,—when we utter warning voices, in the midst of homes and friends, at the most glad some times,—it is that you also should arise, and go—not unto the priest alone, not unto the altar alone, not unto the Church alone, but that you first and chiefly should go unto “the Lord your God.” 2. It is true this message may be regarded in a prospective point of view. “For,” it is said, “there shall be a day,” &c. To us the message is a present one. At the birth of Christ a new era of life and liberty commenced for the Gentiles and for all the families of earth. We live amid the ruins of our own inherent depraved nature. We have the evidence within and around us that we are in bonds. But the cry of the watchman is sent to us now: and if we will be only wise enough to exercise our common senses, and rouse ourselves up from our spiritual lethargy, and seek for God's help and mercy, we may arise, and go up among the congregations of His people, and realise in our hearts the great blessedness of His personal favour and presence of love. II. LESSONS. 1. One lesson to be inferred is the groundwork for the present aspiration of the Jew, and we may add, in another sense, the present aspiration of the Christian. The testimony of the prophecies of the Old Testament is supported by the testimony of providence. Even if the Jew should care but little, if anything, about the ancient prophecies, yet he is moved by “the signs of the times.” And more, he is influenced by feelings which he cannot account for, but which, when examined by the light of prophecy, receives an explanation in God's interposition by some means either direct or indirect. The Christian knows in a thousand ways that this earth, with all its gold, and honours and pleasures, is not our rest, and therefore how natural, like the Jew, that he should turn the eye of his faith to the city of his love, even in the heavens, the place which God has promised him for evermore. It is but reasonable that he should long for that. 2. Another lesson we are taught by the text is, namely, that the Almighty and Eternal Saviour of His people is to be found in the use of the ordinances of His Church. (W. D. Horwood.)

Ver. 9. *They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them.*—*The penitent sinner returning to his God*:—I. SOME OF THE FIRST STEPS BY WHICH A SINNER RETURNS TO HIS OFFENDED GOD. 1. Contrition; a heartfelt sorrow and grief on account of his sins. Many causes may conspire to awaken the sinner; but, as soon as the natural blindness of his heart begins to be removed, fear and alarm will be among the earliest effects. The apprehension of God's future judgment stops him in his course; fills his heart with terror, and his eyes with tears. He has also a more immediate cause of alarm, in the state of his own mind and heart. Beginning now, for the first time, to abhor iniquity, he is confounded on discovering its power and dominion within him. Something more than this is required, in order to make a true and lasting penitent. After trembling under the condemnation of the law, and mourning over your corrupt nature, you must look upon Christ, and behold in Him the effects of your guilt. 2. From penitent tears, the next step is to fervent prayer. II. ABUNDANT AID IS PROMISED TO THOSE WHO ARE SETTING OUT ON THEIR RETURN TO GOD. 1. God will help the repenting sinner by holy influences; by inspiring him with holy desires, and restraining the corrupt inclinations of the natural mind. 2. He will come to your aid with His refreshing consolations. These are the rivers of waters, by which He will cause you to walk. 3. The repentant sinner is assured of instruction, sufficient to guide him on his way, and easy to be comprehended and followed,

4. He, who leads the sinner into the way of light and consolation, will also uphold him therein. (*J. Jowett, M.A.*) *Christian pilgrims*:—I. **THEIR CHARACTER.** 1. There is no discouragement which God will not enable us to surmount. 2. God has chosen those who are in the most discouraging circumstances on purpose that His own power may be the more displayed and glorified. II. **THEIR JOURNEY.** 1. Its commencement. 2. Its progress. Address—(1) Those who yet are in a state of bondage. (2) Those who are travelling towards Zion. (*C. Simeon, M.A.*) **In a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble.**—*A beaten track*:—Here there is a well-beaten track under our feet. Let us keep it. It may not be quite the shortest way; it may not take us through all the grandeur and sublimity which bolder pedestrians might see: we may miss a picturesque waterfall, a remarkable glacier, a charming view: but the track will bring us safe to our quarters for the night. (*R. W. Dale, M.A.*)

Vers. 10, 11. **Hear the Word of the Lord, O ye nations.**—*God's Word*:—I. **THE WORD OF THE LORD.** 1. The sublimity and mystery of the doctrine it reveals. 2. The purity and spirituality of its doctrines. 3. The harmony of its different authors. 4. The fulfilment of its predictions and promises. 5. The enmity that is in the carnal mind against it. 6. The power that it has upon the human heart. II. **THE PREACHER'S WORD.** 1. To be preached wholly. Doctrine, experience, and practice. 2. To be preached freely. 3. To be preached affectionately and warmly. 4. To be preached constantly. III. **THE DUTY OF THE HEARER**—TO HEAR. 1. To prepare in the closet for hearing. 2. To believe what is heard. 3. To reduce what is heard to practice. (*G. J. Till.*) **He that scattered Israel will gather him.**—*Development by crises*:—This is an entirely reassuring message for a nation passing through an ecclesiastical crisis. It tells us that vast upheavals of thought and life have their place in the plan of God, advance under His sovereign leadership, and are compelled to contribute to the carrying-out of His purpose to redeem, remake, and reunite with Himself, the whole race of man. It is a rigid truth, "God scatters Israel"; the Israel He Himself called and created; and it is an infinite solace to know that the "scattering" is His and not another's. It is an equally indisputable fact that the God who scatters Israel gathers him again and keeps him as a shepherd his flock. He gathered before He scattered, and He will gather again after He has scattered. Israel will not perish. Never! The social and ecclesiastical moulds in which her life is cast may be broken again and again; but the life endures. God is the God of salvation. He is always mindful of His own. Hope in Him, and hope for evermore! That swift upheal of faith and hope to the summits of clearest vision is vindicated by the whole story of the Exile. The joy that was set before the strong soul of the seer in these days of crushing disaster was realised in the experiences of the succeeding centuries. The prophecy was fulfilled. The crisis was educational, purifying, expanding, uplifting, and unifying; divisive for the day and the hour, but uniting on purer principles and for broader and higher ideals for evermore. As men are educated by their mistakes, and even their sins become as staves in a ladder by which they climb to God, so the Israelites "rose on stepping stones of their dead selves to higher things." The sevenfold blessing of the Exile stands written in the unimpeachable Chronicles of Israel, and the world. But, a greater than Jeremiah, describing the facts of His own day and ministry, says, "The wolf scattereth the sheep." For again, nearly six hundred years after the time of the prophet, there was another "crisis in the Church" of Israel, and another exile was at the doors. Once more the holy city was to be trodden under foot of men, and the holy people were already seized by the "wolf," and about to be "scattered" to the ends of the earth! The significance of the first exile was forgotten. The lessons of experience were unheeded by the leaders of the Jewish people. Priest, and scribe, and Pharisee had corrupted religion again; taught that the outward rites of worship were of more importance than keeping the commandments of God; substituted ceremonialism for obedience, and the use of the sacraments for loving service of man. And so the sheep were scattered. But this is exactly the same spirit which broke the heart of the prophet Jeremiah until he saw it overtaken by the Divine punishment; and then, passing by the iniquity of the leaders of the people, and looking at the penalty which, because it was inflicted by God, had in it an element of recuperation and of hope, he said, God scatters; but "He that scattered Israel will gather him." These are, then, two ways of regarding two similar crises, and both are necessary to a just and full

interpretation of their meaning. Jesus, speaking to the authoritative religious leaders of Israel, who have, sincerely enough, it may be, but mistakenly, made themselves the foes of God and men, seeks to lay bare their guilt, and therefore fixes upon and exposes the wolf-like ravages wrought on the religious life of the people by their absolute want of the veriest shreds of real religion. His aim is to convict these leaders of the wrong they are doing to their God and to their country. Not so Jeremiah: he is anticipating the great word, "Comfort ye My people; speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; that she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." But the richest draught of consolation in Jeremiah's Gospel is in the assertion of the principle on which these national and institutional changes proceed. God's goal, he says, is always constructive, not destructive; the gathering together in one the children of God that are scattered abroad, and not the driving them away from home and fatherland. He shatters the social form of Israel's life for the sake of the more perfect and adequate rebuilding of the nobler Israel on the basis of His original redemptive idea. This law is older than all Churches, more fundamental than all States, and as wide and deep as our human life. It is the vital condition of progress. God is at war with the obsolete. He is the living God, and seeks life, and promotes life. The Churches are secondary to the kingdom. They exist for religion, and not religion for them. As words are to ideas, tools to service, so are Churches to the kingdom of God and the service of man, and therefore "the crisis in the Church" is not likely to be inimical to religion in the end. It will promote real religion, expand it, clear it of the accretions of the past, set it free of the false alliances into which it has entered, convert it from its paganisms, and restore it to its original purity and vigour. And now, what is to be our attitude to these crises in the religious life of our country? Surely, not merely one of silent acquiescence in and gratitude for the work of God, but rather of intelligent, prayerful, large-hearted, and wise co-operation. We are called to be co-workers with Him, to fall in with His laws, to take part in the furtherance of His beneficent work of scattering and gathering His Israel. Our first business is to get on the side of His laws, of His justice and righteousness, at all costs; not to seek the pleasant paths of neutrality and indifference, but to accept boldly the responsibilities placed upon us by our subjection to Christ, and by the exposition and application of His Gospel to the manifold needs of our time. We must begin with ourselves. He who would free others must himself be free. (*J. Clifford, D.D.*) *God's grace shown to Israel*.—I. GOD'S DEALING WITH THEM IN THE PAST. 1. Redeemed them (ver. 11). 2. Remembered them (ver. 20). 3. Loved them (ver. 3). 4. Drew them (ver. 3). II. GOD'S PROMISE TO THEM IN THE FUTURE. He will forgive them (ver. 34). He will forget their sin (ver. 34). He will gather them out (ver. 8). He will keep them near (ver. 10). He will lead them on (ver. 9). He will prosper them in the way (ver. 12). He will satisfy them fully (ver. 14). He will watch over them continually (ver. 28). (*C. Inglis.*)

Ver. 12. *Their soul shall be as a watered garden*.—*The watered garden*; or, *the possibilities of soul life*:—The watered garden has three characteristics. I. ITS FRESHNESS. Rapid evaporation in hot, dry seasons in the East. Unwatered surface; hard, dry, crusted over, and perhaps cracked. In the watered garden, vegetation continues to spring fresh and joyous. So a Christian man may be fresh and vigorous in soul in the midsummer heat of business life, and in seasons of spiritual drought in the Church. Even when the hot winds of temptation blow directly from the burning desert of sin, his leaf shall not wither, and the manifestations of his spiritual life shall not shrink nor be corrupted (Psa. i. 3). II. ITS FERTILITY. Water is always a fertiliser. It contains some sediment. The Nile has spread from thirty to forty feet of alluvium over the surface of Egypt. In England, artificial fertilisers are distributed to the soil by irrigation. It is therefore a fine figure by which the increased fertility of a watered garden represents the possible fruitfulness of a Christian soul. If it be objected that the illustration will not hold, since fertilisers increase the capacity of a soil to bring forth weeds as well as grain, it is answered, A watered garden is always a cultivated garden. Abundance of grace in the heart will both increase and insure faithfulness. III. ITS BEAUTY. It is said when the Spaniards invaded Mexico they were astonished at the beautiful gardens of the Aztecs. These western people had constructed a finer system of irrigation, and brought horticulture to a degree of perfection

unknown to haughty Spain. The religion of Christ develops the finest, strongest, noblest capacities of our being. (*J. C. Allen.*) *A watered garden*:—To make a good garden four things are necessary. See what they teach about soul culture.

I. GOOD SOIL. A minister in London was conducting a series of special religious services for young people. At the close of one of them a young lady, the daughter of one of the church officials, came into the inquiry room in great trouble. He was surprised to see her, as he had always thought her to be a good girl. "Oh, sir," she said, "I have such a wicked heart; how can I be saved?" The Holy Spirit had shown her the first necessity.

II. GOOD SEED. Sow nothing ugly, harmful, or useless. Be fragrant like the rose, humble like the lily, useful like the myrtle.

III. WELL WATERED. Souls need refreshing. If we would keep them alive for God, we must use the means of grace. 1. The Bible. 2. Private prayer. 3. Public worship. 4. WELL WEDED. 1. Early. 2. A little every day. 3. By the roots. (*W. H. Booth.*)

Spiritual prosperity:—I. SOME IDEAS SUGGESTED BY THE COMPARISON OF THE SOUL OF THE RIGHTEOUS OR GODLY TO A GARDEN. 1. A garden is a spot of ground upon which extraordinary cultivation is employed; it is usually separated and enclosed from common ground, and much labour and attention are employed to improve its soil, and to enrich it with those fruits and vegetables which are pleasant and profitable; and such is spiritually the state of every pious soul. Every real Christian is "a garden walled around—chosen, and made peculiar ground." 2. A garden is generally stored with various kinds of those vegetable productions that are either useful or ornamental. So out of the soul renewed by grace, does the Lord cause to spring up and grow every Christian virtue and heavenly grace that is either pleasing to God, or useful to man. 3. A garden does not arrive at its full perfections and glory at once. So it is with the Christian's graces; at first they are weak and small. His knowledge is very contracted and confused, he "sees men as trees walking"; his faith is unsteady and wavering, his love is limited within narrow bounds, and his hope too often droops and hangs its head.

II. THOSE DIVINE INFLUENCES BY WHICH THIS SPIRITUAL GARDEN IS WATERED. 1. The influences of the Spirit of God are imparted to every real Christian, and produce effects that resemble those which warm and refreshing showers have upon the productions of a garden (*Isa. lxi. 3*). 2. These influences are enjoyed and conveyed to the soul by the means of God's Word and ordinances. 3. HOW MUCH THIS HAPPY STATE AND THESE ENRICHING INFLUENCES ARE TO BE DESIRED BY EVERY IMMORTAL SOUL. 1. Till we attain these, we are in a most desolate, wild, barren condition; yea, in an accursed and ruined state. 2. It is only by attaining this state, that we can arrive at true happiness either here or hereafter. 3. Unless we are in this state we cannot glorify God, nor be useful to our fellow-creatures as we ought. Learn from the whole, the need, the abundant need, we have daily to ask for Divine influences; and we should seek these influences sincerely. Ask evangelically; that is, according to the Gospel method of approaching unto God; with entire dependence upon the mediation of Jesus Christ. Ask importunately; that is, persevere till you obtain the blessing, and the more you have wrestled for it, the more you will value it when obtained. Ask believably; that is, in constant expectation of obtaining; do not question His power, His goodness, or His faithfulness. (*J. Sewell.*)

Soul culture:—The prophet is predicting the time when Israel's captivity shall end and prosperity shall crown adversity and want and poverty shall be no more. The prospect describes not only material, but also spiritual abundance, and both conditions are to be realised through painstaking diligence. The soul—what is it? That which is the highest and noblest part of our nature; which is the seat of reason, affection, conscience, and will; which gives us affinity with things unseen and Divine. We are strangely indifferent at times to the interests of this valuable possession. We have gymnasiums and systems of calisthenics and rules of diet and habit for the body; we are very eager to devise the most expeditious methods of promoting the education of the mind; but we do not give a commensurate emphasis to the discipline of the spiritual. But as a man cannot have a sound and well-grown body or a mature and well-equipped mind without training, so is it impossible for him to have a healthy, thoroughly developed soul without process of cultivation. Let us inquire as to what means are necessary for the unfolding of the spiritual nature. 1. First of all we may mention the need of religious thinking. He is the best business man who can not only adapt himself to the routine and mechanism of his work, but can also discern the underlying principles of it, appreciate its wider relations and foresee its possibilities, who is not only the

business actor, but the business thinker. Likewise one must consider religious facts and principles and truths in order that he may appropriate them and become wisely, fundamentally religious. Theology is, as it always has been, the most commanding of sciences; for it is man's thought about God, and man is always restlessly inquisitive in his attempts to search out the secrets of the Infinite. If one is to be large minded he must think large thoughts, and the greatest ideas that can enter the mind are the religious ideas. Again, it is to be urged that this religious intelligence is important for the sake of religious conduct. We hear it said that it matters not much what a man thinks, provided he does what is right, a statement which is entirely lacking in wisdom, because there is an inevitable sequence of cause and effect between thinking and doing. To give a single instance, whatever righteousness there was in the Jewish life was the reflection of the Ten Commandments—the Jewish conception of righteousness. We must see that our religious thinking has its basis in Scripture. We must take our start in the accepted record, if we would be true and wise, for Christianity is, first of all, not a philosophy, but a history. And the stimulus which the Bible gives us will come not only from being acquainted with its facts and principles and truths, but from breathing the atmosphere which emanates from its pages. It is a book instinct with life.

2. Another means of religious culture is prayer. No man can be truly religious if he does not pray, for religion is a personal relationship between man and God; and prayer is the one supreme act by which the door is opened, and one stands in the conscious presence of his Maker.

3. Still another means must be adopted in the cultivation of the spiritual life, and that is public worship.

4. To all other means implied in the spiritual culture there must be added rightness of action. No man can be truly religious whose devoutness is not rooted in integrity. There is a religiousness which easily lifts itself into ecstasies, which has no connection with the life. "A new commandment I give unto you," Christ declares, "that ye love one another." Oh, to live out of ourselves; to spend and be spent; to plan and work that we may do good to our homes, to our Church, to our community, and to all our fellow-men—that is to make our spiritual life real and abundant. May we ever be refreshed by that Divine presence, that we may grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord, and that our souls may be luxuriant and fruitful as a watered garden. (*H. P. Dewey.*)

The garden of the soul:—

A "watered garden" suggests the idea of—I. A FRAGRANT FRESHNESS. What a difference there is in the plants of a garden after they have been watered by the dews or showers, or by the hand of the gardener! The flowers lift their drooping heads; the leaves, set free from dust, put on a brighter aspect; the plants look as if they had taken a "new lease of life," and you might almost fancy that they were entering with new zest into the enjoyment of their existence! Now, the characters and lives of the people of God ought to be marked by a similar freshness. There ought to be a certain fulness of life in the soul of the Christian, making itself felt by those around him. Godliness tends to keep the soul from withering, and replenishes the springs of the deepest life. There is a perennial freshness in unselfish affections and unworldly aims. The "eternal life" never grows old. Each new day is a new gift from the Father's hand, and brings with it new opportunities of serving the Master and helping the brethren. The faith of the Gospel tends to produce the childlike heart; and to the childlike all is not "vanity and vexation of spirit." Oh! if we would only look at this human life of ours in the light of God, it could scarcely ever lose the freshness of its interest; and if we ourselves were only saturated with the love of God and the love of man, our own souls would be ever full of life, and fresh as a "watered garden." And this freshness of the Christian life is a fragrant freshness. It is a freshness which may co-exist even with physical weakness, sometimes even with disappointed expectations. There are souls which, like the thyme, give out their sweetest perfume when they have just been bruised. And how refreshing it is to see an aged Christian manifesting a fresh and kindly interest in the welfare of others, and especially in the pleasures of the young, and rejoicing in a daily sense of the presence and love of God!

II. A VARIED BEAUTY. In a well-kept garden there is beauty of colour and of form; beauty of order and of tasteful arrangement; beauty of stem, and leaf, and flower; and amongst the flowers themselves a varied beauty, resulting from manifold varieties of form and colour. Flowers do more for people—and especially for some people—than they themselves are aware of; and the blossoming of Christian character has its own subtle influence in the world. There are times when a man may get more good from the flowers

of the garden than even from its fruits. And there is a kind of good which a man may get from the sight of a daisy, which he cannot get from the sight of the sturdiest oak. And, even so, the lovelier features of the Christian character have their own peculiar charm and peculiar power. "See how these Christians love one another!" was the admiring cry of the heathen, as they watched the flowering of brotherly affection in the early Church. And certainly there is no beauty to be compared with that of moral and spiritual character. It is said of Linneus that the first time he saw the gorse in bloom he knelt down upon the ground in grateful rapture, and gave God thanks for the sight. And have not we ourselves sometimes—after hearing of some chivalrous and generous deed, or after enjoying the company of the pure-minded and the tender-hearted—gone home to thank God upon our knees for the grace which can clothe human character with so much beauty? No rose of the garden is so beautiful as human love when it is both passionate and pure. No geranium, with its contrast of scarlet and green, is so lovely as an open frankness associated with a quiet modesty. No apple-blossoms are so fair as the kindly sympathy which is the natural forerunner of the fruits of well-doing. No lily of the valley is so beautiful as the sweet dignity which half hides itself in humility and tenderness. III. A RICH FRUITFULNESS. Even the beauty of spiritual character has, as we have just seen, uses of its own, and is, therefore, in a sense, fruitful of good. But, over and above all this, Christians ought also to be putting forth practical endeavours for the promotion of Christ's kingdom, and for the welfare of human hearts and lives. If only you were more generous with your time or with your money, or if only you were more consistent in your conduct out in the world, or if only you were more earnest in the training of your children, or if only you took a deeper interest in the cause of Him who died for you, would not your life be much more fruitful of good? (*T. C. Finlayson.*)

Ver. 13. **I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow.**—*Transfigured troubles.*—In one of the German picture galleries is a painting called "Cloudland." It hangs at the end of a long gallery, and at first sight it looks like a huge, repulsive daub of confused colour, without form or comeliness. As you walk towards it the picture begins to take shape. It proves to be a mass of exquisite little cherub faces, like those at the head of the canvas in Raphael's "Madonna San Sisto." If you come close to the picture you see only an innumerable company of little angels and cherubim. How often the soul that is frightened by trial sees nothing but a confused mass of crushed hopes! But if that soul, instead of fleeing away into unbelief and despair, would only draw up nearer to God, it would soon discover that the cloud was full of angels of mercy. In one cherub face it would see, "Whom I love I chasten." Another angel would say, "All things work together for good to them that love God." In still another sweet face the heavenly words are coming forth, "Let not your heart be troubled: in My Father's house are many mansions." (*T. L. Cuyler.*)

Ver. 14. **My people shall be satisfied with My goodness.**—*A promise for God's people.*—I. ASCERTAIN THE RIGHT APPLICATION OF THE PROMISE. "My people." The term is restrictive. Only the people of God. And it is universal: all, everywhere, in every age. Who, then, are they? The phrase denotes covenant relationship. As man is alienated, it implies reconciliation,—acceptance. The covenant by which this is effected is that of mercy in Christ. As children of the covenant, we have received its visible seal,—have been instructed in its obligations and blessings. Repentance and faith required. These produce continued obedience,—and so we become, so we continue to be, the people of God. II. WHAT IS THE PROMISE MADE TO THEM? "They shall be satisfied," &c. 1. There is "the goodness of God." The phrase sometimes refers to His essential goodness;—He is good. But here, to its bestowments;—He doeth good. (1) The condescending manifestation of pardoning mercy, and adopting love to the conscience. (2) The various gifts of grace, and blessings of providence, all flowing from paternal love. (3) The blessings of glory, future, and to be waited for; but brought near by good hope, given by God who hath loved us. 2. With this they are "satisfied." (1) The effect of manifested mercy is true satisfaction—peace, joy, delight. We possess what we feel is our true portion. (2) And, preserving this feeling,—living as penitent, pardoned believers,—we rejoice

in the ordinary gifts of providence: even in chastenings we joy, knowing their source and object; we rejoice in the overflowing fountain of grace; we joy in the foretastes of glory. Lessons—1. See the inestimable value of religion. Other gifts vain without this. This of itself all in all. 2. Oh, the unutterable folly of sin! You refuse bliss; choose misery; and for what? The fountains of living waters,—for broken, even empty cisterns. 3. Seek religion now. Live in full possession of it. (*G. Cubitt.*) *God's people satisfied with His goodness:—I. MY PEOPLE.* Who are now God's people? All, whether of Jewish origin or of Gentile extraction, who—1. Have repented of sin, and turned to the Lord with weeping and supplication (Zech. xii. 10; Jer. xxxi. 9; Acts ii. 38, iii. 19). 2. Have received Christ, and believed on Him to the salvation of their souls (John i. 11–13, iii. 18, 36). 3. Have been regenerated by the Spirit and the truth of God (John iii. 5–8; Tit. iii. 3–7; 1 Pet. i. 1, 9, 23). 4. Have the assurance of their adoption into the family of God (Rom. viii. 14–17; Gal. iv. 4–7). 5. Who worship God in spirit and in truth (John iv. 24; Phil. iii. 3). 6. Who keep His commandments, and are zealous of, and careful to maintain, good works (John xiv. 21, 24; Tit. ii. 14, iii. 8; Jas. ii. 14–26; Rev. xxii. 14). 7. Who have their thoughts and affections set on things above, and who are ever looking for the coming of their Lord (Col. iii. 1–4; Phil. iii. 20, 21; Tit. ii. 13; 2 Pet. iii. 10–14; Rev. xxii. 20). My people—II. SHALL BE SATISFIED. Satisfaction is the rest of the desiring faculties. To be satisfied is to be filled, contented, and gratified to that degree, that nothing more is, or can be desired. “The primary idea” of the Hebrew word “lies in abundance of drink, although in the common usage of the language this verb is more frequently applied to food than to drink. Thus of one sated with food, Deut. xxxi. 20; Ruth ii. 14; Isa. xlv. 16; Jer. xxxi. 14. It is spoken of the Spirit, Ecc. vi. 3; and metaphorically of the eye, as not satisfied with seeing, Ecc. i. 8. Compare Isa. liii. 2; Psa. xvii. 15.”—Gesenius's *Heb. Lex.* Our spiritual need is often set forth in Scripture by our bodily necessities; and our spiritual supplies are spoken of in similar terms, to the supplies of our temporal wants (Isa. xxv. 6, lv. 1–3, lxvi. 10–14; Zech. ix. 15–17; Matt. v. 6). They shall be satisfied; for—1. Their minds shall be filled with knowledge, confidence, and hope, in reference to Divine, Spiritual, and eternal things. They shall be free from perplexity, doubt, and fear. They shall have “the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ” (Col. ii. 2). They shall to God “draw near in full assurance of faith, having their hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and their bodies washed with pure water” (Heb. x. 22). And they “shew the same diligence unto the full assurance of hope unto the end” (Heb. vi. 11). These three full assurances satisfy the saints. 2. Their souls shall be filled with holiness. 3. Their hearts shall be filled with love (1 John iv. 16–19). 4. Their lives shall be filled with good deeds (Phil. i. 10, 11, ii. 14–16; Matt. v. 13–16). Shall be satisfied—III. WITH MY GOODNESS, SAITH THE LORD. The goodness of God here means His kindness, benignity, and beneficence, as it does in Psa. xxv. 7, xxvii. 13, xxxi. 19, cxlv. 7, and in many other places. 1. They shall be satisfied with God's favour. “O Naphtali, satisfied with favour, and full of the blessing of the Lord” (Deut. xxxiii. 23). “In His favour is life” (Psa. xxx. 5). In His favour there is pardon and peace, purity and hope, love and joy, protection and honour (Rom. v. 1–5; Psa. iv. 7, 8, v. 12, xxxii. 1, 2, lxxxix. 15–18, cvi. 4–5). 2. They shall be satisfied with His goodness in their meditations on God (Psa. lxxiii. 5, 6, civ. 34, cxix. 14–16). 3. They shall be satisfied with God's goodness in His worship and service (Psa. lxxv. 7–9, lxxxiv. 4). They shall be satisfied with God's goodness in fellowship and communion with Him (1 John i. 3, 4). Fellowship with God and His Son Jesus Christ consists in our being partakers of the Divine nature; in constant intercourse and communion with the Divine being; in community of interest; and in mutual possession. In this blessed fellowship we are satisfied; for we are “filled with all the fulness of God,” and are “blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Christ.” 5. They shall be satisfied with God's goodness in heaven for ever and ever (Psa. xvii. 15). Then shall we be satisfied, fully satisfied, eternally satisfied (Rev. vii. 14–17). 6. The certainty that God's people shall be satisfied with His goodness. We have no ground for doubt; for God says it, whose word cannot fail. Are we God's people? If so, we shall be satisfied with His goodness; but if not, we cannot be satisfied. Literature, art, and science cannot satisfy the soul. Wealth, honour, pleasure cannot satisfy the immortal mind. Believe me, nothing can satisfy us but the goodness of God. (*H. O. Crofts, D.D.*)

VERS. 15-17. A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children.—*Innocents' day*:—Undoubtedly it seems strange, that one of the earliest consequences of the incarnation of Him, who afterwards declared that He came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them, should thus have been the murder of so many unoffending little ones. A few days ago we assembled around the cradle of the newborn King, and now the ground round about us is strowed with the bodies of the young ones, slaughtered, as it were, in His stead. Well might He afterwards declare, that He came not to send peace, but a sword upon the earth; seeing that, while yet a nursing in His mother's arms, He is the occasion of the sword being fleshed in numbers who least deserved to die. And the thing most remarkable in this transaction appears to us to be, that the permission of the slaughter was in no sense requisite to the safety of Christ, Joseph, and Mary, and the Child had departed for Egypt, before the fury of Herod was allowed to break out. How easy does it seem that Herod should have been informed of the flight, and thus taught the utter uselessness of his cruel decree. Let us see whether there be really anything in the facts now commemorated at variance with the known mercy of God. If, indeed, we were unable to discover that the slaughter of the innocents was a means to ensure wise ends, we shall be confident, from the known attributes of God, that there was such an end, though not to be ascertained by our limited faculties. This, however, is not the case. And they who think at all carefully will find enough to remove all surprise that Herod was not withheld from the slaughter. Let it be first observed, that prophecy had fixed Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Christ, and had determined, with considerable precision, the time of the nativity. It were easy, therefore, to prove that no one could be the Messiah who had not been born at Bethlehem, and about the period when the Virgin became a mother. How wonderfully, then, did the slaughter of the innocents corroborate the pretensions of Jesus. If no one could be Messiah unless born at Bethlehem, and at a certain time, why, the sword of Herod did almost demonstrate that Jesus was the Christ; for removing, perhaps, every other who could have answered to the test of time and place of birth, there seems only Jesus remaining in whom the prophecy could be fulfilled. Besides, it should be carefully marked, that Jesus was to live in comparative obscurity, until thirty years of age; He was then to burst suddenly upon the world, and to amaze it by displays of omnipotence. But, brought up as He had been at Nazareth, it was very natural that when He emerged from long seclusion, He should have been regarded as a Nazarene. Accordingly we find so completely had His birthplace been forgotten, that many objected His being of Nazareth, against the possibility of His being the Messiah. They argued rightly, that no one could be the Christ who had not been born at Bethlehem; but then they rashly concluded, that Jesus wanted this sign of Messiahship, because they knew Him to have been brought up in Galilee. And what made them inexcusable? Why, the slaughter of the innocents. They could not have been uninformed of this event; bereaved parents were still living who would be sure to tell the story of their wrongs; and this event marked as with a line of blood the period at which the Christ was supposed to have been born. A moment's inquiry would have proved to them that Jesus was this Child, and removed the doubt which attached to Him as a supposed Galilean. And, therefore, not in vain was the mother stirred from her sepulchre by the cry of her infant offspring; the echo of her lament might still be heard in the land, and those who listened not to the witness of the birthplace of Jesus stood self-condemned, while rejecting Him on the plea, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" There are yet more obvious reasons why God should have allowed this act of cruelty. We may believe that God was leaving Herod to fill up the measure of his guilt. Add to all this, that God was unquestionably disciplining the parents by the slaughter of the children. There was at this time a great and general expectation of the Messiah, and the Jewish mothers must have more than ever hoped for the honour of giving birth to the Deliverer: but of course such a hope must have been stronger in Bethlehem than in any other town, seeing that prophecy was supposed to mark it as the birthplace. Hence we may readily believe that the infants of Bethlehem were objects of extraordinary interest to their parents—objects in which their ambition centred, as well as their affection. And, if so, we can understand that these fathers and mothers stood in special need of that discipline which God administers to parents through the death of

their children; so that there was a suitableness in the dispensation as allotted to Bethlehem, which might not have been discoverable had another town been its subject. Now all this reasoning would be shaken, if it could be shown that a real and everlasting injury were done to the innocents themselves. Let us now, then, consider the consequences of the massacre, so far as the innocents themselves were concerned. There is much here to require and repay your careful examination. We have an unhesitating belief in respect of all children, admitted into God's Church, and dying before they know evil from good, that they are saved by the virtues of Christ's propitiation. We never hesitate to tell parents sorrowing for their dead children, who had been old enough to endear themselves by the smile and the prattle, but not old enough to know moral good from moral evil, that they have a right to feel such assurance of the salvation of their offspring, as the best tokens could scarcely have afforded had they died in riper years. And however melancholy the thought, that so many of our fellow-men live without God, and therefore die without hope, it is cheering to believe, that perhaps a yet greater number are saved through the sacrifice of Christ. For as a large proportion of our population die before old enough for moral accountableness; how many of the Christian community are safely housed ere exposed to the blight and tumult of the world! Oh, the "magnificent possession" would not want inhabitants if all, who could choose for themselves, chose death, and not life; heaven would still gather within its capacious bosom, a shining multitude, who just descended to earth that they might there be grafted into the body of Christ, and then flew back to enjoy all the privileges of membership. And we may believe of this multitude that it would be headed by the slaughtered little ones of Bethlehem—those who, dying, we might almost say, for the Saviour, won something like the martyr's crown, which shall, through eternity, sparkle on their foreheads. Who, then, shall say that Herod was permitted to do a real injury to those innocents, and that thus their death is an impeachment either of the justice or the mercy of God? We may be assured that they escaped many cares, difficulties, and troubles, with which a long life must have been charged; for, had the sword of Herod not hewn them down, they might have remained on earth till Judah's desolation began, and have shared in the worst woes which ever fell on a land. The innocents of Bethlehem have always been reckoned by the Church amongst the martyrs; for, though incapable of making choice, God, we may believe, supplied the defect of their will by His own entertainment of their death. And it is beautiful to think, that as the spirits of the martyred little ones soared toward heaven, they may have been taught to look on the Infant in whose stead they had died; to feel that He for whom they had been sacrificed was about to be sacrificed for them; and that they were mounting to glory on the merits of that defenceless Babe (as He seemed then), hurrying as an outcast into Egypt. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *Rachel weeping for her children*:—The death of young children is among the saddest bereavements of life. The sight of a suffering, dying child is painful. The mystery distresses us. Affection yearns in vain. The death of a young child is a sore disappointment. The fond parents cling round it through life, "like bees about a flower's wine-cup." What dreams of long life, and rich fortune, and untold happiness beguile their days! Their cherished hopes are blighted, and the future is a scene of clouded prospects and changed plans. The death of young children is often one of the hardest things to endure. Like the weeping Rachel, the bereaved parents are inconsolable. What bitter words of rebellion are sometimes spoken, instead of words of sweet resignation! Never is the weakness of all earthly props more manifest than under such circumstances. No considerations save such as the Bible supplies can give to the soul strength and peace. Still you remember your dead. Your experience ripens into that of Vaughan—

"They are all gone into a world of light,
And I alone sit lingering here;
Their very memory is fair and bright,
And my sad thoughts doth clear."

Although the death of young children is such a sore loss, there are sources of comfort—considerations which constrain us to say, "Thy will be done." I. IN THE EARLY REMOVAL OF CHILDREN GOD ACTS AS A FATHER. In one of our English churchyards there is this inscription on a child's tombstone: "'Who plucked that flower?' cried the gardener, as he walked through the garden. His fellow-

servant answered, 'The Master,' and the gardener held his peace." There is an Eastern story of a rabbi, who, having been absent all day, returned home in the evening, and was met by his wife at the door. With her first greeting she told him how she had been perplexed during the day, because a friend, who years ago had entrusted some rare jewels to her care, had that day come for them. From her long possession of them they seemed almost her own, and she felt loth to give them back. "They were only lent," replied her husband; "be thankful that you have had the use of them so long." "Your words are good," said she; "may we now and always follow them!" Then, leading him into an inner chamber, she showed him, stretched upon one bed, their two children who had that day died. Forthwith he knew the jewels which God had lent him, and now resumed, and his heart said, "The Lord gave," &c. II. CHILDREN WHO DIE YOUNG ARE REMOVED FROM ALL POSSIBLE SORROW AND HARM TO LIVE THE PERFECT LIFE ABOVE. Their sufferings, perhaps, were great, and you would fain have suffered in their stead; but their day of suffering was short. There was mercy in their death. Had they lived, some wild and withering anguish might have sored their summer's earliest leaf; the sickness of hope deferred might have given them a disgust of life. They have escaped these and all other woes—escaped them for ever. They are, moreover, taken away from all possible sin. They might have lived to be a curse to their parents and to the world. We know little of their future life; but we know as much as this—that all which can make life worth living is theirs. Your fondest love could not wish more for them than they enjoy. Selfishness might desire their return; love never can. All that was imperfect in them is left behind; and they are as the angels of God for ever. III. THE DEATH OF YOUNG CHILDREN IS OFTEN A MINISTRY OF BLESSING TO THE BEREAVED PARENTS. Just as we make idols of other objects that we regard with undue affection, so we are in danger of making idols of our children. If we allow them to estrange our affections from God, to interfere with our religious duties—to withdraw our sympathies from the poor and suffering around us, then our love is of the nature of idolatry; and it is a proof of God's love that He removes the idols. In one of his letters, Dr. Judson writes thus: "Our only darling boy was, three days ago, laid in the silent grave. Eight months we enjoyed the precious little gift, in which time he had so completely entwined himself around his parents' hearts, that his existence seemed necessary to their own. But God has taught us by afflictions what we would not learn by mercies, that our hearts are His exclusive property, and whatever rival intrudes He will tear it away." Edward Irving exclaimed, after his child's death, "Glorious exchange! God took my son to His own more fatherly bosom; and revealed in my bosom the sure expectation and faith of His own eternal Son." Dr. Bushnell once said, "I have learned more of experimental religion since my little boy died than in all my life before." The shepherd of the Alps who cannot get his sheep to climb the higher ascents of the mountains, will take the lambs and throw them up to the shelving rocks, when their dams soon spring up after them. By somewhat similar methods the Shepherd of Israel gathers His flocks on the hills of glory. He removes your children to heaven, that you may follow them thither. IV. CONSIDER, FURTHER, THE JOY YOUR CHILDREN GAVE YOU WHILE THEY LIVED. Of course, the memory is touched with sadness; but there is room for gratitude. Be thankful that they were yours so long. You were rich in their possession; and you are all the richer for them, even though God has taken them away. Your heart has been enlarged. A fount of feeling has been opened in your nature that never can be dry any more. You are richer in sympathy and in hope; richer towards society and God. In a deep and true sense, your dead children are with you still. (W. Walters.)

Vers. 16, 17. *Refrain thy voice from weeping.—Bereaved parents comforted:—*I. IT IS NOT SINFUL FOR PARENTS TO BE GRIEVED AND SORROWFUL FOR THE DEATH OF THEIR CHILDREN. If we do not grieve when we are thus stricken of God, it is an evidence that we do not feel the heavy calamity which His providence hath inflicted, and how can there be any probability that we shall be profited by it? It is by the sadness of the countenance that the heart is made better. It is in consequence of the affliction being for the present not joyous, but grievous, that, through the Divine blessing, it bringeth forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness in them that are exercised thereby. II. Parents should refrain from immoderate and excessive grief for the death of their children, when they consider that THIS

EVENT FLOWS FROM GOD'S WISE AND SOVEREIGN APPOINTMENT. If our children be interested in that covenant which is ordered in all things and sure, let no one say that their death is premature or unseasonable. God hath a method, which we cannot explain, of ripening those for heaven whom He gathers into it in the beginning of their days. III. Disconsolate parents should moderate their grief for the death of their children, when we consider that OUR LOSS IS THEIR UNSPEAKABLE GAIN. Infant children, born as it were into this world only to suffer and to die, are a striking evidence of the dreadful effects of sin. They are objects of compassion to the human heart, much more to the Father of mercies. It is natural, when our children are taken away, if their faculties have begun to unfold themselves, to review the little history of their lives, and to reflect with melancholy pleasure on many passages unheeded by others, but carefully marked and remembered by parents; and if any good thing towards the Lord was found in our child, the remembrance is full of comfort. If we found their hearts grateful and affectionate for our care, and submissive to our will, these were the seeds of an amiable and humble spirit. If they had a tenderness of conscience, so far as they knew good and evil, and stood in awe of offending; if they loved and hearkened to instruction; if they had a deep veneration for the Bible, as containing the revelation of God's mercy and goodness to His children; if they had some views, however faint, of a state of blessedness into which pious and good children enter after death; in a word, if to the last they grew in favour with God and man, this is an anchor of hope to disconsolate and afflicted parents. IV. Parents should moderate their grief for the death of their children, when they look forward to A JOYFUL AND BLESSED RESURRECTION. Our children shall "come again from the land of the enemy." The husbandman doth not mourn when he casteth his seed into the ground, because he soweth in hope. He commits it to the earth with the joyful expectation of receiving it again with great improvement; so when we commit the precious dust of our relations to the earth, we are warranted to exercise a joyful hope that we shall receive them again unspeakably improved at the resurrection. V. Parents should moderate their grief for the loss of their children, when they consider WHAT BENEFICIAL EFFECTS THIS IS CALCULATED TO PRODUCE IN THEIR OWN SOULS. David thankfully acknowledges it is "good for me that I have been afflicted." God deals with us as a wise parent deals with froward and undutiful children. When counsels and admonitions produce no effect, He finds it necessary to correct us with the rod; and when the strokes of providence inflicted on other families have been slightly regarded by us, He finds it necessary to smite us in our own bone and flesh. It would be highly ungrateful, then, to murmur against God when He acts a father's part toward us, and is chastening and correcting us for our spiritual profit and advantage. The impatience with which we bear the stroke, is an evidence that our affections were rooted many degrees deeper in the creature than we were aware of. Our merciful Father doth not measure out one drop from the cup of affliction, nor inflict one stripe with His correcting rod, more than He sees indispensably necessary for His children's profit and happiness. We should take in good part every trial with which we are visited, as coming from a parent's hand and a parent's heart. Conclusion.—1. Let us learn resignation to Divine providence under our affliction. 2. From the death of our children, let us learn to exercise a lively faith on that state of life and immortality which is brought to light by the Gospel. 3. The death of our children should teach us to live mindful of our own death. (*J. Hay, D.D.*) There is **hope in thine end, saith the Lord.**—*Good hope* :—There are some who cannot endure the thought of looking forward to the end; and this in a great variety of particulars. None but Christians contemplate with delight the end of their woes, and the reason is, that they have no well-grounded hope as to the end. If a hope exists, it becomes us closely to examine on what it is founded. I. If I were asked WHAT CONSTITUTES MY HOPE AS A CHILD OF GOD, as a Christian, as an heir of glory, I should not hesitate for one moment to state that it consists of three things—the constancy of my Father's love, the official faithfulness of my Elder Brother to His engagements, and the ministerial operations of the Comforter, pledged for the eternal salvation of my soul. II. NOTICE HOW THIS IS OWNED BY JEHOVAH HIMSELF. "Saith the Lord." This is a phrase of personal importance. He hath not only said it here in the volume of inspiration, but He saith it repeatedly, continually, powerfully unto the souls of His people when He speaks to them. What paternal tenderness is here! what paternal condescension! There are numbers of little children in different families who would, in many instances,

be disposed to disregard a great deal that a servant might say, or that a stranger or a visitor might say; but when the father speaks, his voice has some weight and authority. Moreover, when Jehovah thus speaks with paternal tenderness, there is hope in His name. Suppose the case of crosses and cares, trials and anxieties, difficulties and perplexities, threatened ruin or discomfort, or the loss of domestic harmony; only let the Lord speak, and "there is hope in the end, saith the Lord." In the next place, just mark, that when Jehovah speaks, when Jehovah Himself comes with His "Thus saith God," it is by revealing the hope of Israel. This is the express business and ministry of God the Holy Ghost, to reveal the glorious Person of the Redeemer, under the appellation of "the hope of Israel, and the Saviour thereof in the time of trouble." I beseech you to mark one more point in connection with the Lord's owning this hope to exist in reality in the soul; I refer to the testimony of the internal witness of the Holy Ghost. "The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God." His testimonies have always a sanctifying tendency. (*J. Irons.*)

Vers. 18-21. **I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself.**—*Repentant Ephraim*.—The real turning-point in man's spiritual history is when he begins to accuse himself and to justify God. From self-accusation the soul is led on by the Spirit of God to self-condemnation. Mark, in the first place, what it is that Ephraim bemoans. It is "himself." To mourn sinful acts is one thing, and may be done by even a Judas. To mourn over a sinful nature, an evil heart dwelling within, of which the act is only an expression, is quite another. The one may be the work of the natural conscience unenlightened by the Spirit of God; the other is the genuine mark of a soul that has been under the leading of that Spirit, and has "passed from death unto life." Mark it in the case of Ephraim. "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself." It is no mere surface work. It is Ephraim under conviction of sin. It is Ephraim taking up the prophet's words, "Woe is me, for I am undone." Mark the three times the word "surely" occurs here. "I have surely heard Ephraim"; "surely after that I was turned, I repented"; "I will surely have mercy." These are "the sure mercies of David," given to the soul under the training of the Spirit of God. There is the sure ear of God, the sure repentance of the soul, and the sure mercy to meet it. Why is this? Because the work is God's. It is a thorough work. Observe, next, how God often brings the soul to the knowledge of itself. "Thou hast chastised me." It is through the sharp strokes of trial and discipline. Ah! these do God's work often when nothing else will. Let God draw near and lay His hand upon us, then the true character of the heart will display itself. That character is unchangeable—"enmity to God." Blessed be God when we are brought to see and feel it! Then, like Ephraim, we say, "Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned." And what is the ground on which this is urged? "For Thou art the Lord my God." What a plea! What sweet assurance! What trust! What knowledge of Him these words imply! Oh, to draw near at all times with this on the lips! Then will the bow of peace span the darkest cloud, and light and peace and joy be the heritage of the soul. Observe the next clause. God "turns" the soul, then there is true repentance. Then He "instructs" that soul by His Spirit. It goes on learning deeper lessons of Him and of His wondrous grace. But mark the direction which this "instruction" takes, and the spirit it begets in the soul. "After that I was instructed," &c. How the instruction increases humility! How the soul begins with smiting, and goes on to shame and confounding! Mark, next, the Lord's language to the returning child. "Ephraim, My dear son; a pleasant child; for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore My bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." How beautifully the history of the prodigal son confirms this! "Set thee up way-marks; make thee high heaps." Make thee finger-posts to guide thee to heaven. How many a thing the believer may set before him each day to help him onward. How many a passage of Scripture stored up in memory may preserve the soul in danger's hour, and send it on its way more than conqueror! How many a secret prayer sent up to God has been a way-mark, leading the soul into a right path when all was perplexity and darkness! Yes, not only "set thee up way-marks," but "make thee high heaps." A high heap is one that can easily be seen. Oh! it is a great thing when we come to some perplexity in life, when we come to some turning-point in our history, to have something ready to hand.

It is a blessed thing not to have to search about for it, not to be hindered in the course by delay, but to see the path plainly and clearly before us! And what is the last word in this passage to Ephraim? "Turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities." It is a prophetic word, bidding that exile from her long-lost home look back again in hope. It is the climax of all that has gone before. It is "that blessed hope," the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. What a glorious prospect awaits the despised and downtrodden nation of Israel! What a glorious prospect awaits the Church of the living God—the Bride of the Lamb! (F. Whitfield, M.A.)

The picture of a true penitent.—I. THE PICTURE OF A TRUE PENITENT. The piteous lamentations,—the bitter self-accusations,—the tears and prayers of the broken-hearted are delineated with a force and accuracy which transport us to the scenes described. 1. His position is solitary, "bemoaning himself." It is not an easy, but it is an indispensable process, that all sources of relief should be forsaken but those which are in God Himself, when man is seeking the pardon of sin and the salvation of the soul. 2. Self-reproach. Shame at having acted so unworthy a part,—so contrary to one's own best interests,—so ungrateful to the Heavenly Benefactor, so derogatory to His glory,—so injurious to the welfare of others,—so morally bad in its defilement,—so insufficient in its motives,—so degrading in its results. 3. The true penitent refers his state to God. If the events of life are in our esteem only the outcome of fixed laws, altogether detached from an intelligent and personal control, they yield us no profit. If, on the other hand, we trace them to God, they become luminous in the instruction which they furnish, and the whole discipline of life resolves itself into a system in which goodness and mercy, wisdom and power, are most effectively taught. 4. It is a favourable sign of this true penitent that he mingles with his self-reproaches the language of childlike interest in God. "For Thou art the Lord my God." II. THE PROCESS OF RESTORATION. In the case of Israel it was as it is often now; by means of affliction God awakened him to spiritual things. The discipline of affliction is not, however, limited to that part of the Christian life which precedes conversion. They have a most important office to perform in the training and perfecting of the sons of God. 1. They are employed as preventive. The condition of life may be very limited, but its limitation is to a godly man a source of security. The suffering in which he is involved may be very acute, but it makes prayer exceeding real, the Bible very sweet, and the consolations of Christ abound as the sufferings of Christ abound (2 Cor. i. 6). "It is better," says an old divine, "to be preserved in brine than to rot in honey." 2. The treatment which God adopted with Ephraim He still employs with His people, inasmuch as He makes their sorrows and trials restorative in their character. The scalpel may cause the patient to wince, but it will cut away incipient corruption and death. The sharpest winters are followed by the most fruitful summers. 3. All the trials of the present world are employed by Divine wisdom as preparatives for the future of the Christian. (W. G. Lewis.)

Ephraim bemoaning himself.—I. A SINNER BEMOANING HIMSELF. 1. Bowed down with a peculiar grief. Inward sorrow. True repentance. 2. Well-founded sorrow. Over guilt, outrage on God's goodness and grace. 3. Humble sorrow. Not excusing or flattering himself, or making new resolutions; but "bemoaning." 4. A thoughtful sorrow. 5. A hopeless yet a hopeful sorrow. II. THE LORD OBSERVING HIM. 1. God heard all Ephraim had to say. It may be but a stammering cry. Broken prayers are the best. 2. God delights in the broken and contrite spirit. 3. God is full of compassion. III. THE LORD WORKING IN HIS EFFECTUAL GRACE. 1. The only turning in the world that is saving and Divine, is the turning of the heart. 2. The Lord's way of turning men varies in each case. (1) A distinct sight of wrath to come stops a sinner. (2) Or the awakened conscience is led to see the real nature of sin. (3) The grand turning-point is the sight of Christ on the Cross. (4) One of the most blessed ways by which God makes a sinner turn is, He manifests His everlasting love to him. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

The cry of the penitent.—Amidst all the confused and discordant sounds that are for ever rising from this fallen world of ours into the ears of the Most High God, there is one to which He can never be indifferent; and that is, the voice of a stricken and contrite sinner bemoaning himself. He finds that "from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot there is no soundness in him." He is out of heart with himself altogether, and despairs of being able to improve his position. "O wretched man that I am!" he exclaims, "who will deliver me from the body of this death?" And thus by his very perplexity and helplessness

he is drawn to look out of himself for assistance. Oh, you who are bemoaning yourselves, here is comfort for you. You never would have come to that point, you would have been even now either excusing or endeavouring to amend yourselves, but for the blessed influence of the Divine Spirit, who has shown you your true condition and brought you to an end of yourself, and thus put you in a position to begin with Him. Oh, thank Him for it, and since He has brought you thus far, trust Him to bring you farther. "Come, let us return unto the Lord: for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up." But here I want you to observe one feature specially of the perplexity and distress which leads Ephraim so to bemoan himself. He makes the humiliating discovery that not only has his past life been full of sin, but that his very efforts to repent and turn to God have also been characterised by a strange and fatal perversity. His repentance itself has to be repented of. This attitude of moral perversity is illustrated in our text by a remarkable and suggestive metaphor. "Thou hast chastised me," exclaims Ephraim, bemoaning himself, "and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke"—a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke—an unbroken bullock! Of all the perverse things to be found in the world, where will you find anything more unmanageable than this? Here Ephraim sees a picture of himself, and here also too many an awakened sinner finds himself represented. How often does such a one adopt a course exactly the reverse of that which God would have him take! How often does he insist on adopting the course of action least appropriate to his spiritual condition, and as a result he has to feel the chastening goad, and only by stern discipline of sorrow has he to be brought to the obedience of faith and the submission of the will, to see and acknowledge his own folly, and to yield himself to God. At last, Ephraim does the wisest thing that he could do, and what he should have done long before. Having reached the point of self-despair; having seen the folly of his own attempts to better himself, and having repented of his own perversity, he just puts the whole thing into the hands of God. "O Lord, I have tried my best, and my best has failed me: Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised; but still, like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, I have continued to make mistakes and to do the wrong thing; now in my helplessness I must make the whole matter over to Thee. Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned: for Thou art the Lord my God." Ah, that is the only true solution of the difficulty. Here is the turning-point in our experience, here is the moment of victory for the helpless. Let a man once put himself thus unreservedly into the hands of his God, and all the devils of hell cannot keep him from the blessing. His present salvation is at once secure, because the honour and truth of the everlasting God are pledged for the safety of the man who trusts himself to God. O God, cries the penitent and self-despairing sinner, I cannot turn myself, I cannot change my own nature, but I believe that Thou canst, so I put myself completely in Thy hands to do it for me. How often have I hindered Thy work by endeavouring to do for myself what only Thou canst do; how often in my very efforts to turn myself have I, as it were, turned the wrong way. Lord, if I am to be saved at all, Thou must save me, for I cannot save myself. "Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned: for Thou art the Lord my God!" And who is there that God cannot turn when he is thus submitted to Him—who so far gone, so deeply sunk, that God cannot change him? The things impossible with men are possible with God; and often when the change has been beyond all human hope, God has done it to the glory of His own great name. (*W. Hay Aitken, M.A.*) *The inner side of conversion:—* There are turning-points in most lives. We go on in a straight line for a certain distance, but suddenly we come to a place where we must make a choice of roads. All the rest of our journey may depend upon what we do at those particular points. Character often hinges on a day's resolve. An interesting book has been written upon "Turning-points in life," and it is capable of indefinite extension. According to a man's station and disposition, those turning-points take place at different periods; but whenever they are before us, they call for special prayer and trust in God. There is, however, one turning-point, and one only, which will secure salvation and eternal life; and that is what we call conversion, which is the first apparent result of regeneration, or the new birth. The man being renewed, the current of his life is turned: he is converted. I. First, here is *MAN AT THE TURNING-POINT AS GOD OBSERVES HIM*. Is not that a wonderful word of the Lord, "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself"? Of a certainty the Lord hears all the sorrowful voices of men. The Lord hears "surely":

that is to say, He hears the sense and meaning of our wordless moans: He puts into language that which no words of ours could express. The Lord understands us better than we understand ourselves. 1. Concerning the man here described, we note that he is in a state of great sorrow about himself. The grief is within. All the water outside the ship is of small account; it is when the leak admits the water to the hold that there is danger. "Let not your heart be troubled": it matters something if your country or your house be troubled; but to you the trying matter is if your heart be troubled. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity: but a wounded spirit who can bear?" This is what the Lord tenderly notes about the sinner at the turning-point, that he bemoans himself. 2. This bemoaning was addressed to his God. This is a very hopeful point about it: he cried to Jehovah, "Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised." It is a blessed thing when a man in his distress turns to his God, and not from Him. 3. Notice how Ephraim in the text has spied out his God as having long ago dealt with him. He tells the Lord that He has chastised him. "Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised." The man had not before observed the hand of God in his suffering: but he does now. I have hope of that man who sees God's hand, even though he sees only a rod in it. 4. But the mourner in our text means more than this by his bemoanings: he owns that the chastening had not set him right. "Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised"; and that was all. He had smarted, but he had not submitted. He had not obeyed, but had still further rebelled. 5. Yet there is something better than this; the mourner in our text despairs of all but God. He cannot turn himself, and chastisement will not turn him; he has no hope left but for God Himself to interpose. "Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned." 6. To all this confession poor bemoaning Ephraim adds another word, whereby he submits to the supreme sway of Jehovah his God, "For Thou art the Lord my God." He does as good as say, Man cannot help me. I cannot help myself. Even Thy chastenings have not availed to turn me. Lord, I appeal to Thee, Thyself! Thou art Jehovah: Thou canst do all things. Thou art my God, for Thou hast made me; and therefore Thou canst new-make me. I pray Thee, therefore, exercise Thine own power, and renew Thy poor, broken and defiled creature. II. MAN AFTER THE TURNING-POINT. Here you have the description in the nineteenth verse. It begins with "Surely." Is it not very remarkable that each of these verses should be stamped with the hall-mark, and each one bear the word "surely"? The Lord said He had "surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself"; and here Ephraim says, "Surely after that I was turned, I repented." 1. See, before us, prayer mixed with faith soon answered. Not many moments after Ephraim had said, "Thou art the Lord my God," he felt that he was turned. My friend, do you remember when you were turned? Do you know your spiritual birthday, and the spot of ground where Jesus unveiled His face to you? Some of us do, although others do not. The main point is to be turned; to know the place and time is a secondary matter. 2. Yet I say some of us know when we were turned; and here is one reason why we remember it, for repentance came with turning. "After that I was turned, I repented." He that is truly turned turns his face to the wall to weep and pray. Thou canst not make thyself repent; but when God hath changed thy heart, thou wilt repent as naturally as the brook flows adown the valley when once its bands of ice are thawed. "After that I was turned, I repented." 3. Deep sorrow followed upon further instruction. The Holy Spirit does not leave the convert, but gives him further instruction; and out of that comes a sorer regret, a more complete self-abasement. "After that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh." Want of knowledge tends to make men hardened, unfeeling, self-complacent, and proud; but when they are instructed by the Divine Spirit, then they are ready to inflict wounds upon themselves as worthy of buffetings and blows. "God be merciful to me, a sinner" is a fit prayer for the instructed, and the lowliest posture well becomes such a one. 4. To this deep sorrow there followed shame. Ephraim says, "I was ashamed, yea, even confounded." This man knew everything before; now he knows nothing, but is confounded. Once he could dispute, and dispute, and dispute; but now he stands silent before his Judge. He stands like a convicted felon, who, when he is asked by the judge if he has anything to say in stay of sentence, lays his hand on his mouth, and, blushing scarlet, confesses by his silence that he deserves to die. This is the man with whom mercy can work her will. 5. Lastly on this point, memory now comes in, and revives the reproach of youth. Memory is a very terrible torture

to a guilty heart. "Son, remember!" is one of the voices heard in hell. "I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did hear the reproach of my youth." I can only compare the sinner with a quickened memory to one who is travelling across the plains of Russia dreaming in his carriage, and on a sudden he is aroused by the sharp bark of a wolf behind him; and this is followed up by a thousand cruel voices of brutes, hungry, and gaunt, and grim, all eager for his blood. Harken to the patter of those eager feet! the howls of those hungry demons! Whence came they? You thought that your sins were dead long ago, and quite forgotten. See, they have left their tombs! They are on your track. Like wolves, your old sins are pursuing you. They rest not day nor night. They prepare their teeth to tear you. Whither will you flee? How can you escape the consequences of the past? They are upon you, these monsters, their hot breath is in your face; who can now save you? Only a miracle can rescue you from the reproach of your youth; will that miracle be wrought? May we dare to look for it? We have something better than a mere hope to set before you. Jesus meets these packs of wolfish sins. He interposes between us and them! He drives them back! He scatters them! There is not one of them left!

III. Now we will turn, and HEAR GOD AT THIS TURNING-POINT. "Is Ephraim My dear son? is he a pleasant child?" Does this look like a question? The answer has been already given in the ninth verse: "I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn." The gracious Lord sees Ephraim sore with chastisement, spent with weeping, pale with shame, and moaning with agony, and then his sonship is acknowledged. He bends over the crushed one, and cries, "This is My son. This is My dear child." How gracious on God's part to acknowledge the guilty rebel as a son! See here is love acknowledging the object of its choice, love confessing its near relationship to one most unworthy and most sorrowful. Then behold the same love well pleased. The Lord does not merely say, "Ephraim is My son; yea, he is My child"; but He calls him "My dear son, a pleasant child." A pleasant child! Why, he has been full of rebellion from his birth! Yes; but he confesses it, and mourns it; and he is a pleasant child when so much holy sorrow is seen in him. Love takes delight in repenting sinners. Notice, in this case, love in earnest. The Lord says, "Since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still." God in earnest—that is a great conception! God in earnest over one moaning sinner! God earnest in thoughts of love, even when He bids the preacher tell the offender of the wrath to come. Notice, next, love in sympathy. Ephraim is bemoaning himself, and what is the Lord doing? He says, "My bowels are troubled for him." God's heart is wounded when our hearts are broken. Then comes love in action: "I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." I am so glad to think that the "surely" is found again in this place. "Surely" God heard Ephraim bemoaning; "Surely" he said that he was turned, and now God says, "Surely I will have mercy upon him." The Lord God puts His hand and seal to it. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Presumptuous sins call for profound repentance*:—The will of man is a sour and stubborn piece of clay, that will not frame to any serviceable use without much working. A soft and tender heart, indeed, is soon rent in pieces, like a silken garment if it do but catch upon any little nail; but a heart hardened with a long custom of sinning, especially if it be with one of these presumptuous sins, is like the knotty root end of an old oak that has lain long a-drying in the sun. It must be a hard wedge that will enter, and it must be handled with some skill too to make it do that; and when the wedge is entered, it will endure many a hard knock before it will yield to the cleaver, and fall in sunder. And indeed it is a blessed thing, and to be acknowledged a gracious evidence of God's unspeakable mercy to those that have wilfully suffered such an unclean spirit to enter in and to take possession of their souls, if they shall ever be enabled to out him again, though with never so much fasting and prayer. (Bp. Sanderson.) *Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised*.—*Chastisement resulting in penitence*:—

I. AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT. 1. Inefficacy of former corrections. 2. Though corrections are calculated to produce amendment, it is evident, from observation and experience, they often fail in accomplishing the effect. 3. Ephraim is here represented as reflecting upon it. (Proximate causes of the inefficacy of correction by itself.) 4. Inattention to the hand of God, and, as a natural consequence, their neglecting to pass from the contemplation of their sufferings to their sins. Religion begins with consideration. 5. In the serious purpose of a religious life,

formed under afflictive dispensations, too many depend entirely upon resolutions formed in their own strength. To such purposes may be applied the beautiful image of Nahum: "And as the great grasshoppers, which camp in the hedges in the cold day, but when the sun ariseth they flee away, and their place is not known." II. THE PRAYER. 1. The plea of necessity. There is no other resource. 2. To entreat God to turn is not to ask an impossibility. The residue of the Spirit is with Him. 3. It is worthy of His interposition. The turning of the heart is a fit occasion on which Omnipotence may act. 4. The plea may be enforced by precedents. It implies no departure from His known methods. 5. We may force it by a reference to the Divine mercy. (*Robert Hall, M.A.*) To the penitent:—I. THE SOLOQUY OF THE PENITENT. 1. He reflects on his misimprovement of the dealings of God with him. 2. He prays for converting grace. 3. He describes the working of his mind. 4. He assigns special prominence to his youthful sins. II. THE ADDRESS OF GOD TO HIM. 1. He owns him as a son. 2. He declares that he has a place in His memory. 3. He expresses His sympathy with him. 4. He promises him mercy. (*G. Brooks.*) The cause and design of affliction:—I. GOD IS TO BE ACKNOWLEDGED AS THE AUTHOR AND DISPENSER OF ALL AFFLICTIONS. He consented to all those disarrangements of the creation that inflict numberless ills and distresses, that He might have materials ever at hand for the affliction of the children of men for sin, in a state of probation, and for urging them to use the means provided for their recovery. He dispenses all the particular causes of affliction, in their movements and operations: they are all His servants, and obey His orders, however complicated their movements, however long or short the series in which they are connected with each other, and made dependent the one upon the other: they are all a large army, whose movements, individually and collectively, are according to His plans and His will. 1. This truth approves itself to our reason. It follows from the fact of His sustaining care over the world, as necessary for its provision: for all created things depend on Him; they could do nothing without His permission. 2. This truth is further confirmed by the consideration of the meritorious cause of affliction, which is sin. For sin is originally committed against God: it violates His law, contemns His authority, and despises alike His favour and His frown. Who, then, is to dispense affliction as the punishment of sin, but He who is its supreme avenger? 3. This is a truth, which when once confirmed by our reason, is recognised throughout Scripture. There you find that the afflictions of the children of men are dispensed to them in number and in measure. II. THE DESIGNS OF GOD IN AFFLICTIONS ARE VERY MERCIFUL AND BENEFICENT. Afflictions never sow the seed of religion in the soul; they cannot do this: but they may soften the soil to receive it, and subserve the growth and the expansion of the seed when sown. They are lessons of instruction to the mind through the senses; corroborating those lessons of truth from revelation to the mind alone; and which are responded to by the conscience. 1. Afflictions are to bring men to become the people of God. (1) That this is their design will appear from their nature. For what is the obvious drift of that disappointment through the whole course of life, in finding happiness from the world—what is the drift of it but to cure us of that mistake, to direct our attention from that object, and to lead us to Him in whose favour is life? What is the apparent design of certain miserable effects to certain sins, but to breed in us remorse for those sins, and wean us from them? Again, what is the obvious design of those particular evils that belong to our individual condition? What are they, what can they be, but a thorn planted in our earthly nest, to make us arise and go out of it, and seek for happiness in some higher quarter? (2) That such is their design, is evident from the result of them in many cases. 2. When men become the people of God, afflictions do not cease; on the contrary, there are new reasons for the continuance of the former ones, and even for the addition of others to them. But these reasons are all wise and good, and the ends they have in view are so benign and gracious, as far more than to reconcile us to them. (1) They are to prevent them from degenerating, so as to settle in a state of declension and backsliding from God. And this they do by bringing their sins to their remembrance in a timely way, before they can make head against them. (2) They are employed to recover man from a state of backsliding. (*J. Leischild.*) Discipline:—There are chastisements in life which cannot be classed amongst great afflictions. There are little checks, daily disappointments, irritations, defeats, and annoyances—shadows which chequer what else would be a sunny

way—things which themselves cannot be treated with dignity, yet they tease and wear the heart. I. HUMAN LIFE IS ESTABLISHED UPON A DISCIPLINARY BASIS. There is a "yoke" everywhere—in sin, in repentance, in grace. No one can have everything just as he wants it. Man is made to feel that there is somebody in the world besides himself. We are made to feel that our very life is a vapour, and that every respiration is but a compromise with death. We should ask ourselves the meaning of these things. Discipline touches the whole scheme: boy at school, going from home, bodily affliction, oversights and miscalculations, losses, &c. II. THE VALUE OF DISCIPLINE DEPENDS UPON ITS RIGHT ACCEPTANCE. 1. We may become desperate under it: "as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke." Men may mourn, complain, rebel; they start arguments against God; they justify themselves; they become lost in secondary agencies and incomplete details. 2. Then there is a better way. "Ephraim bemoaned himself," repented before God, and said, "Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned." In this state of mind see—(1) Self-renunciation. (2) Devout and joyful confidence in God's sovereignty and graciousness. Application—1. There is a yoke in sin. "The way of transgressors is hard." 2. There is a yoke in goodness. It is often difficult to be upright, noble, holy. 3. God helps the true yoke-bearer. We must bear a yoke; say, shall it be the bad yoke, or the yoke of Jesus Christ? (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Sanctified affliction*.—I. THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT MADE BY THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN TIMES OF TROUBLE. 1. That the affliction is from the Lord. (1) It is this circumstance—this perception of God, as connected with affliction—which imparts to the afflicted an air of something more than solemnity and seriousness, as if the man had sustained a loss—were deprived of what was agreeable to him. It invests him, in some measure, with a character which inspires awe. He knows that God has been dealing with him. And yet, on this part of my subject, let me offer a word of counsel to the people of God. It is true that you believe that all afflictions come from the Lord. (2) Beware of resting satisfied with this as a part of your creed. Take care lest you do no more than in words acknowledge that the Lord is the author of your trouble. 2. That there is a necessity for improvement. This is the direction which the gracious soul takes, when its afflictions are in the way of being sanctified. It is submissive: it cannot question the act of the Lord: it is solemnised. But it is more than all this. There is a disposition and desire to make the dispensation an instrument of spiritual benefit and glory to God. To this spirit and exercise believers are brought by several considerations. (1) That the Lord does nothing in vain. (2) That this is the declared purpose of the Lord in the visitations of trouble. He calls His afflictions chastenings. (3) That improvement and reformation have been the effects produced by chastisement upon many. (4) There is a felt necessity for improvement, as well as experience derived from affliction in the past. II. SOME OF THE USES OF SANCTIFIED AFFLICTION. 1. Thus do believers become intimately acquainted with their God. God is then set before them in various aspects. (1) In the character of a Sovereign. (2) In the character of a Comforter. 2. Believers, when in affliction, know experimentally the value of their Saviour. 3. By affliction believers are weaned from the world. This is the result of their consideration of the Lord's dealings with them, and the work of His Spirit in them. Affliction of itself will not wean us from the world. Some it only glues more closely to that which is left. But when the solemn question upon a trial or a bereavement is, "What meaneth the Lord by this?" the effect is necessarily happy and useful. The meditation leads to the conclusion, that these objects we have lost are but creatures—that as creatures they must be regarded—and that God must have the first place in our affections and hearts. 4. By affliction believers are quickened in the performance of duties. (1) They are quickened in the duties which they owe peculiarly to God. (a) They are quickened so as to be more serious and frequent in their thoughts of God. (b) They are quickened so as to inquire after Him in His Word. (c) They are quickened in prayer. They pray after another fashion. They pray as the needy to the God who hears. (2) They are quickened in their duties to others. Sanctified affliction creates a tender feeling for others. (*J. Thorburn.*) *Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned; for Thou art the Lord my God.*—A pattern prayer for the penitent:—I. A CONFESSION OF MORAL INABILITY. God's words and man's thoughts both declare this: the difference lies here that God does not let it be any reason for our despair. Comp. Jer. xiii. 23, xvii. 1, 4, with the saying of George Eliot, "The world does not believe in conversion, and the world is mostly right"; and with this of Cotter

Morrison. "The sooner it is perceived that bad men will be bad, do what we will (though, of course, they may be made less bad), the sooner shall we come to the conclusion that the welfare of society demands the suppression or elimination of bad men and the careful cultivation of the good only. . . . There is no remedy for a bad heart, and no substitute for a good one." II. A PRAYER FOR DIVINE HELP. There is no hope for the sinner but in God. The more absolute seems our own helplessness the more earnestly must we cry to Him. God requireth that "we do justice, and love mercy, and walk humbly with Him"; but He must give what He asks. III. AN ALL-PREVAILING PLEA. "For Thou art the Lord my God." Our confident appeal is to God's own nature as revealed by His Word, and with so much the more assurance as His revelation is now more perfect (Heb. i. 1-4). In Christ crucified and risen is the supreme unfolding of God's heart. As we look at Him we learn godly sorrow for sin, and heart-trust in the abundance of the Divine pardon, while we are quickened with His life given for us, and kindled by the flame of His love. (C. M. Hardy, B.A.)

The stubborn sinner submitting to God.—I. THE FEELINGS AND CONDUCT OF AN OBSTINATE IMPENITENT SINNER, WHILE SMARTING UNDER THE ROD OF AFFLICTION. In this situation he is like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; wild, unmanageable, and perverse. That such is the natural temper of man, must be evident to parents and all others who are concerned in the education of children. How soon do they begin to discover a perverse and stubborn temper, a fondness for independence, and a desire to gratify their own will in everything! and what severe punishments will they often bear, rather than submit to the authority of their parents and instructors! This disposition, so strong in us by nature, grows with our growth and strengthens with our strength; and to subdue it, is the principal design of all the calamities with which we are in this world afflicted by our Heavenly Father. Sometimes He afflicts sinners by taking away their property and sending poverty, as an armed man, to attack them. At other times He corrects us by depriving us of our relatives, who rendered life pleasant, by sharing with us its joys, or helping to bear its sorrows. If these afflictions do not avail, He brings the rod yet nearer, and touches our bone and our flesh. Then the sinner is chastened with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones are filled with strong pain; so that his life abhorreth bread and his soul dainty meat. All these outward afflictions are also frequently accompanied with inward trials and sorrows, still more severe. Conscience is awakened to perform its office, and fills the soul with terror, anxiety, and remorse. Now when God visits impenitent sinners with these afflictions, they usually murmur, struggle, and reluctate, like a stubborn bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, or a wild bull entangled in a net. This perverse and rebellious temper manifests itself in a great variety of ways, as persons' circumstances, situation, and dispositions vary. Sometimes it displays itself merely in a refusal to submit, and a sullen, obstinate perseverance in those sins which caused the affliction. At other times, impenitent sinners manifest their rebellious dispositions under the rod by flying to the world for comfort, and plunging with increased eagerness into its pleasures and pursuits, instead of calling upon God agreeably to His command, and repenting of their sins. With others this disposition displays itself in a settled formal endeavour to frustrate the will of God by sinning against Him with a high hand, in open contempt of all His infictions and threatenings. But the perverse, unreconciled disposition of impenitent sinners most frequently appears in the increase of hard thoughts of God, and proud, angry feelings towards Him, as if He were severe, unmerciful, or unjust. II. THE NEW VIEWS AND FEELINGS WHICH, THROUGH DIVINE GRACE, HIS AFFLICTIONS WERE INSTRUMENTAL IN PRODUCING. 1. We here find the once stubborn and rebellious, but now awakened sinner deeply convinced of his guilt and sinfulness, and deploring his unhappy situation. He still complains indeed, but it is of himself and not of God. He acknowledges the goodness, condescension, and justice of God in correcting him. Perhaps more are convinced of sin, and brought to repentance, by reflecting on their impious, unreconciled feelings under affliction, than by reflecting on any other part of their sinful exercises. 2. We find this awakened, afflicted sinner praying. Convinced of his wretched situation, and feeling his need of Divine aid, he humbly seeks it from his offended God. 3. We find this corrected, mourning, praying sinner reflecting upon the effects of Divine grace in his conversion. Surely, says he, after I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded,

because I did bear the reproach of my youth. It is worthy of remark, my friends, how soon the answer followed the prayer. In one verse, we find Ephraim calling God to turn or convert him. In the very next, we find him reflecting upon his conversion and rejoicing in it. And what were the effects of this change, thus suddenly produced by Divine grace? The first was repentance. The second was self-loathing and abhorrence. III. A CORRECTING, BUT PASSIONATE AND PARDONING GOD, watching the result of His corrections, and noticing the first symptoms of repentance, and expressing His gracious purposes of mercy respecting the chastened, penitent sinner. In this description God represents Himself—

1. As a tender father solicitously mindful of his penitent, afflicted child.
2. As listening to his complaints, confessions, and petitions. Certainly nothing in heaven or earth is so wonderful as this; and if this language does not affect us and break our hearts, nothing can do it.
3. God declares His determination to pardon him: I will surely have mercy upon him. (*E. Payson, D.D.*)

Surely after that I was turned, I repented.—*Evangelical repentance*:—I. THE CONSTANT WAY AND MANNER WHEREIN TRUE GRACE DISCOVERS ITSELF, WHEN ONCE IT IS IMPLANTED IN THE HEART. "I repented, surely I repented." Agreeable to this is the language of the prodigal (*Luke xv. 18*). Old things are passed away with the man that is born of the Spirit; his face is turned Zionward, and his eager steps show how desirable and delightful are wisdom's ways to his renewed soul.

II. THE ONLY SPRING FROM WHENCE THIS AMAZING CHANGE DOTHS ALWAYS PROCEED. "Surely after that I was turned, I repented." Grace first enters the heart, before it can be discovered in the life and conversation. The God of all grace first of all draws us, or else we shall never move towards Him (*John vi. 44*). Had not the same mighty power which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, been exerted toward us, we should still have continued in the same conversation which we had in times past, in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind. But quickening grace opens the way to godly sorrow, and this always issues in evangelical repentance (*2 Cor. vii. 10*).

III. AN ACCOUNT OF THE PROGRESS OF THIS GREAT WORK IN THE HAND OF THE SPIRIT; WHEREIN THE TRUE NATURE OF REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE IS CLEARLY DESCRIBED.

1. What are the things in which the soul is instructed by the Spirit, when a principle of grace is wrought in the heart?
 - (1) The Spirit begins His work, with leading the soul to the knowledge of sin.
 - (a) The Spirit shows us the nature of sin, as attended with guilt, whereby we are obnoxious to the curse of the law.
 - (b) The Spirit shows the sinner the defiling nature of sin, as opposed to the holiness of that God with whom he hath to do.
 - (c) The Spirit shows the sinner the many heinous aggravations wherewith his sins in particular have been attended.
 - (2) The Spirit instructs the soul in the nature of pardoning grace and mercy, which is the sweetest sound that an awakened conscience can ever hear; the most agreeable message a self-condemning sinner can ever receive.
 - (a) The Spirit instructs the sinner that the privilege is attainable; that there is forgiveness with God, that He may be feared.
 - (b) The Spirit instructs the sinner in the only way through which His grace and mercy is to be attained; lets him know that an absolute God is a consuming fire; and directs him to Christ Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life.
 - (c) The Spirit instructs the sinner into the way through which pardon is communicated to him. That it was obtained by Christ; that it is received by faith; and that whosoever will, may take of the water of life freely.
 - (d) The Spirit further instructs the sinner who the persons are to whom this pardoning grace and mercy are applied. This He teaches, by the absolute promises of the Word, which reach the case of the most rebellious criminals.
2. What are the various actings of the soul in consequence of these instructions?
 - (1) The soul thus instructed "sorroweth after a godly sort." This is the first thing in which Gospel-repentance discovers itself to be genuine and of the right kind; of which "smiting upon the thigh" is very expressive.
 - (2) The soul thus instructed is filled with shame and confusion of face, attended with an utter hatred of the sins he hath been guilty of. "I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth."
 - (3) The soul thus instructed hath an abiding sense of these things. He is not weary of his rags to-day, and pleased with them again to-morrow; humbled for sin now, and wallowing in the same mire and dirt anon: No, "I did bear (saith Ephraim) the reproach of my youth."
 - (4) The soul thus instructed is most sensibly affected with those sins to which he hath been most addicted. Heart sins are bewailed by the sincere Christian, and youthful transgressions

are never forgotten by him. (5) The soul thus instructed always applieth to the blood of Christ for pardon. (*J. Hill.*) *The repentance of the truly converted*:—1. We notice this about the cry of the wanderer of the Old Covenant, resembling herein the prodigal son of the New Testament—it is not like the utterance of the heathen who had never known God. The powerlessness of man is indeed brought out; for the words are, “Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned”; but there is the remembrance still of a Father, of a Divine promise, a heavenly home though long despised. 2. The text goes on to speak of the effect of this conversion, of the result of this homeward journey: “Surely after that I was turned, I repented.” It is not a sign of the truly converted heart, to spring at a bound from the rebelliousness of a sinner to the rejoicing of a saint. Those who go most frequently to the Holy Communion know best the gulf which separates the two—they know in that nearness to Jesus Christ how far off they have been, how unworthy they are. 3. It takes much teaching, much fatherly correction and chastisement, many humble approaches to that altar which reveals the greatness of our burden, ere the soul can thus fully and heartily repent. Most of us, like Ephraim, are so unaccustomed to the yoke, through the easy, careless life we lead, that we need much application of doctrine to ourselves, much reproof of our personal faults, much instruction in righteousness. 4. It often happens that contrition of heart is granted long after maturity is reached—so that much recollection is needed ere the whole life can be reviewed before God. What is it which then disturbs us most? The remembrance probably of those precious years wherein the character was being formed—those priceless years, which might have witnessed the moulding of our yet pliant will into the thorough obedience of Christ, but which have been marked, instead, by a growing hardness and indifference and selfishness, scarcely to be altered afterwards. “I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.” 5. God means us to feel the weight of these old chains: He speaks against us in our wonderfully responsive conscience, writes the most painful truths concerning us in His heart-piercing Word—and why? Exactly for the opposite reason to that which makes Satan stand at our right hand to resist and accuse us. God smites on purpose that He may Himself be troubled for us, Himself have mercy upon us, Himself create a new thing in the earth, the Incarnation of His own Eternal Son, to be the propitiation for our sins, the renewer of our wasted youth and misused talents, the restorer of paths to dwell in. (*Canon Jelf.*) *Repentance*:—I. REPENTANCE IS AN ABIDING CHARACTERISTIC, OR PRINCIPLE OF THE NEW HEART. The heart itself is, by nature, impenitent. It has a natural fitness to sin, without shame or ingenuous sorrow. The heart itself, by grace, is penitent, broken, contrite. It has a fitness to repent, an aptitude to mourn ingenuously over sin. This is a permanent principle, or source of sorrow for sin, and of turning from it unto holiness. II. REPENTANCE IS THE GIFT OF GOD. 1. The mind, to which God has granted repentance unto life, has a just sense of its sins. 2. Another trait of the mind to which God has granted repentance, is an appreciation of His mercy through Christ. 3. Another characteristic of the penitent man is, that he turns from sin. 4. Another particular in this state of the penitent man, is a constant endeavour to obey God. III. WHAT ARE THE EVIDENCES OF REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE? There are individuals who seem to suppose that a serious attendance on the duties of private and public prayer—a diligent reading of the Scriptures—a reverent hearing of the Word—and a celebration of the ordinances appointed by God—are an evidence that they are born of the Spirit. This is ample evidence of their love to the forms of religion, but no proof of its power. It has dwelt in thousands whose hearts were not right with God. There are others who seem to suppose that the abandonment of some external vice is to be regarded as evidence of repentance unto life. Repentance unto life is, indeed, attended by a reformation of morals, in all those who spiritually mourn over their sins. But this reformation is the effect of an internal change. The soul of the penitent man is careful to discriminate between good and evil—between light and darkness. It struggles against every unholy propensity, and every sinful habit, and toils through grace to extirpate them from the bosom. He exercises himself to have a conscience void of offence, both towards God and man. These powerful principles in the penitent heart diffuse their odour through the whole man, and cause him to be widely different from what he was previously. Nor is this a temporary change in his life. The whole course of an individual who is brought into the kingdom of God, is

a course of repentance. So permanent is it in this life, as not to be completed till the saints are made perfect in glory. (*J. Foot, D.D.*) *Mercy to penitents :*

—I. The favoured OBJECTS of Divine mercy. True penitents; men whose hearts are humbled under a deep sense of sin; and who, by the Spirit and grace of God, are brought to their right minds. II. The abundant EXERCISE of Divine mercy. 1. In bestowing pardon. 2. In promoting peace; that rest of conscience which is the close attendant of pardon, and accompanies the scriptural hope and evidence of it. 3. In affording preservation. III. The absolute CERTAINTY of Divine mercy. 1. The greatness of God secures it. 2. The goodness of God secures it. 3. The faithfulness of God secures it. (1) He is faithful to His covenant; to His own solemn and voluntary engagement to save guilty man, according to a prescribed method; and this method is all of mercy, of abundant mercy, especially to the broken-hearted penitent. (2) He is faithful to His Word. This is the revelation of His covenant; its statement to us in direct promises and positive assurances. (3) He is faithful to His Son. (4) He is faithful to Himself. The whole scheme of Divine mercy is adapted and intended to display the glory of the Divine perfections; and can we suppose that this end will be frustrated? From the whole—1. Let the impenitent tremble. 2. Let the humble hope. 3. Let the believer rejoice. (*T. Kidd.*) *Set thee up way-marks.*—*Spiritual way-marks:*—Here is an invitation—I. To FOLLOW AN ANCIENT CUSTOM. Not all old customs bad, the good filtrates through all time. It is a holy duty to follow in the good, tried paths of the “just men made perfect.” II. To KEEP ALIVE OUR SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES. 1. While faith obeys implicitly, aids are not rejected. 2. To recount becomingly our experiences serves two ends: we put God in remembrance; we keep Him in remembrance. 3. Our experiences may be such as—(1) Past grace received. (a) The grace to know, (b) And the grace to love. (2) Past strength renewed. (3) Wonderful deliverance from fears. (4) Help in trouble. (5) Times of sweet communion. Thus we put in practice the word, “forget not all His benefits.” III. To PUT UP LASTING MEMORIALS. 1. All our spiritual privileges may be as way-marks set up. 2. Blessed hours of devotion and times of sweet communion. 3. The Gospel of a holy life in the common lot for ever. IV. To HAVE A REGARD FOR POSTERITY. Sinners will need directing, saints will require comforting, workers with flagging energies must be stimulated. Then set up your “way-marks.” The records of our experience will stand out like milestones, and all shall be as inspiring testimony to the faithfulness of Him who has promised neither to “leave us” nor “forsake us.” (*John Jones.*) *I did bear the reproach of my youth.*—

Sin the reproach and shame of youth:—I. SIN IS OF A REPROACHFUL NATURE. 1. It flings an unrighteous reproach on God and others. (1) Let us begin with others. Friends and families are often disgraced by the sinners that belong to their houses: They are frequently ashamed of them, and reproached for them; they are ashamed to think, speak, or hear of them, to see or own them; and many are apt to reflect, sometimes indeed with too much reason, but at others without cause, as if their parents, their masters, or their other relations and friends, who have been most conversant with them, and might have had the greatest influence over them, have not taken proper care to counsel, caution, and restrain them. (2) But what is still infinitely worse, is that their iniquities throw the most vile and unrighteous reproach upon the holy and blessed God Himself, as if He were not what He is, and were not to be treated with the reverence and honour that are His due. Sin reproaches God's perfections. His name and His image, as if they were not worthy to be maintained with honour; it reproaches His workmanship in man, as if a creature had come out of His hand unworthy of Himself to be the author of; and it furnishes occasions to other sinners to reproach and blaspheme His blessed majesty. 2. It is a just reproach upon sinners themselves. It is the disgrace of their nature, it disrobes it of all its glory, defaces the beautiful image of God in which it was at first created, and debases it into the odious likeness and deformity of the devil, and of the brute. II. THE SINS OF YOUNG PERSONS MUST NEEDS BE THE REPROACH OF THEIR YOUTH. Youth is indeed the most amiable age of life. It is the time for beauty and ornament, for activity and vigour, for gathering and improving in all that is excellent and desirable, and for pursuing after everything that is honourable and glorious. It is the time of expectation and hope, and the time of their own chief delight, and of others delighting in them. But sin stains all this glory of their youth, it sweeps away their lovely bloom, it depraves and perverts their vigorous powers, and makes

them only so much the more capable of becoming despicable and vile; they are thereby daily heaping to themselves infamous and destructive things; they glory in their own shame; sport themselves in their own vain and foolish deceivings; and give melancholy prospects of growing up, the shame and torment of their friends, and the pests, instead of the blessings, of the rising generation; and they are in the direct way of entailing all misery, for this world and the next, upon themselves. III. A TIME IS COMING, WHEN, ONE WAY OR OTHER, THEY WILL BEAR THIS REPROACH. 1. There is a bearing it, in the fruits and effects of their sins. They are the source of many sorrows; they often bring great and numerous distresses upon sinners in the way of God's righteous judgment, and by the natural operation of their iniquities themselves. 2. There is a bearing the reproach of youth, in being reproached by others for their sins. Some sins bring such a reproach upon young men and women, as they can never get rid of all their days (2 Sam. xiii. 12, 13; Prov. vi. 32, 33). 3. There is a bearing the reproach of youth, in the reflections of their own consciences upon their sins. IV. WHEN THEY COME TO BEAR THE REPROACH OF THEIR YOUTH, THEY WILL BE ASHAMED, YEA, EVEN CONFOUNDED AT IT. 1. Young people will be ashamed, yea, even confounded at the reproach of their youth, when they come to bear it in the way of God's mercy to them. 2. Young people will be ashamed, and even confounded at the reproach of their youth, when they come to bear it in the way of God's wrath against them. Reflections.—1. Let young and old think seriously with themselves, which of these is, or is like to be their condition. 2. How should Christ and His Gospel be prized and improved, to take away the reproach of your youth! (*John Guyse, D.D.*) **Is Ephraim My dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still.**—*A pleasant child*:—Within one circle, one limited circle, a pleasant child is always a centre of the most engrossing interest and delight. Nor is the blessing of such a child confined exclusively to the home circle. The neighbourhood, the community, the Church of God are sharers in it. Along the street, in all the modest duties and interchanges of daily life, in the hour of play, and wild exuberance of youthful feeling, in the Sunday School and sanctuary—everywhere and in all places, a pleasant child is a perpetual comfort. "Heaven lies about him." I. **CHEERFUL OBEDIENCE IS A CONSPICUOUS TRAIT IN A PLEASANT CHILD.** Cheerful, in distinction from compulsory obedience. It will not be a sacrifice, forced out of him by overstrained prerogative, or rigorous compulsion, but rather the spontaneity of a loving, loyal heart. It will be a high sense of what is due from the offspring to the progenitor—a willing and cheerful consent to the known precepts and principles established at home. It not only yields readily to each expressed and absolute command, but goes beyond and acts continually upon what is implied, and expected, under the parental rule. It anticipates the audible prohibition: it waits not for the check or caution, for the law once revealed is thenceforth written on the mind and heart. Knowing that to do right, is the measure of that law, the constant aim will be to do right, whether it is expressly required or not. What a contrast there is—what a vital and tremendous difference—between such a child and his opposite—a son whose nature revolts at all the proper constraints of home, and puts scorn upon its holiest claims of honour and duty; a petulant, self-willed, wrongheaded son, who lives in his father's house, like a wild beast in a cage; who flies in the face of authority, and bursts into uncontrollable fits of rage at the slightest reproof, and dares to turn upon those who support and cherish him, with words of abuse and malediction; a son who can look into the pleading face of the mother that bare him and laugh at her counsels, or the father that begat him with open contempt and loud dispute, and oh, the difference, who can measure it? Often have agonised parents been known to declare, that to have laid the child in his grave, would have been far easier than to have borne the daily inflictions of his wilfulness and evil behaviour (Prov. xxii. 25). Nor is this without an impressive lesson for parents. Remember this solemn truth—the obedience due to you is enshrined in a universal and unqualified law. What is your example—what is your course of life? Your children are commanded to honour you, and they will usually do so, by adopting your practice. What is it? II. **REVERENCE IS A PRINCIPAL FEATURE IN THE CHARACTER AND DEPORTMENT OF A PLEASANT CHILD.** It is not servility of which I speak, or an abject, self-distrusting spirit, which shrinks and cringes in the presence of authority or age. I would rather define it to be a due and noble appreciation of what belongs to parents and all superiors, including also a chastened respect

for whatever is sacred or august. The true filial sentiment, as an excellent writer has said, will show itself in the tone of manners. You may detect the grace of this living sentiment, in the unnumbered offices that diminish a father's or a mother's care, or relieve their troubles. What exceeding beauty is there in the gentle, modest kindnesses that childhood and youth may throw around the hearthstone—the refined address—the unobtrusive attentions—the willing proffers of service! Do you ask if this be reverence? Yes—and but one rivulet from the fountain-head, for children have it in their power, if they have it in their hearts, not only to sweeten home with their courteous demeanour and ready will, but to be like attending angels there, in all that contributes to household peace and order: and when amidst the uncertainties of this mortal life, adversity or sickness invade their circle, and a shadow falls, what a blessing may arise from their hushed solicitude and consideration—what relief, more potential than all the arts of medicine, may they bring to the aching pillow, or the chamber of convalescence, by their tender assiduities. But more than this, a truly reverent child will ever be glad to adapt himself to all the varying circumstances and conditions of his father's house. If the sun of prosperity cease to shine upon it, or a necessity for frugal expenditures suddenly arise, he will not deepen the trial by a murmuring reluctance. The habit of obeisance and affectionate respect thus cultivated at home, will be displayed abroad and upon all occasions. Reverence will beautify all the ways of a pleasant child, and become his characteristic mark. **III. EARLY PIETY.** Hitherto your attention has been drawn only to the branches and specimens of the fruit—this is the root of the tree. If the trunk is vigorous, if the boughs are luxuriant and well laden, hanging over the wall of the domestic garden, so that even the wayfarer may delight in their shade, it is altogether traceable to a spring of fatness, a hidden life beneath the ground. In like manner, the mind and affections of childhood, nurtured by godly counsels, quickened and enlightened beneath home culture, pleased and persuaded by the gentle tones of a mother's voice, and freshened by the ever-descending dews of heavenly grace, will steal forth upon the outward life in visible forms of fruit and flowers, and manifold attractiveness. We shall see that conscientiousness—that sense of the Divine presence—that shrinking from sin, because it is offensive to God—that love of purity and truth, which is so much to be admired—that interest in whatsoever things are lovely and honest, and of good report—that trusting, prayerful, guileless temper, which looks upward for help, and would not willingly go astray. Who can express the comeliness and beauty which rest upon such a child? (*W. F. Morgan, D.D.*) *The Divine mercy to mourning penitents*:—The text naturally resolves itself into three parts. First, we find the careless, resolute, impenitent, reduced by chastisement to a sense of his danger, and the necessity of turning to God; and yet sensible of his utter inability, and therefore crying for the attractive influences of Divine grace. The attractive influences of Divine grace are granted, and he is enabled to return; which introduces the second branch of the text, in which the new convert is represented as reflecting upon the efficacy of converting grace, and the glorious change wrought in him by it. While the returning prodigal is venting himself in these plaintive strains in some solitary corner, his Heavenly Father's bowels are moving over him. The third part of the text represents the blessed God listening to the cries of His mourning child. **I. THE RETURNING SINNER UNDER HIS FIRST SPIRITUAL CONCERN, WHICH IS GENERALLY PREPARATORY TO EVANGELICAL REPENTANCE.** Where shall we find him? What is he doing? He is not congratulating himself upon the imaginary goodness of his heart or life, or priding himself with secret wonder in a rich conceit of his excellences; but you will hear him, in his sorrowful retirement, bemoaning, condoling himself. He sees his case to be really awful and sad, and he, as it were, takes up a lamentation over himself. He is no more senseless, hard-hearted, and self-applauding, as he was wont to be; but, like a mourning turtle, he bewails himself. "Thou hast chastised me." This, as spoken by Ephraim, had a particular reference to the Babylonish captivity; but we may naturally take occasion from it to speak of those calamities in general, whether outward or inward, that are made the means of alarming the secure sinner. There are many ways which our Heavenly Father takes to correct His undutiful children until they return to Him. Sometimes He kindly takes away their health, the abused occasion of their wantonness and security, and restrains them from their lusts with fetters of affliction (*Job xxxiii. 19, &c.*). Sometimes God awakens the sinner to bethink himself, by stripping him of his earthly supports and comforts, his estate, or his relatives, which drew away

his heart from eternal things, and thus brings him to see the necessity of turning to God, the fountain of bliss, upon the failure of the streams (2 Chron. xxxiii. 11, 12). Thus also God promises to do with His chosen (Isaek. xx. 37; Psa. lxxxix. 32; Prov. xxii. 15, xxix. 15). But the principal means of correction which God uses for the end of return to Him is that of conscience; and indeed without this, all the rest are in vain. It is conscience that makes the sinner sensible of his misery and scourges him till he return to his duty. Conscience is a serpent in his breast, which bites and gnaws his heart; and he can no more avoid it, than he can fly from himself. Its force is so great and universal that even the heathen poet Juvenal, not famous for the delicacy of his morals, taught by experience, could speak feelingly of its secret blows, and of agonising sweats under its tortures. Let not such of you as have never been tortured with its remorse, congratulate yourselves upon your happiness, for you are not innocents; and therefore conscience will not always sleep; it will not always lie torpid and inactive, like a snake benumbed with cold, in your breast. It will awaken you either to your conversion or condemnation. Therefore now submit to its wholesome severities, now yield to its chastisements. Such of you as have submitted to its authority, and obeyed its faithful admonitions, find it your best friend; and you may bless the day in which you complied with its demands, though before Divine grace renewed your heart, your wills were stubborn and reluctant; and you might say with Ephraim, "I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke." You see the obstinate reluctance of an awakened sinner to return to God. Like a wild young bullock, he would range at large, and is impatient of the yoke of the law, and the restraints of conscience. He loves his sin and cannot bear to part with it. He has no relish for the exercises of devotion and ascetic mortification; and therefore will not submit to them. The way of holiness is disagreeable to his depraved heart, and he will not turn his feet to it. But the happy soul, on whom Divine grace is determined to finish its work in spite of all opposition, is suffered to weary itself out in a vain resistance of the chastisements of conscience, till it is obliged to yield, and submit to the yoke. And then with Ephraim it will cry, "Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned." This is the mourning sinner's language, when convinced that he must submit and turn to God, and in the meantime finds himself utterly unable to turn. Never did a drowning man call for help, or a condemned malefactor plead for pardon with more sincerity and ardour. If the sinner had neglected prayer all his life before now, he flies to it as the only expedient left, or if he formerly ran it over in a careless unthinking manner, as an insignificant form, now he exerts all the importunity of his soul; now he prays as for his life, and cannot rest till his desires are answered. The sinner ventures to enforce his petition by pleading his relation to God, "Turn me; for Thou art the Lord my God." The awakened sinner is obliged to take all his encouragement from God, and not from himself. All his trust is in the Divine mercy, and he is brought to a happy self-despair. II. AS REFLECTING UPON THE SURPRISING EFFICACY OF GRACE HE HAD SOUGHT, AND WHICH WAS BESTOWED UPON HIM IN ANSWER TO HIS PRAYER. When the Lord exerts His power to subdue the stubbornness of the sinner, and sweetly to allure him to Himself, then the sinner repents; then his heart dissolves in ingenuous disinterested relents. We learn from this passage, that the true penitent is sensible of a mighty turn in his temper and inclinations. "Surely after that I was turned, I repented." His whole soul is turned from what he formerly delighted in, and turned to what he had no relish for before. Particularly his thoughts, his will, and affections are turned to God; there is a heavenly bias communicated to them which draws them to holiness, like the law of gravitation in the material world. The penitent proceeds, "After that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh." The same grace that turns him does also instruct him; nay, it is by discovering to him the beauty of holiness, and the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, that it draws him. And when instructed in these, "He smites upon his thigh." This gesture denotes consternation and amazement. He is struck with horror to think what an ungrateful, ignorant, stupid wretch he has been all his life till this happy moment. The pardoned penitent proceeds, "I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth." We are ashamed when we are caught in a mean, base, and scandalous action; we blush, and are confounded, and know not where to look, or what to say. Thus the penitent is heartily ashamed of himself, when he reflects upon the sordid dispositions he has indulged, and the base and scandalous actions he has committed. He blushes at his own inspection; he is con-

founded at his own tribunal. III. THE TENDER COMPASSION OF GOD TOWARDS MOURNING PENITENTS. While they are bemoaning their case, and conscious that they do not deserve one look of love from God, He is represented as attentively listening to catch the first penitential groan that breaks from their hearts. What strong consolation may this give to desponding mourners, who think themselves neglected by that God to whom they are pouring out their weeping supplications ! He hears your secret groans, He counts your sighs, and puts your tears into His bottle. His eyes penetrate all the secrets of your heart, and He observes all your feeble struggles to turn to Himself ; and He beholds you not as an unconcerned spectator, but with all the tender emotions of fatherly compassion : for, while He is listening to Ephraim's mournful complaints, He abruptly breaks in upon him, and sweetly surprises him with the warmest declarations of pity and grace. "Is this Ephraim ?" &c. This passage contains a most encouraging truth, that, however vile and abandoned a sinner has been, yet, upon his repentance, he becomes God's dear son, His favourite child. He will, from that moment, regard him, provide for him, protect him, and bring him to His heavenly inheritance, as His son and heir (Rom. viii. 38). (*President Davies.*) *The contrite comforted* :—What is it that wins back the heart to God ? It is God's free, full, overlasting mercy. This attracts the sinner, melts, transforms, comforts, saves him. I. A BROKEN HEART. Such was Ephraim's ; he had departed far from God, he had fretted against the Lord, he had refused for a time to submit, but chastisement after chastisement in mercy came, and at length he received instruction. 1. His froward course is strikingly set forth. "A bullock unaccustomed to the yoke." Ephraim had spurned the hand that would have guided him. 2. There was insight into, and confession of his guilt. Nothing so fit to describe his state, as it was seen by his now enlightened eye, as the untamed bullock ; like Asaph, "his heart is grieved, he is pricked in his reins" ; like him he is ready to exclaim, "So foolish was I and ignorant, I was as a beast before Thee." 3. There were the true breathings of prayer. "Turn Thou me." (1) The source is acknowledged whence this godly sorrow flows. "After that I was turned." (2) There is application for mercy. "Turn Thou me." (3) Faith was in exercise in this prayer of Ephraim. "Thou art the Lord my God." II. HEALING MERCY. The mercy that God gives is Godlike mercy ; yea, He giveth Himself to the believing soul in and by Jesus Christ. 1. God makes no mention of his sins. 2. He transcribes a fair copy of his confessions. 3. He treasures up his groans. 4. He addresses by the titles of affection the once wayward but now bemoaning Ephraim. 5. God answers the one desire of the contrite heart. (*F. Storr, M.A.*) *God's tender mercy to the penitent* :—We have in this passage two speakers, two personalities. It is so everywhere. All religion which is worthy the name is the meeting, the intercourse, the converse and conversation of two spirits : till they come into communication and contact there is no religion, no possibility of religion in any but a barren and lifeless sense—the spirit of the man, and the Spirit of his God. Ephraim is bemoaning himself, but it is in God's presence. "I have surely heard him," God says, and that, not only because He who made the ear must hear all things, but because the self-bemoaning is addressed to God, as concerned, and interested, and acting in all. "Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised ; turn Thou me, and I shall be turned." Oh, let Ephraim never bemoan himself in solitude. Let him shut the world out, but not shut self in. Let God hear him. Let him lay bare the sins and the sorrows which follow the sins, in the presence, consciously, discerningly—in the presence of the God against whom the sins are committed, and from whom the consequent sorrows come. We know not how it is, yet we do know that the whole character of the self-bemoaning is changed at once by the thought that God hears it. Oh, when I bemoan myself upon my knees, for the darkness in which sin has wrapped me round and round, for the chain which binds me, for the misery which chills me, for the weakness which baffles, and the experience of evil which paralyses me—when I do this upon my knees, there is a glimmering at once, and peradventure at least, at once of hope that I am so made as to feel that there is light in heaven, and that He before whom I kneel is already, in virtue of creation, Himself what Ephraim here called Him, "the Lord my God." We pass from the one speaker of the text, and the one personality to the other, and, having listened to the self-bemoaning of Ephraim in God's presence, have yet to give audience to the most pathetic words in all the Bible : "Is Ephraim My dear son ?" God is the speaker. "Is he a pleasant child ? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still : My heart is

troubled for him: I must surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." You will not easily persuade us that the words were spoken of Ephraim the tribe, or of even the ten tribes, and not of Ephraim the individual and the man. It is because God feels thus towards man, that He feels thus towards the nation. Never let us lose the collective life in the individual; never let us rob the collective life, whether of Israel or of England, of the precious promises written of it in the Word. On the other hand, let us see an argument, as it were a *fortiori*, of the love of God to the responsible sin-suffering soul in all that He speaks in the Bible of that aggregate of souls which is the corporate being. We cannot err in taking the words home. We honour God when we elasp to our bosom any one of His utterances. It was for us if we can make it our own—and we can make this our own. There is something unspeakably affecting in that thought, that the very heart of God is, as He here says, troubled for the sinner that He has been obliged to speak against. He would not have been true, He would not have been righteous, He would not have been gracious, He would not have been God, if He had not spoken against him whilst he was going astray. He must speak against him while he is bent upon his own ruin; but oh! to hear Him saying that He earnestly remembers him still, even while He speaks. Earnestly remembers him! What about him? We can answer that question. He remembers that He made him in His own image; He remembers what He made him for—holiness, happiness, a delightful life, full of love and joy, and growing, maturing, expanding beauty, one day to shine as the sun in the kingdom of his Father. But more, and much more than this. He remembers the man himself, just as a parent remembers a son far away serving his country in India or Egypt; or a son gone into the unseen country, oh! how to be missed and mourned; or a son—for this is more appropriate—a son who has given him trouble, for whom he has had endless anxiety, for whom his own pillow has been wet, night after night, with tears. Yes, Ephraim has given God trouble. For Ephraim God left heaven, went after him into his exile, shed His life's blood for him. St. Paul said so at Miletus. What more could He have done for him that He has not done? and, though it has been for a long time in vain, though neither gentleness nor severity has succeeded with him, though He might, if He had been a human parent, long ago have given him up, yet, being God and not man, He earnestly remembers him still. (*Dean Vaughan.*)

Ver. 29. In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge.—*The bequeathment of the ungodly*:—There is this great difference between moral and physical evil—that men will use all their carefulness to avoid the one, while every imaginable prohibition is ineffectual to deter them from the other. It is quite evident that there is not in our nature a principle of what we may call a moral self-preservation. Hence it is that, whilst the Governor of the universe has not thought it necessary to interpose the precepts of the statute-book that we may be warned against physical evil, He has heaped together edicts and motives which all bear on the avoidance of moral evil. We know, indeed, that such is the desperate proneness of man to misdoing, that all this mighty instrumentality is practically of no effect; but it is singular to observe how every motive by which our nature can be plied is brought into play, so that the Divine Legislator has left nothing untried in order to save us from iniquity. If a man be wrapt up in selfishness, why, he is told that health, and peace, and reputation will be best consulted by his "seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." Then, if he care only for himself—if he would not hate his own flesh, and mar his own happiness, let him cultivate that godliness which hath the promise of the present life, as well as that which is to come. And if a man be inaccessible to this kind of attack—if he can be contented, for the gratification of his senses and the indulgence of his passions, to brave the penalties of the law of the Almighty, the Bible will open upon him another battery, and seek to move him by his affection for others. Those yet unborn may be sufferers by your sin; for the days spoken of in our text are assuredly not yet come—the days in which "they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge." Yes, you may say, it is not to be denied that God doth visit on the children the iniquity of the fathers; but is this just? The innocent seem made to suffer for the guilty. Can this be right? No, it cannot be just that the innocent should suffer for the guilty. If you can show the children to be innocent, and therefore deserve nothing of what they receive, you will make

good your point—that the visitation is unjust; but to maintain the thorough innocence of the children would be to maintain the purity of human nature. If in themselves they deserve not to be visited with calamity, they must be exceptions to the rule that men are “born in sin and shapen in iniquity.” It is certain that every one born into the world is born in a state of wrath and condemnation: the child, whether of believing or unbelieving parents, has not a particle of right to one solitary blessing; and if, therefore, whatever be His reasons for making a distinction, God withhold many blessings from this or that child, He withhold nothing to which the child has a claim; and if He permits many calamities to fall on the child, He permits nothing which is wholly undeserved. Wherein, then, can lie the violation of justice if nothing be kept back to which there was right, nothing inflicted but in the way of retribution? But still if you allow the strict justice of the measure, you may profess to think it hard that the child should have to endure what, but for the parent’s offences, it would have escaped. Let us not, however, be carried away by appearances. The child, for example, is of a diseased constitution, of a dishonoured name, of broken fortunes; these constitute that “setting the teeth on edge,” which you think it so hard that “the fathers’ eating the sour grape” should have caused. But who can prove to me that the child is injured by the visitation? Nay, who can prove to me that the child is not really advantaged? Are penury and affliction never overruled for good? Is it necessarily an evil to have been born poor in place of rich—to be of weak health instead of strong—to struggle with adversity, in place of being lapped in prosperity? No man who feels himself immortal, who is conscious that this confined theatre of existence is but the school in which he is disciplined for a higher and nobler, will contend for the necessary injuriousness of want and calamity. We are poor judges of injuries. What seems to be injurious, is so capable of being overruled for good, that it may turn out beneficial. There may be many a tongue which would never have been tuned to the high praise of God, had not “the teeth been set on edge” by the sin of the father. Now there would seem no more important and practical application of this subject, than the pressing home on parents the duties which they owe to their children. Fathers of the present day will “rise early and late take rest,” they will ply without ceasing at laborious occupations, and the strength of intellect, and the powers of muscle shall be devoted with a like prodigality; and the animating thing throughout the unwearied enlistment of every talent and every moment in one engrossing pursuit shall be the upholding of a family in sufficiency and obtaining the means of future independence. And it may never occur to these fathers that if they so indulge the passion of accumulation as to become the slaves of covetousness, or if they so engross themselves with the wharf and the exchange as to leave comparatively no time for the Church and the closet—or if the resolve to be rich induce them to depart from high-toned rectitude, and to carry on trade with those shuffling and underhand tricks by which it is often deformed—it may never, we fear, occur to them that in their zeal for their children’s welfare they may be storing up for them calamity, and that with every pound they lay by, they may lay by a worm which, if it sleep till their own death, shall then struggle into life and gnaw at the core of their family’s happiness. Yet, if there be truth in the text, the father’s sin goes down to his posterity: and where shall be the profit of a large bequeathment of land or consols if there be fastened to it the entailment of the Almighty’s displeasure? God has ordained that wickedness shall defeat its own end; He may allow you to heap up wealth, but He puts the stamp of His anger on the silver and the gold; and the nothing which a pious beggar has to leave were a better inheritance than the coffers of ingots on which were impressed the stamp of the Lord’s indignation. The days are not yet come, in which it shall no longer be said, “The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children’s teeth were set on edge.” But the days shall come when the prophecy shall be accomplished, even as will be that which asserts the universal extinction of war; though nation is as yet ready to “rise against nation,” and no signs appear of “the sword being beaten into the ploughshare.” Prophecies like these are commands as well as prophecies; and their being fulfilled as predictions may greatly depend on their being obeyed as precepts. Here is a clear practical lesson for parents. Would you save your children from the having “the teeth set on edge”? Take heed, then, that you “eat” not “the sour grape” yourselves! You may be sure that you then consult best for the interests of your families when you consult most your own souls. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*)

The hereditary principle in God’s government of humanity:—I. MAN HAS BEEN

SUBJECT TO THIS HEREDITARY PRINCIPLE OF GOVERNMENT THROUGH ALL PAST AGES. 1. Its necessary working is secured by the connection existing between the members of our race. (1) How close is the tie of physical relationship subsisting between men and generations! We are all made of the "one blood," all descendants from the same stock. Our parents transmit to us not merely their natures, but their idiosyncrasies, their diseases, their characteristic propensities. (2) How close, too, is the tie of social interdependence. Every man is dependent upon his brother. One has something to impart which the other requires. 2. It is registered in the everyday experience of humanity. (1) You see it written in a man's history as the lineal descendant from a particular family. Some inherit a princely fortune, and some a crushing penury, from their ancestors. Their social status, too, is often ruled by the position and conduct of those of whom they were born. (2) You see it written in his history as the offspring of past generations. The human plant does not grow up in its wild luxuriance and unassisted strength, but is trained against the walls and espaliers of law and government, and pruned by the hand of public customs and manners. II. THIS HEREDITARY PRINCIPLE OF THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT IS TO MAN NO JUST GROUND OF COMPLAINT. 1. No man is made to suffer more than he actually deserves on account of his own personal sins. The method is for the Judge of all the earth to determine and no one else. In sooth, since suffering must come to the sinner, I would sooner have it through parents than in any other way; for that medium seems to afford some alleviating considerations. Love modifies suffering, cools its fires on the nerves, and lessens its pressure on the heart. 2. The evil which thus descends to us from our ancestors is not to be compared with that which we produce ourselves. With evils that are transmitted to you there can be no remorse. You bear them as calamities; and you have the grace of heaven, the sympathy of the good, and the smiles of an approving conscience to enable you to bear them with calm magnanimity, and even with triumphant exultation. 3. Whilst this hereditary principle of the Divine government entails evil, it also entails good. Whence came our political constitution, which, notwithstanding its defects, affords a better guarantee of personal liberty, social order, and human progress, than any other government under heaven? Did we elaborate it ourselves? No. It is the production of days. It has grown out of the enlightening instructions, the importunate prayers, the patriotic sacrifices and struggles of the best men of the generations that are gone. 4. This hereditary principle tends to restrain vice and stimulate virtue. What sacrifices will not parents of the ordinary natural affection make to serve the interest of their children! Now the hereditary principle of government brings this mighty impulse in the world's heart to act in the restraint of evil and in the development of good. III. THE TIME WILL COME WHEN MEN WILL CEASE ENTIRELY COMPLAINING OF THIS PRINCIPLE. In "those days" of universal knowledge, virtue, and blessedness, not a solitary man will be found to complain of this hereditary principle in the Divine government. Every man shall have such an insight into the nature of God's administration that he shall see the wisdom and feel the beneficence of this principle. In "those days" the successive generations of holy and happy men will clearly see that the good, that will then have come out of this principle to humanity, will far out-measure all the evil that has ever grown out of its operation, through all the past history of man. In "those days," parents, through many a circling age, down to the solemn day of doom, will transmit nothing to their offspring, but baleness of constitution, elasticity of intellect, purity of feeling, nobleness of soul, and honour of name, knowledge, and blessed example, on which it shall leave its successor to lay another, and thus on for centuries; until humanity shall find itself on that rich and lofty soil, where the choicest productions of paradise will bloom for ever. 1. This subject serves to show the right which every reformer has to protest against the sins of individuals. 2. It serves to show the solemn responsibility of the parental character. 3. It serves to show that the best way to elevate the race is to train the young. 4. It serves to throw some light upon what is called "original sin." A deterioration of our nature, and a disturbance of our moral relations, is a fact palpable to every eye, incontrovertible to every intellect, conscious to every soul. 5. It serves to indicate the philosophy of Christ's incarnation. (*Homilist.*)

VERS. 31-37. I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah.—*The new covenant*:—The old and new covenants are

placed in opposition to each other. The latter is represented as being—I. MORE EFFECTIVE IN ITS PROVISIONS. 1. Spiritual. 2. Loving. 3. Cheerful. 4. Diligent. 5. Persevering. II. MORE COMPREHENSIVE IN ITS RANGE. 1. An important truth implied. It is the duty of those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, to be zealous in instructing those around them. 2. A cheering assurance given. "They shall all know Me," &c. 3. A striking reason adduced. "For I will forgive their iniquity," &c. To know God savingly, is to know Him as a sin-forgiving God, and that the enjoyment of His pardoning mercy is an evidence of our interest in all the other blessings of the Gospel covenant. III. MORE SECURE AS REGARDS ITS STABILITY. "Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun," &c. The carnal and hypocritical He would indeed cast off; but for the encouragement of the spiritual seed of Israel, the most stable things in the universe are referred to as a pledge of the immutability of His gracious purposes. (*Expository Outlines.*)

The new covenant:—I. THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION IS DESCRIBED AS A NEW COVENANT. This covenant would be new, for it had predecessors, and God is said to have made a covenant with Noah when He promised that a judgment like the flood should not be repeated, and with Abraham when He promised Canaan to his descendants for an everlasting possession, and imposed the condition of circumcision. But by the phrase "the old covenant" is meant especially the covenant which God made with Israel as a people when Moses descended from Mount Sinai. At later periods in Israel's history this covenant was again and again renewed—as by Joshua, at Shechem; as by King Asa, at Jerusalem; as by Jehoida, the priest, in the temple, and by the priesthood and people together, under Hezekiah, and under the auspices of Ezra and Nehemiah in later days still, after the great captivity. It was renewed and it was continually broken. It was a Divine work, and yet, through man's perverseness, it was a continuous failure. The new "covenant": it is a phrase which sounds somewhat strange to the ears of Christians, who have been accustomed all their life to talk of the New "Testament." A covenant is a compact or agreement, and it implies something like equal rights between those who are parties to it. Monarchs make covenants or treaties with monarchs, nations with nations. Even when, as sometimes happens, the government of a great Power enters into contracts with a house of business, or with an individual, this is because the firm or the person in question is for the purposes of the contract on terms of equality with the negotiating government, as having at disposal some means of rendering it a signal service, which, for the moment, throws all other considerations into the background. And this general equality between parties to a covenant may be further illustrated by the case of the most sacred of all possible human contracts, the marriage tie—that marriage tie which, by the law of God, once made, can be dissolved only by death, and in which it is the glory of the Christian law—I do not speak of human legislation in Christian times—to have secured to the contracting parties equal rights. It is, then, a little startling to find this same word employed to describe a relation between the infinite and eternal God and the creatures of His hand. He wants nothing when He has everything to give. Man needs everything, and can do nothing that will increase the blessedness that is already infinite, or enhance a power which, as it is, knows no bounds. But here are covenants between God and man, covenants in which there seems no place for reciprocity, covenants in which indulgence or endowment is all on one side, and acknowledgment, or, rather, failure, on the other; covenants in naming which language seems to forget its wonted meaning, and to betray us into misconceptions, which bring, to say the least, bewilderment and confusion; and yet, in reality, when God speaks of making a covenant with man, He is only giving one more instance of that law of condescension of which the highest results appeared when He, the Infinite, took on Him a human form, when He, the Eternal, entered as a man into fellowship with the children of time. A covenant, then, is a contract or compact, and the question cannot but occur to us, "Might the covenant which God makes with His people not come to be called, as it is called, a testament?" for the words "covenant" and "testament" represent in our English Bibles a single word in each of the original languages. The Greek-speaking Jews of Alexandria, who some 200 years or more before our Lord turned the Old Testament, bit by bit, from Hebrew into Greek, as it was wanted for use in the service of their synagogue, and then made of these fragments the great version which we to-day call the Septuagint, used the Greek word for "will" to translate the Hebrew word for "covenant," because they observed that the old covenant of God with the patriarchs and with Israel did

involve actual bequests such as was the possession of Canaan, which could only be inherited in a distant future. And thus the Hebrew word meaning a contract was strained, if you please, by its actual use to mean a testament, and the Greek word meaning primarily, although not exclusively, a will acquired by its associations the sense of a covenant or contract. He who by His providence controls the course of human events and the currents of human thought does also most assuredly take human speech so that it may do His work, and it is His doing and not any chance irregularity that the original word in the New Testament has thus come to mean both covenant and testament, for that which it was intended to describe answered to both meanings. Religion as such, and the religion of the Gospels especially, is at once a compact with God and a bequest from God. The Gospel, I say, is a compact or covenant, because its blessings are provisionally bestowed. They must be met by faith, hope, love, repentance. And it is also a will or testament more obviously than was the Mosaic covenant, for it was made by our Divine Lord when His death was in full view, and when He, who alone could use such words without folly or without blasphemy, took the cup into His blessed hands, and when He had given thanks He gave it to His followers, saying, "Drink ye all of this; for this is My blood of the New Testament, which is being poured out for you and for many for the remission of sins." And yet this very testament is so conditioned as to be a covenant too, and the solemn words to which I have just referred were but an echo in an after age of the saying in the prophets, "Behold, I make a new covenant." II. OF THIS NEW COVENANT IN THE GOSPELS THERE WERE ACCORDING TO JEREMIAH TO BE THREE CHARACTERISTICS. We cannot suppose that he is giving us an exhaustive description. He selects these three points because they form a vivid and easily understood contrast between the new covenant and the old, between Christianity and Judaism. 1. In those who have a real part in the new covenant the law of God was not to be simply or chiefly an outward rule, it was to be an inward principle. The law was to be no longer an outward rule condemning the inward life or even rousing the spirit of rebellion: it was to be an inward operation, not running counter to the will, but shaping it and claiming obedience, not from fear but from love, and from love heightened to enthusiasm. It was to present itself, not as a summons from without the will, but as an impulse from within the soul; not as declaring that which has to be done or foregone, but as describing that which it was already a joy to forego or to do; in short, a new power, the Spirit of Christ, giving Christians a new nature; the nature of Christ would be within the soul and would effect a change. 2. The second token of a part in the new covenant is the growth of the soul in the knowledge of Divine truth. In ancient Israel, as now, men learned what they could learn about God from human teachers, but the truths which they learned, though inculcated with great industry, were, in the majority of cases, not really mastered, because there was no accompanying process of interpretation and readjustment from within. It was to be otherwise in the future. In the new covenant the Divine Teacher, without dispensing with such human instruments as we are, would do the most important part of the work Himself. He would make truth plain to the soul, and would enamour the soul with the beauty of truth by such instruction as is beyond the reach of human argument and human language, since it belongs altogether to the world of spirits. "Ye have an unction from the Holy One," said St. John to his readers, "and ye know all things." "Listen not," cries St. Augustine, "too eagerly to the outward words: the true Master sits within." 3. A third characteristic of the new covenant was to be the forgiveness of sins. This, although stated last, is really a precedent condition of the other two. "This is a true saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and this salvation of His must begin with pardon, and this pardon is the crowning triumph of the new covenant between God and man. (*Canon Liddon.*) *The new covenant*:—This particular portion of the chapter is the only clear evangelical declaration in the Book. It reads more like Isaiah than Jeremiah. It must have been a great gladness to that sad-hearted and sorrowful prophet to have this glimpse of coming restoration and grace for his sinful and sorely afflicted people. He was all the more glad to pour in this balsam because he had hitherto been giving them salt for their wounds and wormwood to drink. I. THE NEW PLANTATION. Hitherto it had been his sad and sorrowful duty to declare to the people God's purpose to "root out, to pull down, and to destroy and throw down"; but now the time has come to fulfil his task of declaring God's purpose to "build and to

plant" (i. 10). The devastation of the land of Israel and Judah had been complete, the slain of the people vast in numbers; the utter taking away and dispersing of the ten tribes had left but a remnant even before the captivity of Judah. The promise of a restoration of Judah to the land would be, even when fulfilled, but the return of a mere handful of people and cattle. So small, indeed, that the land would still seem to be desolate for want of inhabitants, and in poverty for want of cattle. In view of this very discouraging outlook the prophet speaks this most comforting promise. 1. The sowing—"I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man, and with the seed of beast." The same promise was made to Israel and Judah by Ezekiel (xxxvi. 9-11), and by Hosea (ii. 23). This promise seems to include the gathering in of the Gentiles as well, just as the same covenant promise is made to them as to the returned Jews. The figure is one of the greatest encouragement. The remnant of the people and cattle are as the handful of seed for the ground, but God will so bless them that they shall increase like seed sown before a great harvest that shall fill the land. The same thought is expressed in Psa. lxxii. 16. This prophecy was scarcely realised in the return from Babylon, but it had the beginning of its fulfilment then. There is a suggestion here of the method of multiplication of the people; as seed sown in the ground multiplies into a great harvest, so shall living Christians multiply themselves in those whom they are the means of converting to God. How Andrew multiplied himself when he found Peter, who after was the means of winning three thousand souls at one preaching! Stephen multiplied himself through Saul of Tarsus. In this latter case seed was literally sown in the ground, and out of the martyr blood sprung the apostle of the Gentiles. 2. The watching—"And it shall come to pass that like as I have watched over them to pluck up," &c., "so will I watch over them to build and to plant, saith the Lord." The growth of God's kingdom in the earth among men is not a mere process of nature. It goes on in the power of God's special and supernatural gifts of grace, and is carried forward under His watchful eye and fostering care. Not one least convert makes his appearance in the world but that God watches over him to protect and defend. His promise is that "their soul shall be as a watered garden" (ver. 12). It is comforting to know that God's promise of grace and favour is as true as His threats have proved. If sin has abounded to our ruin, let us know that grace doth much more abound to our salvation. 3. The new individual relation between God and the people. The saying which the prophet alludes to: "The fathers have eaten a sour grape and the children's teeth are set on edge," shall no longer be in vogue when that day of grace of which the prophet speaks comes. He condemns the saying, as does Ezekiel (xviii. 1-3). There was a certain truth in the saying, but it had been perverted, and the entire proverb had been quoted in such a way as to cast a reproach of injustice upon God. As a matter of fact, there is a law of heredity, both physical and moral, to which every one must submit. It is impossible to shut one's eyes to the fact; but then according to God's law, and especially according to His grace, moral responsibility does not attach to this hereditary transmission of consequences unless the heir consents to the father's sin and walks in his way. Any individual descendant may break the heredity at any point he pleases by turning to the Lord. It is also true that in former times God dealt with the nation as such, rather than with individuals. The nation's sin brought their present calamities upon them, in which many individually righteous men suffered; but in the days to come the national will give place to the individual relation. This for two reasons. First, the nation as a whole will have learned righteousness in that day, and so it will come to pass that the individual transgressor will be so conspicuously by himself, that it will be seen at a glance that his suffering or judgment will rest upon the fact of his own sin. Hitherto the individually righteous man had been so rare in the nation that he was overlooked and swept away in the tide of the nation's punishment, just as Caleb and Joshua were carried back into the wilderness for forty years with the whole unbelieving nation. But, second, there is a distinct advance in thought by the prophet in the direction of that individuality of relation which characterises the new covenant in distinction from that which was so apparent in the old. Under the law the oneness and entirety of the nation was maintained; under the Gospel the individual soul is brought before God. "Every one of us shall give an account of himself to God" (Rom. xiv. 12). Nothing could more mark the great advance in thought than this prophetic declaration. II. THE NEW COVENANT. As if to explain and justify his new doctrine, he announces the fact of a new covenant. This is the first distinct announcement of the new

dispensation under this title. This covenant is to differ radically in terms and contents from the old covenant which God made with the children of Israel when He brought them out of Egypt. Reference is clear to the New Testament dispensation, as may be seen from Hebrews viii. By a covenant is meant an appointment by God. We are not to understand that God entered into a contract with man. He appointed certain things, promised certain things, upon certain conditions which the people were to perform. But the covenant or agreement was wholly of His own making. The old covenant, so far as the blessings were concerned, had failed utterly because of the utter failure of the people to "do the things" which God commanded. Therefore He has taken it away and substituted another covenant, based upon better promises—one in which He not only proposes blessings, but undertakes to fulfil the conditions upon which they shall flow in to us. 1. Some contrasts. The old covenant was broken by the disobedience of the people, though in the administration thereof God had acted throughout as a forgiving husband who was constantly compounding the sins of an unfaithful wife. But this new covenant is kept and secured by the performance of all its conditions by God Himself, acting in and through Christ (Heb. viii. 6). The old covenant was a faulty one, never intended indeed to be the means of their salvation, but only to remind them of their sin and show them their helplessness. Not faulty in the thing it was intended to accomplish, but in its final ability to save; whereas the new covenant, made in and with Christ for our sakes, is a perfect covenant in terms and in fulfilment, and so does secure our salvation (Heb. viii. 6-13, x. 1-22; Rom. viii. 3, 4). The old covenant had a complicated and elaborate ceremonial, which could not be understood or administered except by priests and ministers, and then but imperfectly; the new covenant is simply based on the one complete offering which Jesus Christ has made for all time and for all people; He being at once tabernacle, priest, altar, offering, and minister. We simply, as sinners, go to God by Him, confess that we are sinners, acknowledge that we are helpless either to get rid of sin or maintain righteousness, and call upon Him to save us. This He does fully, freely, and eternally by His grace, without any merit of our own. Under the old covenant the provisions for the cancelling of sins were not only imperfect but utterly futile, every offering made by man through the priests being in fact but a remembrance of sin, not a removal of it; whereas in this new covenant there is perfect provision (Heb. x.). Therefore on its basis the forgiveness of sins is freely proclaimed (ver. 34; Heb. x. 17, 18). 2. Chief characteristics. The prophet mentions three—(1) Inwardness. "I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts." The terms of the old covenant, indeed its whole contents, were written first on tables of stone and then all its detail in external laws, which the people were compelled to bind between their eyes, on their wrists, and fix them on the door-plates of their houses and the posts of their gates. The whole relation was as between an outward law and an outward obedience. The law commanded and the subject had to obey. The law of Moses did not take account of thoughts or motives, only of actions. The action was not that of faith, but of works. But this new covenant is not so proclaimed and written. Jesus shows in the Sermon on the Mount that true righteousness extends to thoughts and motives, and so the true life of God is not in externals, but in heart relation to God. Therefore we are God's children, not by national or family relation, but by a new birth, by faith in Jesus Christ. We obey the law not because of outward pressure, but from inward conviction, not by the fear of external punishment, but by the constraint of an inward love. In the new creation which comes to believers under the new covenant (2 Cor. v. 17), they are not bound by a multitude of statutes and minute rules, but constrained by a personal love to and for Jesus Christ. It is now an affectionate loyalty to a Divine Person; no longer a fearful obedience to an external, cold and pitiless law. An old writer says, in answer to an anxious inquiry as to what a Christian may and may not do: "Love God and do what you please." That is, if the heart is controlled by the love of God, if the law is written in the heart, then the Christian will know what is right and wrong by the instinct of the law of righteousness in him, and will only desire to do that thing which heart and conscience teach him. Christ in us the hope of Glory is the best law a Christian can have. This is to walk with God, and to walk with God is certainly to walk in paths of righteousness. (2) Knowledge. "And they shall teach no more every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know Me from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord." I think the sense of this passage is that, under the new covenant with the law in the inward parts and written in

the heart, the system shall not be dependent on intellectual training or culture. Philosophical or scientific knowledge must be painfully taught and more painfully learned. The young child is often as enlightened in the things of the Spirit as the aged scholar; the ignorant negro as intelligent in spiritual things as his cultured master. This knowledge is for the least as well as the greatest, and is dependent not so much upon teaching and learning as upon spiritual apprehension (1 Cor. i. 13-end, ii. 1-10). So also John declares that, with this law in our hearts and the Spirit of God for a teacher, we are not dependent upon anyone to teach us the essential truth of the Gospel (1 John ii. 27). (3) Universality. "From the least to the greatest" is an expression which carries with it the idea of universality as to the race. The old covenant was confined to the Jewish people, the new covenant, or the Gospel, is "for all people." The terms of the covenant of grace are the same to all; the masses of heathendom are to be dealt with just as the so-called Christian nations. "There is no difference" now, for as all have sinned, all have been brought under the provisions of grace. Let the covenant, then, be published abroad.

3. The contents of the Covenant. These are three—(1) "I will be their God." This was a promise under the old covenant; it shall be more than confirmed under the new. They had forfeited the right of having Him for their God by their breach of His covenant, but now that which could not be theirs by law comes to be theirs by Grace. After His resurrection, Jesus sent this message to His disciples (John xx. 17). This is the relation now. He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the same close and blessed way He is our God and Father. (2) "They shall be My people." Not an outward and earthly people, but an heavenly and spiritual. Every one shall be born of the Spirit, and each one is so an offspring of God. This promise is often emphasised in the closing Book of Revelation (Rev. xxi. 3, 4). (3) The forgiveness of sin. "For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Matt. xxvi. 28). This is the great promise which the apostle held out to the people: "Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins" (Acts xiii. 38). We might multiply passages innumerable to show this great blessing, and how it glows in the forefront of all those of the new covenant. Not only does He forgive our iniquities, but He utterly forgets them (Psa. xxxii. 1).

III. ASSURANCES. The wonderful covenant promises are now guaranteed by such assurances as must satisfy any people or any soul. God appeals to the heavens, where He has set the sun, moon, and stars for lights by day and night, whose permanence is accepted; He appeals to the ocean, which obeys some mysterious power, and never fails. As long as they endure, so shall the terms of this covenant stand. When heaven and earth can be measured and searched out, and the ordinances of heaven and earth fail, then shall the seed of Israel fail, but not till then (vers. 36, 37). (*G. F. Pentecost, D.D.*)

Jeremiah's prophecy of the new covenant.—1. Of two things we may be sure beforehand. (1) The prophet's hope of permanent well-being in the future will not be based on any expectation of the people doing better, but rather on the faith that God in His grace will do more for them and in them. The action of Divine love may, nay, doubtless will, transform human nature so as to make the people of the new covenant veritable sons of God; but the initiative will lie with God, not with men; and just on that account the new covenant will be stable as the ordinances of the sun and moon and stars. (2) Since the new constitution is to be introduced on the express ground of dissatisfaction with the old, its provisions will be found to have a pointed reference to those of the latter, and to be of such a character as to supply the needful remedy for their defects.

2. Looking now into the prophecy itself, we find that the description which it gives of the peculiarities of the new covenant exactly answers to these expectations. (1) God appears most conspicuously throughout as the agent. He is the doer, man is the passive subject of His gracious action. He is the giver, man is but the receiver. The old covenant ran, "Now therefore, if ye will obey," &c. (Exod. xix. 5). In the new covenant there is no "if," suspending Divine blessing and favour on man's good behaviour. God promises absolutely to be their God, and to regard them as His people, and to insure the relation against all risk of rupture by Himself making the people what He wishes them to be. (2) There is an obvious reference to the defects of the old covenant in the provisions of the new. Whereas, in the case of the old, the law of duty was written on tables of stone; in the case of the new, the law is to be written on the heart; whereas, under the old, owing to the ritual character of the worship, the knowledge of God and His will was a complicated affair in which men generally were helplessly dependent on a

professional class, under the new, the worship of God would be reduced to the simplest spiritual elements, and it would be in every man's power to know God at first hand, the sole requisite for such knowledge as would then be required being a pure heart. (3) Whereas, under the old, the provisions for the cancelling of sin were very unsatisfactory, and utterly unfit to perfect the worshipper as to conscience, by dealing thoroughly with the problem of guilt—of which no better evidence could be desired than the institution of the great day of atonement, in which a remembrance of sin was made once a year, and by which nothing more than an annual and putative forgiveness was procured—under the new, on the contrary, God would grant to His people a real, absolute, and perennial forgiveness, so that the abiding relation between Him and them should be as if sin had never existed. 3. We must enter a little into detail by way of further explanation. (1) That the contrast is rightly taken in the first of the three conditions will be disputed by few, if any. One cannot read the words, "I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts," without thinking of the tables of stone which occupy so prominent a place in the history of the Sinaitic covenant. And the writing on the heart suggests very forcibly the defects of the ancient covenant, in so far as it had the fundamental laws of life. The slabs on which the ten words are inscribed may abide as a lasting monument, proclaiming what God requires of man, saying to successive generations, Remember to do this and to avoid doing that. But while the stone slabs may avail to keep men in mind of their duty, they are utterly impotent to dispose them to perform it; in witness whereof we need only refer to Israel's behaviour at the foot of the mount of lawgiving. Manifestly the writing on the heart is sorely wanted in order that the law may be kept, not merely in the ark, but in human conduct. And that, accordingly, is what Jeremiah puts in the forefront in his account of the new covenant, on which restored Israel is to be constituted. How the mystic writing is to be achieved he does not say, perhaps he does not know; but he believes that God can and will achieve it somehow; and he understands full well its aim and its certain result in a holy life. (2) Dispute is most likely to arise in connection with the second condition, referred to in the words, "They shall teach no more every man his neighbour," &c. The primary lesson we take to be, that spiritual knowledge in the new time will take the place occupied by ritual under the old. Spiritual knowledge is a kind of knowledge which can be communicated to each man at first hand, and which indeed can be communicated in no other way. God, as a Spirit, reveals Himself to each human spirit, to each individual man who has a pure heart and who worships in spirit and in truth. On the other hand, the knowledge of positive precepts, such as those contained in the ritual system, can be only obtained at second hand. One man, who has himself been taught, must teach others. The reason, the conscience, or the heart could never reveal God's will as embodied in such carnal ordinances. And only on supposition that a tacit reference to the ritual system is intended can the full force of the words "They shall teach no more every man his neighbour" be perceived. For what was it in the Sinaitic covenant that made men dependent on their neighbour for the knowledge of God? Surely it was the ritual system. The priest's lips kept knowledge, and men had to seek the Torah, the needful instruction in religious ritual, at his mouth. And it was a grievous bondage, a sure index that the old covenant could not be the final form of God's relation with men, but was destined one day to be antiquated and replaced by a better covenant with better promises. For these reasons, we find in this part of the oracle concerning the new covenant the prediction that the ritual law would form no part of the final covenant between God and His people, and that in the good time coming men should not be kept dependent on priests and far from God by an elaborate ceremonial; but, taught of the Spirit, should worship God as Father, offering unto Him the spiritual rational service of devout thoughts and gracious affections. So it was understood by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who gives prominence to the ritual of the old covenant as one of the things most urgently demanding antiquation (Heb. ix. 1). (3) The third blessing of the new covenant, the complete and perpetual forgiveness of sin, is so clearly defined that no dispute can arise as to its nature; the only point open to debate is the feature of the old covenant, to which it contains a tacit reference. We assumed that the mental reference is to the provision in the Levitical system for the cancelling of sin, especially the great day of atonement. Jeremiah evidently speaks as one who feels that the old Sinaitic covenant, at

this point as at others, was seriously defective. It made elaborate arrangements for cancelling the sins of ignorance and precipitancy committed by the people, so that these might not interrupt their fellowship with God; and yet there was no real effective forgiveness. For many of the more grievous offences there was not even an atonement of any kind provided. The Levitical forgiveness was thus both partial and shadowy; the problem of human sin was not thoroughly grappled with. All this Jeremiah felt; and therefore, in his picture of the ideally perfect covenant, he assigns a place to a forgiveness worthy of the name—a forgiveness covering the whole of Israel's sins: her iniquities as well as her errors; and not merely covering them, but blotting them out of the very memory of heaven. 4. But on what does this free, full, and absolute forgiveness of the new covenant rest? The Levitical forgiveness was founded on Levitical sacrifices. Is the forgiveness of the new covenant to be founded on the sacrifice "of nobler name"? That is a question which the student familiar with his New Testament will very naturally answer in the affirmative; and we all know the answer given in the Epistle to the Hebrews. But if it be asked, What is Jeremiah's answer to the question? we must reply, None. The glorious thought that the ideals of priesthood and of sacrifice can then only be realised when priest and victim meet in one person, does not seem as yet to have risen above the horizon. And yet one may well hesitate to make an assertion when he reads Isaiah liii., or even those significant words of Jeremiah himself, "I was like a lamb that is brought to the slaughter." The idea that a man, and not a beast, is the true sin-bearer is struggling into the prophetic consciousness. If the sun of this great doctrine is not yet risen, its dawn may be discerned on the eastern sky. (*A. B. Bruce, D.D.*)

A new covenant:—I. THE BLESSINGS OF THE NEW COVENANT. 1. God undertakes to write His law in our hearts. 2. God undertakes to establish a relation between Himself and us. 3. God undertakes to give us the knowledge of Himself. 4. God undertakes to pardon all our iniquities. II. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW COVENANTS. 1. In the freeness of their grants. 2. In the extent of their provisions. 3. In the duration of their benefits. (*G. Brooks.*)

Ver. 33. *I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.*—*The newness of the covenant*:—A covenant is a contract or agreement between two parties, binding each to the other, and equally binding on both. The eligibility of any such covenant depends on the fitness of the parties concerned to carry out the terms, the conditions of it,—when on both sides equally, there is alike the will and the power to act upon it, to adhere to it. The two parties to the covenant referred to in the preceding verse, were "the God of Israel," and "the house of Israel." It was made "with their fathers in the day that He took them by the hand, to bring them out of the land of Egypt." That was the date of it. It was a covenant of mutual friendship or goodwill, and of mutual service. He was "an husband unto them" (ver. 32), and it was something equivalent, in respect of sacredness, to the marriage vow by which, as His chosen bride, their fidelity was pledged to Him. "Which covenant," however, "they brake." Their idolatry was "adultery." The only claim which Israel had thereafter was to "get a bill of divorcement, and to be put away." Her merited doom would have been final rejection,—to have had "a full end made" of her, as there was to be, as there has been, of the other nations, such as Babylon, whither the Lord scattered her. Instead of this, however, a wondrous announcement, prefaced by the word "Behold," is here made (ver. 33). The former covenant having come to nought, through the failure of one of the contracting parties, God says, He will make another,—He will make another with the same "treacherous house of Israel,"—He will bind Himself to them anew. But He will so make it this time, as to ensure its being kept. He will become bound for both the parties, He will undertake for the fidelity of His partner, as well as for His own. It is the "covenant of grace," of which the text speaks, as the presently existing régime, the basis of the constitution, under which, as the subjects of God's moral government, we now live; "the covenant," one and alone, without a second, like the one "bow in the cloud," in the day of rain, spanning the world in its embrace. It is new in form, though not in substance. It was new to Adam, the first covenant-transgressor, when, instead of doom, he found in it deliverance. It was new to Abraham, when his faith in it was counted to him for (or unto) righteousness, when he received the seal of his acceptance with God, not after, but "before he was circumcised." It was new to as many of Abraham's posterity, under the law, as had faith enough

to discern its newness through the haze, and amid the shadows of that comparatively dark economy.—devout men like Simeon, and devout women like Anna, who waited for the “consolation of Israel.” It was new—a new revelation to the world—when that new thing was created in the earth of which the prophet speaks (ver. 22), the sinless humanity of Christ, when “God sent forth His Son,” &c. It is new still to every newly awakened sinner, when he first gets a sight of it, reads it with his own eyes, and finds out that there is a place in it for him. It is new in this respect, that it shall never be “old,” or become obsolete, or go out of date, or lose its charm, or disclose all that is wonderful in it, never, even in eternity! There are four clauses, or articles, in it, setting forth the fourfold provision which He has made for carrying it into effect, i.e., for carrying out what has been His invariable purpose, in all His transactions with men as His creatures, from the beginning, even to “bless them,” by making and keeping them obedient to Himself—to make them happy, in their being obedient and holy. 1. Clear understanding. “I will put My law into their mind,” God does this when He lets us see ourselves as the breakers of it, and Christ as the keeper, the fulfiller of it,—when He reveals to us the length, the breadth, the spirituality, the beauty of the law,—in Christ’s living and dying obedience to it,—how it was “magnified” by Him! 2. Permanent impression. “I will put My law into their mind,”—to dwell there. I will “write it in their hearts,” so as to be indelible, and so as to be ever at hand, available, as a rule of duty, a standard of appeal. 3. There is, however, something more engaged for on our behalf than mere acquiescence or approval. There is pleasure and delight. What is “written in the heart” is the object of the heart’s esteem, love, complacency. And this is true of God’s law; when He writes it, then He makes its very strictness look beautiful, its severity seem “sweetly reasonable.” Its perfection becomes its charm. 4. Where there is clear intelligence, and constant remembrance, and cordial choice of the law, there will also be—there cannot but be—an abiding, practical influence,—a loyal subjection to it, such as the legal, carnal mind, that is so fond of making a bargain with God, will not, cannot yield. (*J. C. Burns.*) *Means of the world’s conversion:*—I. WHAT INSTRUMENT WILL BE EMPLOYED TO BRING ABOUT THE BLESSED CONDITION OF THE HUMAN FAMILY PREDICTED IN THE TEXT. This instrument is Divine truth, most expressively called in the text, knowledge of the Lord: that is, the exhibition of the Divine character, more than any other truth, before all consciences, is to be the mighty engine by which heaven will work out the moral revolution of the world. What is the moral law itself, but God’s character—a catalogue of His perfection, written out in the form of precepts? The soul that knows what God is, sees intuitively what itself ought to be. To know Him, is to know His character, His government, His rights, His claims on us, and our duties to Him. It is to know His plan of mercy,—His Son, and His Spirit—His pardoning and sanctifying grace. II. BY WHAT METHODS AND AGENCY IS THIS GRAND INSTRUMENT TO BE APPLIED TO THE RENOVATION OF THE WORLD? How is this knowledge of the Lord to be spread all over the earth, and to be brought in contact with every human heart? In this stage of the Church’s history at least, it is evidently the Divine arrangement that men shall be themselves the instruments of saving their own race. That this is the way to do a great work, we learn from the analogies of the natural world. How are the coral isles of the ocean made? Not by being upheaved, by some great convulsion, from the bosom of the deep; but by the ceaseless labours of little insects, each of which works in its own place, and adds its mite to the accumulated mass. It stops not to form combinations and lay plans, but labours in its sphere. How is the huge globe watered, and made productive? Not by great seas, but by little streams, or, rather, by single drops of rain and dew, each refreshing a single leaf, or blade of grass. How is bread produced for the millions of mankind? Each stalk of corn becomes responsible for a limited number of grains. And, in the moral world, we see the same results produced in the same way. How is it that vice is propagated? How are drunkards, gamblers, and infidels made? Not by wholesale, but by individual contact. One corrupt heart infects some other heart: one polluted soul taints some other soul with the infection of its own depravity; and thus recruits are ever multiplied for the host of Satan. Let it be so in the work of salvation. Let each Christian labour to rescue his neighbour and his brother, and how soon will the world “be filled with the knowledge of the Lord”? Nor will such benevolence be restricted to its own immediate circle. A genuine concern for the salvation of one soul is of the nature of the most enlarged philanthropy. From this subject we learn—I. The true remedy for all our social

and political evils. It is by spreading the knowledge of the Lord. 2. The excellence of those methods of doing good, which exercise the conscience on questions of personal duty. Hence the excellence of all those forms of effort in which teaching is employed: (the mother amid her children—the teacher of a Sabbath School, or Bible class—the faithful distributor of tracts—and, pre-eminently, the pastor and the missionary. 3. The mode in which revivals of religion may be promoted. A revival that shall penetrate the mass of the community, must be carried into it by the living agents, who are accustomed to mingle with the mass; and who will go hither and thither, attaching themselves to individuals. (*C. Hall*.) *The law written on the heart* :—I. THE TABLETS upon which God writes His law. “I will put My law in their inward parts.” 1. Thus, you see, the Lord has selected for His tablets that which is the seat of life. It is in the heart that life is to be found, a wound there is fatal: where the seat of life is, there the seat of obedience shall be. 2. Observe next, that not only is the heart the seat of life, but it is the governing power. It is from the heart, as from a royal metropolis, that the imperial commands of the man are issued by which hand and foot, and eye and tongue, and all the members are ordered. If the heart be right, then the other powers must yield submission to its sway, and become right too. 3. But before God can write upon man’s heart it must be prepared. It is most unfit to be a writing-table for the Lord until it is renewed. The heart must first of all undergo erasures. It must also experience a thorough cleansing, not of the surface only, but of its entire fabric. Truly, it was far easier for Hercules to purge the Augean stables than for our hearts to be purged; for the sin that lies within us is not an accumulation of external defilement, but an inward, all-pervading corruption. In addition to this, the heart needs to be softened, for the heart is naturally hard, and in some men it has become harder than an adamant stone. Nor would the softening be enough, for there are some who have a tenderness of the most deceiving kind. They receive the Word with joy: they feel every expression of it, but they speedily go their way and forget what manner of men they are. They are as impressible as the water, but the impression is as soon removed; so that another change is needed, namely, to make them retentive of that which is good: else might you engrave and re-engrave, but, like an inscription upon wax, it would be gone in a moment if exposed to heat. In a word, the heart of man needs to be totally changed, even as Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Ye must be born again.” II. THE WRITING. “I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.” What is this writing? 1. First, the matter of it is the law of God. God writes upon the hearts of His people that which is already revealed; He inscribes there nothing novel and unrevealed, but His own will which He has already given us in the book of the law. Observe, however, that God says He will write His whole law on the heart,—this is included in the words, “My law.” God’s work is complete in all its parts, and beautifully harmonious. He will not write one command and leave out the rest as so many do in their reforms. Mark, again, that on the heart there is written not the law toned down and altered, but “My law,”—that very same law which was at first written on the heart of man unfallen. 2. But to come a little closer to the matter: what does the Scripture mean by writing the law of God in the heart? The writing itself includes a great many things. A man who has the law of God written on his heart, first of all, knows it. God’s Spirit has taught him what is right and what is wrong: he knows this by heart, and therefore can no longer put darkness for light, and light for darkness. This law, next, abides upon his memory. God has given him a touchstone by which he tries things. It is a grand thing to possess a universal detector, so that, go where you may, you are not dependent upon the judgment of others, and therefore are not deceived as multitudes are. This, however, is only a part of the matter, and a very small part comparatively. The law is written on a man’s heart further than this: when he consents unto the law that it is good; when his conscience, being restored, cries, “Yes, that is so, and ought to be so. That command by which God has forbidden a certain course is a proper and prudent command: it ought to be enjoined.” But, furthermore, there is wrought in the heart by God a love to the law as well as a consent to it, such a love that the man thanks God that He has given him such a fair and lovely representation of what perfect holiness would be; that He has given such measuring lines, by which he knows how a house is to be builded in which God can dwell. Thus thanking the Lord, his prayer, desire, longing, hungering, and thirsting, are after righteousness, that he may in all things be according to the mind of God. 3. If anybody should inquire how the Lord

keeps the writing upon the heart legible, I should like to spend a minute or two in showing the process. He enlightens by knowledge, convinces by argument, leads by persuasion, strengthens by instruction, and so forth. So far also we know that one way by which the law is kept written upon a Christian's heart is this,—a sense of God's presence. The believer feels that he could not sin with God looking on. Next, the Christian has a lively sense within him of the degradation which sin once brought upon him. But a sense of love is a yet more powerful factor. Let a man know that God loves him, let him feel sure that God always did love him from before the foundations of the world, and he must try to please God. Another very powerful pen with which the Lord writes is to be found in the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ. Besides that, God actually establishes His holy law in the throne of the heart by giving to us a new and heavenly life. Once more, the Holy Ghost Himself dwells in believers.

III. THE WRITER. Who is it that writes the law upon the heart? It is God Himself. "I will do it," saith He. 1. Note, first, that He has a right to indite His law on the heart. He made the heart; it is His tablet: let Him write there whatever He wills. 2. Note, next, that He alone can write the law on the heart. This is noble work, angels themselves cannot attain to it. "This is the finger of God." As God alone can write there and must write there, so He alone shall have the glory of that writing when once it is perfected. 3. When God writes He writes perfectly. No holiness can excel the holiness produced by the Holy Spirit when His inward work is fully completed. 4. Moreover, He writes indelibly. I defy the devil to get a single letter of the law of God out of a man's heart when God has written it there. Written rocks bear their inscriptions long, but written hearts bear them for ever and ever.

IV. THE RESULTS of the law being thus written in the heart. 1. Frequently the first result is great sorrow. If I have God's law written on my heart, then I say to myself, "Ah me, that I should have lived a law-breaker so long! This blessed law, this lovely law, why I have not even thought of it, or if I have thought of it, it has provoked me to disobedience. Sin revived, and I died when the commandment came." 2. The next effect of it is, there comes upon the man a strong and stern resolve that he will not break that law again, but will keep it with all his might. 3. That strong resolve soon leads to a fierce conflict; for another law lifts up its head, a law in our members; and that other law cries, "Not so quick there: your new law which has come into your soul to rule you shall not be obeyed: I will be master." 4. But does not something better than this come of the Divine heart-writing? Oh yes. There comes actual obedience. The man not only consents to the law that it is good, but he obeys it; and if there be anything which Christ commands, no matter what it is, the man seeks to do it,—not only wishes to do it, but actually does it; and if there be aught that is wrong, he not only wishes to abstain from it, but he does abstain from it. 5. As this proceeds, the man becomes more and more prepared to dwell in heaven. He is changed into God's image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

And will be their God.—*God in the covenant*.—I. HOW IS GOD ESPECIALLY THE GOD OF HIS OWN CHILDREN? We answer, that in some things God is the God of all His creatures; but even there, there is a special relationship existing between Himself and His chosen creatures, whom He has loved with an everlasting love. And in the next place, there are certain relationships in which God does not exist towards the rest of His creatures, but only towards His own children. 1. First, then, God is the God of all His creatures, seeing that He has the right to decree to do with them as He pleases. He is the Creator of us all; He is the potter, and hath power over the clay, to make of the same lump, one vessel to honour and another to dishonour. He is the God of all creatures, absolutely so in the matter of predestination, seeing that He is their Creator, and has an absolute right to do with them as He wills. But here again He has a special regard to His children, and He is their God even in that sense; for to them, while He exercises the same sovereignty, He exercises it in the way of grace and grace only. Again, He is the God of all His creatures, in the sense that He has a right to command obedience of all. But even here there is something special in regard to the child of God. Though God is the ruler of all men, yet His rule is special towards His children; for He lays aside the sword of His rulership, and in His hand He grasps the rod for His child, not the sword of punitive vengeance. Again, God has a universal power over all His creatures in the character of a Judge. He will "judge the world in righteousness and His people with equity." Our loving God is the Judge who shall acquit our souls, and in that respect we

can say *He is our God*. So then, whether as Sovereign, or as Governor enforcing law, or as Judge punishing sin; although God is in some sense the God of all men, yet in this matter there is something special towards His people, so that they can say, "*He is our God, even in those relationships.*" 2. But now there are points to which the rest of God's creatures cannot come; and here the great pith of the matter lies; here the very soul of this glorious promise dwells. God is our God in a sense, with which the unregenerate, the unconverted, the unholy, can have no acquaintance, in which they have no share whatever. First, then, God is my God, seeing that He is the God of my election. If I be His child, then has He loved me from before all worlds, and His infinite mind has been exercised with plans for my salvation. If He be my God, He has seen me when I have wandered far from Him; and when I have rebelled, His mind has determined when I shall be arrested—when I shall be turned from the errors of my ways. He has been providing for me the means of grace, He has applied those means of grace in due time, but His everlasting purpose has been the basis and the foundation of it all; and thus He is my God as He is the God of none else beside His own children. Furthermore, the Christian can call God his God, from the fact of his justification. A sinner can call God—God, but he must always put in an adjective, and speak of God as an angry God, an incensed God, or an offended God. But the Christian can say "*my God*" without putting in any adjective except it be a sweet one wherewithal to extol Him. Again, He is the believer's God by adoption, and in that the sinner hath no part. II. THE EXCEEDING PRECIOUSNESS OF THIS GREAT MERCY. "*I will be their God.*" I conceive that God, Himself, could say no more than that. 1. Compare this portion with the lot of thy fellow-men! Some of them have their portion in the field, they are rich and increased in goods, and their yellow harvests are even now ripening in the sun; but what are harvests compared with thy God, the God of harvests? Or, what are granaries compared with Him who is thy husbandman, and feeds thee with the bread of heaven? Some have their portion in the city; their wealth is superabundant, and in constant streams it flows to them, until they become a very reservoir of gold; but what is gold compared with thy God? Some have their portion in this world, in that which most men love—applause and fame; but ask thyself, is not thy God more to thee than that? What, if a thousand trumps should blow thy praise, and if a myriad clarions should be loud with thine applause; what would it all be to thee if thou hadst lost thy God? 2. Compare this with what thou requir'st, Christian. To make thee happy thou wantest something that shall satisfy thee; and come, I ask thee, is not this enough? Will not this fill thy pitcher to its very brim, ay, till it runs over? But thou wantest more than quiet satisfaction; thou desirest, sometimes, rapturous delight. Come, soul, is there not enough here to delight thee? Put this promise to thy lips; didst ever drink wine one-half so sweet as this, "*I will be their God*"? Didst ever hear harp or viol sound half so sweetly as this, "*I will be their God*"? But then thou wantest something more than present delights, something concerning which thou mayest exercise hope; and what more dost thou ever hope to get than the fulfilment of this great promise, "*I will be their God*"? O hope! thou art a great-handed thing; thou layest hold of mighty things, which even faith hath not power to grasp; but though large thine hand may be, this fills it, so that thou canst carry nothing else. I protest, before God, I have not a hope beyond this promise. "Oh," say you, "you have a hope of heaven." Ay, I have a hope of heaven, but this is heaven—"I will be their God." III. THE CERTAINTY OF THIS PROMISE; it does not say, "*I may be their God*"; but "*I will be their God.*" Nor does the text say, "*Perhaps I shall be their God*"; no, it says, "*I will be their God.*" "Oh!" cries the sinner, "*I will not have Thee for a God.*" "Wilt thou not?" says He, and He gives him over to the hand of Moses; Moses takes him a little and applies the club of the law, drags him to Sinai, where the mountain totters over his head, the lightnings flash, and thunders bellow, and then the sinner cries, "O God, save me!" "Ah! I thought thou wouldst not have Me for a God?" "O Lord, Thou shalt be my God," says the poor trembling sinner, "I have put away my ornaments from me; O Lord, what wilt Thou do unto me? Save me! I will give myself to Thee. Oh! take me!" "Ay," says the Lord, "I knew it; I said that I will be their God; and I have made thee willing in the day of My power." "I will be their God, and they shall be My people." IV. MAKE USE OF GOD, if He be yours. It is strange that spiritual blessings are our only possessions that we do not employ. There is the mercy-seat, for instance. Ah, my friends,

if you had the cash-box as full of riches as that mercy-seat is, you would go often to it ; as often as your necessities require. But, you do not go to the mercy-seat half so often as you need to go. Most precious things God has given to us, but we never over-use them. The truth is, they cannot be over-used ; we cannot wear a promise threadbare ; we can never burn out the incense of grace ; we can never use up the infinite treasures of God's loving-kindness. But if the blessings God gives us are not used, perhaps God is the least used of all. Though He is our God, we apply ourselves less to Him, than to any of His creatures, or any of His mercies which He bestows upon us. Have thou not a God lying by thee to no purpose ; let not thy God be as other gods, serving only for a show : have not a name only that thou hast a God. Since He allows thee, having such a friend use Him daily. (*Ibid.*) *The Christian's portion in God* :—Christian ! here is all thou canst require. 1. To make thee happy thou wantest something that shall satisfy thee ; and is not this enough ? Desire is insatiable as death, but He who filleth all in all can fill it. The capacity of our wishes who can measure ? but the immeasurable wealth of God can more than overflow it. 2. But thou wantest more than quiet satisfaction ; thou desirest rapturous delight. Come, soul, here is music fit for heaven in this thy portion, for God is the Maker of heaven. Not all the music blown from sweet instruments, or drawn from living strings, can yield such melody as this sweet promise, "I will be their God." Here is a deep sea of bliss, a shoreless ocean of delight ; come, bathe thy spirit in it ; swim an age, and thou shalt find no shore ; dive throughout eternity, and thou shalt find no bottom. 3. But thou wantest more than present delights, thou cravest something concerning which thou mayest exercise hope ; and what more canst thou hope for than the fulfilment of this great promise, "I will be their God" ? This is the masterpiece of all the promises ; its enjoyment makes a heaven below, and will make a heaven above. Live up to thy privileges, and rejoice with unspeakable joy. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 34. **They shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them.**—*Good things to come* :—A blessed season is here spoken of, very unlike what the world has hitherto seen. Such acquaintance with God is meant, as brings the power, the justice, the mercy, the holiness of God before the mind, and applies them so closely to the heart, that it may be ruled and actuated by that knowledge. And if it is this, and nothing less than this, then may we justly say, The time is not come, of which the prophet speaks, when "all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest, saith the Lord." And it were a vain speculation to inquire when it shall be. These are among "the times and the seasons, which God hath reserved in His own power." But it is not a vain speculation, and by God's blessing it may prove "good to the use of edifying," if we inquire how it might be—how this blessed consummation may be obtained, and the promise brought to its fulfilment. Looking, then, at the fulfilment of the prophecy, I first observe, that we have no ground for expecting that "all will know the Lord," because mankind will bring another nature into the world—a nature which of its own accord shall turn towards God and righteousness. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh," and the time will never cease, when they who are taught of God to understand themselves will be forced to confess, "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh, my original nature) dwelleth no good thing." Neither have we any right to expect that they shall know Him by any fresh or more general revelation. This was not needed even by the Jews, to whom the promise was addressed. Our Lord declared that the knowledge of God was sufficiently within their reach, if their hearts had not been closed against it. "They had Moses and the prophets—let them hear them" ; they would teach them to "know the Lord." How much more, then, is it true of those on whom the Sun of Righteousness has risen—"the brightness of the Father's glory, the express image of His person," in whom dwelleth "all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" ! The agency, therefore, to which we are to look for the accomplishment of the prophecy, is no other than that from which whatever is good in man has been derived from the beginning. "Every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the God and Father of lights." If the patriarchs served God "in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation"—if Enoch and Abraham were governed by His laws—it was because His Spirit wrote them in their hearts ; if they possessed the knowledge of God, it was because that knowledge was implanted in them by His Spirit. And so, when "all shall know the Lord, from

the least to the greatest," it will be the same Spirit which worketh all in all. But "there are diversities of gifts, though the same Spirit; and there are differences of administrations, though the same Lord"; and there are differences of results, even in the same administration. The means producing the abundant harvest will be no new means; the Spirit will "take of the things of God," and write them in the heart by the instrumentality already in operation; the difference will be, that the instrumentality will be, first, universal, and secondly, more successful. It will be more universal. "All shall know the Lord, from the least to the greatest"; from the youngest to the eldest, from the richest to the poorest. All, therefore, shall know Him from their youth; all shall be "brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." "They shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord"; this shall be no longer needful. And why is it needful now? Partly, and for a first reason, because too many grow up without that knowledge; and they who from their years and experience in earthly things ought to be teachers in spiritual wisdom, are often children in real understanding. How few are accustomed to hear the knowledge of God treated as if it were "the one thing needful" to be acquired, and "the one thing needful" to be retained! How few parents use this language to their children—"Seek knowledge, acquire learning; but first learn to know the Lord!"—"the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and the knowledge of Him, that is understanding." No wonder, then, that the impression made upon their tender minds, in regard to the God in whom they have their being, is like the footprint in the sand, washed away by the first wave of temptation, and quickly obliterated by the daily inroads of the world. But there are other classes, of which the larger part of human society must ever be composed. Shall we, then, leave the rich—reverse the prophet's course, and now betake ourselves to the poor? Do they "know the way of the Lord, and the judgment of their God"? Alas! they have altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bands. Multitudes spring up from youth to manhood, with no more knowledge of the Lord than they might have possessed if the Lord had not revealed Himself to the world. If they hear His name, it is to hear it blasphemed; if they learn that the Lord has spoken to men, it is to learn that His message is despised. Whenever, then, the destined time shall arrive, when "all shall know the Lord, from the least to the greatest," all "from the least to the greatest" will be nurtured in the faith and fear of God. Christian instruction will be universal. Now it is rare—now it is partial—now it is imperfect, and marred by inconsistency; then it will be general and complete. But further, Christian instruction, as it will be universal, so also it will be efficient and successful. I say not that it is unsuccessful now; I believe that it is greatly honoured of God, and that they bring a false report of the land of promise who reproach it as vain and unprofitable; but its effect is now impeded by so many hindrances. Its rarity is a hindrance. Those who have been taught to "know the Lord," are encompassed on every side by those who know Him not. Take the most favoured case;—the child who has hitherto "sat beside the still waters," and drank of the pure fountain of piety and holiness, must soon be launched on the wide ocean of the world—must take his course among those who have gone with the stream of the multitude, and are guided by no scriptural direction; the parent who has sown good seed in his son's heart, and prays for its growth and fruitfulness, looks round after a while, and sees (we trust he sees) the wheat appearing—but he cannot help seeing that it is surrounded by tares, and how must he fear lest the tares should prevail and overspread it! In proportion, therefore, as education in Divine knowledge will become general, we may believe that it will become effective and permanently influential. If each one in his own household, and each one in his own neighbourhood, made this their chief and earnest care, that those in whom they are interested and by whom they are surrounded should know the Lord from their youth, the prophet's words might be fulfilled, and the whole community become one well-ordered family, "walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost"; "all, from the least to the greatest," might be taught of God, blessing the pious endeavours of His people, and giving effect to the means which, in dependence on His grace, they would employ; all might "walk with God," as Enoch—might trust in Him, as Abraham—might fear Him, as Joseph—might submit to Him, as Eli—might set Him before their eyes, as David—so that, "living and dying, they might be the Lord's." (*Archbishop Sumner.*) *The duty of extending religious knowledge:—I. THE*

EXISTING IGNORANCE SUPPOSED. The impression that there is a God is seldom obliterated from the human mind. But this persuasion subsisting alone, or in connection with the grossest error, comes far short of making wise unto salvation. Oh! how lost is the immortal mind to all true apprehensions of Deity, when it can stoop to the worship of stocks and stones, the works of men's hands. Yet the heathen are not alone ignorant of God. It would be some relief if the eye, after surveying pagan lands, and compassionating these dark places of the earth filled with the habitations of horrid cruelty, could retreat securely to the nations of Christendom, and there soothingly repose on pervading spiritual intelligence. But, alas! there are multitudes in these favoured countries whose religious tuition has yet to be commenced, who have all the ignorance of heathens, wanting only its palliations. Nor does this remark apply only to the illiterate. A vast proportion of the learned themselves have still to acquire the veriest rudiments of this heavenly science. The list of the ignorant is not yet completed. To attain its completion, we must go to Christian sanctuaries. Yes, even of those who attend in the house of God, numbers seem as little instructed by their attendance as if they were frequenting heathen or Mohammedan temples. Their ears are inured to the sound of the Gospel, and this familiarity with its accents they are apt to mistake for acquaintance with its import. Thus wide are the realms of ignorance, and I need not tell you that its sway is most destructive. Without knowledge there can be no faith, for how can we believe what we do not know? And without faith, we are Divinely assured, it is impossible to please God. **II. AS INCUMBENT ON US WHILE IGNORANCE LASTS, THE DUTY OF TEACHING EVERY MAN HIS NEIGHBOUR, AND EVERY MAN HIS BROTHER, SAYING, KNOW THE LORD.** You will readily admit the propriety of teaching every man his brother. You will own at once that Andrew, finding his brother Simon, did right in bringing him to Jesus, and that all Christian members of families would do well to imitate this commendable example. But, alas! the interval is often wide between a verbal acknowledgment of duty and its vigorous performance. And is it not so here? Are not Christians themselves too sparing in expostulation with careless, unawakened relatives? You would stand between them and temporal destruction, and the more they were bent on such ruin, the more you would remonstrate. And will ye give place to them, then, and facilitate their progress when they are madly encountering eternal destruction, and hastening to the gates of the second death? You observe, however, that you are required, moreover, to teach every man his neighbour. Here many will at once understand us to speak of missionary agents, not deeming themselves at all qualified for personally instructing a benighted neighbourhood. But this conclusion we cannot reach so hastily. It is often adopted as self-evident when it has no evidence, when it is on the contrary most erroneous and criminal. There are now Tract Societies and Christian Instruction Societies, which employ many members of our Churches in diffusing through the streets and lanes of our city the knowledge of the only true God. Why may not others join their number? Change of labour is sometimes rest; and if the maxim ever apply, it must surely hold good, when we pass from anxious wasting tasks to those scenes and subjects which prove all affliction to be light and momentary, and elevate the soul to a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. One hour a week, where more cannot be conceded, may be space enough for great usefulness. Yea, it were presumptuous to limit the happy effect of a single visit, for a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver. It must be allowed, however, that all have not equal facilities for the personal prosecution of such works and labours of love; and even though they had, it would still be their duty to engage others in this service as well as themselves. Some are willing to devote their lives to the extension of Christ's kingdom, if you will devote a portion of substance to their support. The proposal is most reasonable surely, and assigns you the easier department of the treaty. By adopting it, and reducing it to energetic practice, you may teach your neighbour and brother in the largest and noblest acceptance of the terms. **III. THE ULTIMATE PREVALENCE OF KNOWLEDGE BY WHICH SUCH OBLIGATIONS SHALL BE SUPERSEDED.** The phrase, "from the least of them unto the greatest of them," may be differently understood, but in every view it is delightfully significant. Does it refer to age? How beautiful on the one hand to see little children entering the kingdom, to see God, out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, perfecting praise; and to witness on the other hand maturity of years and grace identified, to see the grey hairs a crown of glory being found in the way of righteousness. How

affecting to see these extremes of life united in devotion, the infant and the ancient joining the tender and the wrinkled hand to approach in fellowship the Father of mercies! Again, does the language refer to station? How attractive to see the degraded rising in character, and comfort, and piety, and the exalted humbly stooping from their loftiness to acknowledge and embrace the lowliest followers of the Lamb! to see all envy on the one hand, and all disdain on the other utterly lost and swallowed up in fraternal endearment. And there shall not be verdant spots in the desert as infrequent as lovely; the whole earth shall be such a paradise, for righteousness and peace shall spring forth before all the nations. And how shall this consummation be attained? Doubtless by God fulfilling His promise of putting His law in men's inward parts, and writing it on their hearts. But will He do so directly and independently of His revealed Word? No; we as the instruments in His hand must disseminate that Word, and then He will open men's understanding to understand the Scriptures. How honouring to be employed by such an Agent in such a work and for such ends! (D. King.)

The Church's duty to the world, and the promised result of its performance.—I. THE CHURCH'S PRESENT DUTY. 1. The knowledge of God is essential to the well-being and happiness of man for time and for eternity—in other words, that it is essential to his salvation. It matters not in what region they may dwell, it matters not under what other circumstances favourable to their advancement in civilisation or commerce or the arts they may or may not be placed; such must be the lamentable result in every case where men live and die without the knowledge of God, while the guilt of such ignorance and the misery which it entails are only heightened and aggravated by the circumstance, when the case occurs in a Christian land where the light of the Gospel is wisely diffused. 2. A destitution of this knowledge is the natural condition of mankind. 3. The knowledge of God is that kind of knowledge which above all others we should be anxious to diffuse. 4. The way in which this knowledge is to be communicated is suggested in the text and adopted by this institution. We are to "teach." We must exhort men to the attainment of this knowledge, as to an imperative duty. We must admonish them of the melancholy consequence of remaining in ignorance. We must warn them of their danger, whilst they continue thus ignorant of God and alienated from Him. We must reason with them, and remonstrate with all possible earnestness and affection, "if peradventure God may grant them repentance to the belief of the truth." II. THE GLORIOUS PROSPECT UNFOLDED TO THE CHURCH IN CONNECTION WITH THIS DUTY, AS A REWARD FOR ITS PERFORMANCE—AND WHICH, WHEN FULLY REALISED, WILL RENDER THE PERFORMANCE OF THIS DUTY NO LONGER NECESSARY; for then "they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord," for there shall be no more necessity, the work shall have been done, and "they shall know the Lord" each and every one, "from the least of them" through all the grades of society "unto the greatest of them," from the meanest to the most exalted. 1. The nature of the blessing which is thus assured. It is the possession and enjoyment of the knowledge of God. 2. The extent to which this blessing shall be diffused. It shall be universal. Riot and disorder, debauchery and drunkenness, robbery and fraud, assassination and murder, shall no more be known; for all those vile lusts and furious passions in the human breast, whence these enormities proceed, shall be eradicated and subdued, and men shall be bound together in one common bond of brotherhood and love. Then uprightness and integrity shall be the prevailing principles of commerce and of trade. Then the office of the judge shall become a sinecure, and the prison a solitude, and the criminal and the felon a name and a character belonging to a former state of things. Then "Holiness to the Lord shall be written upon the bells of the horses"; and men shall learn to combine diligence in business and honourable industry in their lawful callings, with the fervour of an ardent piety and supreme devotedness to God, while none shall undermine or overreach, none shall tyrannise or oppress, none shall slander or traduce, "none shall hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain." (T. Raffles, D.D.) *Knowing the Lord through pardoned sin.*—If we regard this passage as instructive in its order, the knowledge of God follows close upon the application of the law to the heart. The work of grace usually begins, so far as we can perceive it, by the Holy Spirit's bringing the law into contact with the inner man. The law outside of a man is forgotten; he may profess a reverence for it, but it does not affect his desires and thoughts. But when the Holy Spirit begins to put the law into the inward

parts, the immediate result is the discovery of our shortcomings and transgressions. Law-work is grace-work in its darker dress. It is the axe which rough hews the timber which grace goes on to fashion and smooth. By the operation of the law upon the conscience, convincing the man of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, the Holy Spirit works towards the transforming of the heart. He takes away the stone out of it, and makes it to be a fleshy, tender, sensitive thing. Then with His own finger He writes the Divine law upon the mind and the affections, so that the Divine commands become the centre of the man's life, and the governing force of his action. The man now loves that law which before he, at his very best, only feared: it becomes his will to do the will of God.

I. THE ONE ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE. "This is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." To know God is to live in the light. This knowledge brings with it trust, peace, love, holiness, and acceptance.

1. This knowledge is emphatically the knowledge of God. "They shall all know Me." They may not know everything about God. Who could? Only the infinite can comprehend the infinite. The regenerate, however, know the Lord, though they do not, and cannot, understand His incomprehensible glories. "They shall all know Me, saith Jehovah." Believers can say, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father"; can you say that? Were you ever conscious of the presence of God? Has He ever manifested Himself to you in any special way? One said to a Christian lady that he did not believe in the Scriptures, and she replied that she believed in them, and delighted to read them. When asked her reason, she replied, "Perhaps it is because I know the Author." Personal acquaintance with God turns faith into assurance. The knowledge of God is the basis of a faith of the surest and sweetest kind: we know and have believed the love which God hath towards us. Knowing God, we believe in the truth of His words, the justice of His sentences, the goodness of His acts, the wisdom of His purposes, yea, and the love of His chastisements.
2. Note, next, that it is a personal knowledge. Each renewed person knows the Lord for himself. You cannot see God with another man's eyes; you cannot know God through another man's knowledge. Ye must yourselves be born again! Ye must yourselves be made pure in heart, or you cannot see God.
3. Next, this knowledge is one which is wrought in us by the Spirit of the Lord. It is the duty of every Christian man to say to his neighbour, and to his brother, "Know the Lord." God uses this effort as His instrumentality for saving men. But the man who really knows the Lord, does not know Him solely by such instruction. All Zion's children are taught of the Lord. They know God by His revealing Himself to them.
4. Note, carefully, that this knowledge of God becomes manifest knowledge. It is so manifest that the most earnest workers who desire the conversion of their fellow-men no longer say to such a man, "Know the Lord," for they perceive most clearly that he already possesses that knowledge, so as to be beyond the need of instruction upon that point.
5. Next, this knowledge of God is universal among the regenerate. The regenerate man with one talent knows the Lord; the man with ten talents boasts not of them, but rejoices that he knows the Lord.
6. This is the distinguishing mark of the regenerate, that they know the Lord. The knowledge of God lies at the bottom of every virtue and grace. The Lord is no more to us a stranger of whom we have heard—of whom a report has come to us through many hands. No; the Lord God is our friend.

II. THE ONE GRAND MEANS OF OBTAINING THIS KNOWLEDGE OF GOD. "For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

1. Without the pardon of sin it is not possible for us to know the Lord. The thought of God is distasteful to every guilty man. It would be good news to him if he could be informed, on sure authority, that there was no God at all. Darkness covers the mind, because sin has blinded the soul to all that is best and holiest. While sin lieth at the door, there is a difficulty on God's part, too. How can He admit into an intimate knowledge of Himself the guilty man, as long as he is enamoured of evil? Beyond this, an awful dread comes over the guilty mind, even when it begins to be awakened. Conscience testifies that God must punish sin.
2. In the pardon of sin there is made to the pardoned man a clear and unmistakable revelation of God to his own soul. The knowledge of God received by a distinct sense of pardoned sin is more certain than knowledge derived by the use of the senses in things pertaining to this life.
3. This personal manifestation has about it a singular glory of overwhelming self-evidence. How a man sees God when he comes to know in his own soul the fulness of pardon intended by this matchless word, "Their sins and their

iniquities will I remember no more"! Can this be so? Does the Lord make a clean sweep of all my sins? Can it be that the Lord has cast them all behind His back? Has He blotted out the record which accused me? Has He cast my sin into the depths of the sea? Hallelujah! He is a God indeed. This is a Godlike act. O Jehovah! who is like unto Thee? Mark, also, how freely, out of His mere love, the Lord forgives, and herein displays His Godhead! No payment on our part, of suffering or service, is required. The Lord pardons for His own name's sake. 4. When the soul comes to think of the method of mercy, it has a further knowledge of God. In the extraordinary plan of salvation by grace through Christ Jesus, all the Divine attributes are set in a glorious light, and God is made known as never before. Oh, the splendour of redeeming love! 5. The immutability of Divine pardon is one of the most brilliant facets of the diamond. Some think that God forgives, but afterwards punishes; that you may be justified to-day, but condemned to-morrow. Such is not the teaching of our text. "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." Our debts are so fully paid by our Lord Jesus that there is not an account upon the file of omniscience against any pardoned one. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.**—*God's forgetfulness of sin*.—One of the appalling obstacles between sinful men now, and their eternal blessedness hereafter, is the indestructible fact of the memory of sin. The poet Dante, as he wandered through the forest of the terrestrial paradise, came to a stream which on the one side was called Lethe, and on the other Eunoe, for it possessed the double virtue to take away remembrance of offence, and to bring remembrance back of every good deed done. Immersed in Lethe's wave he forgets his fault, and from Eunoe's stream he returned

"Regenerate,
E'en as new plants renew'd with foliage new,
Pure and made apt for mounting to the stars."

Where flows, then, the stream of happy forgetfulness? A poet's dream may not beguile us;—what are the facts, the stern, unchangeable facts of memory? Is memory an unalterable record of life? Shall the shadow of this earth always lie before us upon our path? The facts of memory are these. The mind of man is a chamber of memories—a hall of echoes—a gallery of endless whispers—a house haunted by shades of the past. The mind is one labyrinth of memories—like a catacomb of the dead. Recollection is as the torch in the traveller's hand through this endless labyrinth of memory; but memory itself is the receptacle of all our past. There is a place in it for all the deeds done in the body. All that the mind has been used for remains a memory wrought into its own structure and form. No ingenuity of human art has ever invented to watch the watchman a self-registering machine so accurate, so constant, so unalterably true, as is the human brain—God's register of the deeds done in the body. Carry now this truth one step further. If in the present physical basis of life there is provision made for memory; if matter so gross as the brain can become the register of the mind; much more may memory be continuous and comprehensive in the spiritual embodiment of the soul; much more shall it be made perfect in the resurrection. The form shall be broken up, and they shall be distributed, dust to dust, and earth to earth; but the soul shall have taken, before this bodily form is broken up, the copy of this mortal life and its deeds, and hence shall continue with the impression of it stamped upon it for ever. But this is not all. Not only do we have in our own organisation a memory of ourselves which we cannot tear from us, but also the universe has a memory of us. The memory of men's lives is a part of the universe. The record of our life is a line written in the book of things. It belongs to nature. We cannot blot it out. And if we carry this truth of memory still further and higher, we rise to the conception of the unalterable memory of the Eternal. Can God forget? Can God put our sin out of His eternal remembrance? This is not simply a question of power over will. It is not simply a question as to what an Almighty God can do; but what God as an infinitely perfect moral Being will do. There are those who tell us that God out of His mere benevolence can forgive sin, and open the heaven of His holy presence to the sinner who would return. Yes, so might a kind human friend say to one who had done him wrong, "I do not care; you may come back at any time and sit at my table if you please; I will not speak of the offence; I am willing to let it pass"; but still, although unmentioned, the wrong also would be there, sitting at the same table

with the two who sit down together again. The wrong once done shall be always as a shadow between them, until something be done to put it away; until something be done to enable both to forget it, something that shall cost some sacrifice, some suffering, some reparation for the wrong, some humiliation, and some manifestation of the evil really inflicted and the pain really felt on account of the sin which is to be forgiven. Something must be said and done once for all of the nature of an atonement for the sin which separates those two, in order that each may experience the joy of a restored friendship, and that full reconciliation in which the wrong done is to be henceforth morally forgotten as well as forgiven. Surely, then, it is not good theology to imagine God to be reconciled to this world at a less effort and at a less cost of sacrifice and suffering than is required for the perfect binding up of a broken human friendship. Reconciliation does cost humiliation, suffering, self-vindication, at least through sorrow and pain for the sin committed, on the part of the person who would forgive, and then the recognition also of this effort and cost of forgiveness on the part of him who is to be forgiven. Otherwise the forgiveness does not reach to the bottom of the wrong, and the healing is only on the surface of life. And shall the infinitely perfect One be less human in His forgiveness than we? How can the Holy One forgive and forget our sin? Heaven's answer is the Cross of Christ! Through His work of atonement for sin is opened the Divine way of forgetfulness of the sin of the world. God remembers man henceforth as he stands before Him in the nature and grace of Christ. Hence He can forget man as he was without Christ. Justification is God's covering the knowledge of what we once were in our sins by the blessed and all-transfiguring thought of what His own love in the suffering Redeemer has done and always is for us. And this is no mere act of power or violence over memory. It is no arbitrary act of forgetfulness. It contradicts no ethical principle of memory, human or Divine. It is a moral hiding from the Divine remembrance of the sin of the world, which has been already and once for all condemned in the same suffering for it by which the Divine willingness to forgive was made manifest. Our sin, which God always would forgive, can be sin forgiven and forgotten, because it has been at last perfectly confessed before God, and God's necessary pain over it has been realised and revealed in the sufferings in it, and for it, of the Son of His love, and its condemnation, once for all, has been visited upon it in the death of Him who prays in God's pure will that His enemies may be forgiven. If, then, God has made such a morally sufficient atonement for sin that He can forgive it, as He would forgive it, and can forget it without denying Himself, it follows also that we ourselves shall be able to put hereafter our own sin of this life out of mind, and all other pure beings shall be able to let it pass as a dream of the night. (*Newman Smyth, D.D.*) *God's non-remembrance of sin* (with Isa. xliii. 25; Heb. viii. 12, x. 17):—These texts are all alike in their declaration that the Lord will not remember His people's sins. "In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established." Here, then, you have Isaiah and Jeremiah, two Old Testament saints affirming the same thing: is not this enough? Added to these you have the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and these three agree in one. Their united testimony is that Jehovah, the Lord God, will forgive the sins of His people, and do it in so complete a way that He will remember their iniquities no more. Does any unregenerate person believe in the forgiveness of sin? I throw not. No man in sincerity believes it until God the Holy Ghost has taught him its truth, and has written it upon his heart. When a man's sins are set before him in the light of God's countenance, his first instinct is to fear that they are altogether unpardonable. He looks to the law of God, and while he looks in that direction he will certainly conclude that there is no pardon, for the law knows nothing of forgiveness. It is, "This do, and thou shalt live; disobey, and thou shalt die." What the law asserts, the understanding also supports; for within the awakened man there is the memory of his past offences, and on account of these his conscience passes judgment upon his soul, and condemns it even as the law doth. Meanwhile, many natural impressions and instincts assist and increase the clamours of conscience; for the man knows within himself, as the result of observation and experience, that sin must bring its own punishment; he perceives that it is a knife which cuts the hand of him that handles it, a sword that kills the man who fights therewith. Meanwhile the devil comes in with all the horrors of the infernal pit, and threatens speedy destruction. Thus, for once, the devil craftily co-operates with the law of God and with conscience; these would drive men to self-despair, but Satan would go further, and compel them to despair as touching the Lord Himself,

so as to believe that pardon for transgression is quite impossible. With the desponding I shall try to deal at this time, and may the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, help me to console them. I. THERE IS FORGIVENESS. Our four texts all teach us that doctrine with great distinctness. 1. This appears, first, in the treatment of sinners by God, inasmuch as He spares their forfeited lives. Assuredly the Lord meant pardon when He tarried to inquire, "Adam, where art thou?" In the morning of human history the Lord's long-suffering displayed itself and gave promise of larger grace. The like is true of you and of me. If God had no pardons would He not long ago have cut us down as cumberers of the ground? 2. Why did God institute the ceremonial law if there were no ways of pardoning transgression? Why the bullocks and the lambs offered in sacrifice? Why the burnt-offerings in which God accepted man's gift, if man could not be accepted? Assuredly he could not be accepted if regarded as guilty. Why the peace-offering in which God feasted with the offerer, and the two united in feeding upon the one sacrifice? How could this be unless God intended to forgive and enter into fellowship with men? 3. Further than this, if there were no forgiveness of sin why has the Lord given to sinful men exhortations to repent? 4. If you will think of it you will see that there must be pardons in the hand of God, or why the institution of religious worship among us to this day? Why are we allowed to pray in secret if we cannot be forgiven? What is the value of prayer at all if that first and most vital favour of forgiven sin is utterly beyond our reach? Why are we allowed to sing the praises of God? God cannot accept the praises of unforgiven men; worshippers must be clean ere they can draw near to His altar with their incense; if, then, I am taught to sing and give thanks to God it must be because "His mercy endureth for ever." 5. What assurance of pardon lies in the ordaining, sealing, and ratifying of the covenant of grace? The first covenant left us under condemnation, but one main design of the new covenant is to bring us into justification. Why a new covenant at all if our unrighteousness can never be removed? 6. Furthermore, why did Christ institute the Christian ministry, and send forth His servants to proclaim His Gospel? For what is the Gospel but a declaration that Christ is exalted on high to give repentance unto Israel and remission of sins? 7. Why are we taught in that blessed model of prayer which our Saviour has left us, to say, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors," or, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us"? A star of hope shines upon the sinner in the Lord's Prayer in that particular petition: for it seems to say, "There is a real, true, and hearty forgiveness of God toward you, even as there is in your heart a real, true, and hearty forgiveness of those who offend against you." 8. The best of all arguments is this: God has actually forgiven multitudes of sinners. II. THIS FORGIVENESS IS TANTAMOUNT TO FORGETTING SIN. 1. You know what we do when we exercise memory. To speak popularly, a man lays up a thing in his mind: but when sin is forgiven it is not laid up in God's mind. Of course the Lord remembers their evil doings, in the sense that He cannot forget anything; but judicially as a judge, He forgets the transgressions of the pardoned ones. They are not before Him in court, and come not under His official ken. 2. In remembering, men also consider and meditate on things; but the Lord will not think over the sins of His people. The great Father's heart is not brooding over the injuries we have done: His infinite mind is not revolving within itself the tale of our iniquities. 3. Sometimes you have almost forgotten a thing, and it is quite gone out of your mind: but an event happens which recalls it so vividly that it seems as if it were perpetrated but yesterday. God will not recall the sin of the pardoned. The transgressions of His people are dead and buried with Christ, and they shall never have a resurrection. "I will not remember their sins." 4. Furthermore, this not remembering, means that God will never seek any further atonement. The apostle saith, "Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin." The one sacrifice of Jesus has made an end of sin. The Lord will never demand another victim, nor seek another expiatory offering. 5. Again, when it is said that God forgets our sins it signifies that He will never punish us for them. How can He when He has forgotten them? 6. Next, that He will never upbraid us with them. "He giveth liberally and upbraideth not." How can He upbraid us with what He has forgotten? 7. Once more, when the Lord says, "I will not remember their sins," what does it mean but this—that He will not treat us any the less generously on account of our having been great sinners? III. FORGIVENESS IS TO BE HAD. 1. Why does God forget our sin? Is it not on this wise? He looks upon His Son Jesus bearing

that sin. 2. Next remember that this forgetfulness of God is caused by overflowing mercy. God is love: "His mercy endureth for ever"; and He desired vent for His love. 3. How does God forget sin? Well, it is through His everlasting love. He loved His people before they fell; and He loved His people when they fell. "I have loved thee," saith He, "with an everlasting love"; and when that great love of His had led Him to give His Son Jesus for His people's ransom, it made Him also forget His people's sins. 4. Again, God forgets His people's sins because of the complacency He has in them as renewed and sanctified creatures. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 35. Thus saith the Lord, which giveth . . . the stars for a light by night.—*Stars at midnight* (with John xvi. 32):—"Two things," said Kant, "fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe the oftener and the more steadily we reflect on them: the starry heavens above, and the moral law within." Certainly there are few sights more impressive than the starry heavens. But the stars, in addition to the influence they produce upon the mind of the beholder by their number and magnitude and beauty, serve a practical and a useful purpose in the system to which they belong. They help to guide the mariner to steer his course, and the traveller to discern his way. The darkness is never overwhelming so long as the stars are visible. The sailor who has come within sight of the lights which skirt the coast knows that he is not far from hospitable shores. So the stars convey to us the intimation and the assurance that we are not far from home. Between the dark side of nature and the dark side of human life is there not a striking analogy? Are not our lives a succession of days and nights? Do we not spend our existence partly in the sunshine and partly in the gloom? That He who has done so much for the dark side of nature, kindling those "soft fires" which enlighten the prevalent gloom and shed their benign influences upon the world beneath, should have done nothing to brighten the dark side of human life so as to preclude despair is a suggestion against which all our spiritual instincts rise in quick and emphatic revolt. But our Creator has not, we repeat, left us in unrelieved darkness. So the dark side of human life is never utterly dark, for there are stars shining somewhere in the darkness. It was into the deepening gloom that Christ passed as He drew nearer Calvary. And yet, midnight as it then was with Jesus, there were stars shining overhead. What were the sources of illumination and strength of which Christ availed Himself? 1. The power of communion with God—"I am alone, and yet not alone, for the Father is with Me." The Father was with the Son in approval of His work and in an identity of purpose. A consciousness of a deep underlying agreement with the Supreme will was a source of never-failing strength to Christ in the sacred task which He had undertaken. And never was Christ more conscious of the Father's smile than when the world was most emphatically hostile. And so, no matter how dark it is if only we can maintain our communion with God—if only we have continued to us the Divine fellowship. Should the world forsake us, we shall be able to stand alone if the Father is with us. 2. The power of persevering prayer was another source of light and strength to Christ. The stars are always visible from the high vantage-ground of prayer. The heavens are never wholly dark to him who can repeat the hallowed name. And this was partly the secret of the strength which animated Christ as He passed through the thick darkness, that "He oftentimes resorted thither." He had accustomed Himself to pray. "I have meat to eat," He said, "that ye know not of." It is well to learn to pray if it is only that we may learn how to stand alone. The time will come when the things upon which we have leaned will no longer afford us any support; when our health will fail us; when the ties which bind us to friends and loved ones will be severed. But he who has learned to pray has found a companionship in solitude which shall avail him in all the lonely crises of his life. It is not that, having found God, we can afford to part with everything else. But it is that, having found Him, we have found the true basis and guarantee of life. The darkness that overtakes us, be it what it may, is only temporary and precedent to the dawn. We have found the pathway of the stars. 3. The power of faith's great anticipation was another source of light and strength to our Saviour. He anticipated the Cross? Yes. But He anticipated the Crown also. To the eye of sight the Cross was a repulsive object; to the eye of faith it was the tree of life in the midst of the garden. He said to Himself, "The Cross will not be the end, but the beginning of My influence and power for good in this world,

and through the sacrifice which I am about to make I shall transform the very gates of death into the gates of life!" These, then, were the great hopes, the high anticipations, shining like stars in the midnight sky, which sustained Christ in the darkness in which He found Himself. Have faith in God, and that faith, like a great pilot-star, shall light you over the roughest sea and in the darkest night. (*T. Sanderson.*)

CHAPTER XXXII.

VERS. 1-15. Buy my field, I pray thee.—Jeremiah's faith.—I. FAITH IS HERE ILLUSTRATED AS RESTING EXCLUSIVELY UPON THE WORD OF GOD. All that Jeremiah did in this matter he did just because he had a command from the Lord. Whilst he was in prison, God told him that his cousin should come and offer him the redemption of a part at least of the family inheritance. The man came, and he "knew that this was the Word of the Lord"; therefore he bought the field. It is not to be supposed that he was rich. The probability is that he may have had to get the money for the purchase from his friend Baruch. Neither had he any expectation of himself obtaining any personal benefit from the purchase, for he believed that the city would be given into the hands of the Chaldeans, that the people would be taken for seventy years as exiles to Babylon. This is the very nature of true faith; it does the thing, or it receives the thing, it fears or it hopes, as the case may be wholly because God has spoken. If it embraces a promise, it rests its hope upon the Word of the Lord. If it is moved by fear, it is because God has denounced an impending punishment. If it acts in a particular way, it follows exactly the path which God has marked out. Resting as it does entirely upon the Word of God, it is altogether independent of reason, although it does not refuse to listen to its voice. Faith receives testimony; our faith in men leads us to receive the testimony of men. We often receive that testimony although we have no other evidence whatever of the facts we believe. Nay, we receive it although we have found the very persons whose testimony we are now relying upon to have been, in some instances, at least, mistaken. Faith in men goes thus far; it must go thus far; we are compelled to act in this way, or we should cut ourselves off from mankind and the activities of life. But if this be so, if we find it necessary and reasonable to act in this way, receiving the testimony of men, shall we not receive the testimony of God? When He speaks it is for us simply to listen. How wondrously has God spoken! "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Going on from that primary revelation, He has revealed more and more of His truth; and in proportion as our minds rise, in proportion as our moral sense is cultivated, in proportion as we get free from the degrading power of evil which perverts our moral judgment, we find the revelation to be in accordance with everything we might expect. He speaks to us of things which are far beyond the reach of human knowledge and experience, testimony or deduction. He sets before us His own dear Son incarnate in our nature, and tells us of the great purpose for which He came. II. This passage teaches us also that FAITH TAKES ACCOUNT OF DIFFICULTIES AND IMPROBABILITIES ONLY SO FAR AS TO REFER THEM TO HIM. We must pass on to a later portion of the chapter to illustrate this. When Jeremiah had purchased the field, and subscribed the deeds and sealed them, and they were deposited in the custody of Baruch in an earthen jar to be kept for a considerable time, he seems to have experienced what we all know, some kind of reaction of feeling; and then, as if he almost felt that he had done something that he was hardly warranted in doing, he goes and lays the matter before God (vers. 17-25). This must certainly have seemed strange to any person who did not understand that it was God's Word. That a man who was in prison should buy an estate, believing as he did that before long the country would be in the hands of the Chaldeans, who would recognise no title-deeds whatever; that he should carefully go through the forms of Jewish law to acquire the estate, really appeared a most foolish thing. It seems as if those thoughts, so natural to us, came back upon Jeremiah's mind, and he began to think of the difficulties and the probabilities of the case. You see that this is not a prayer for a blessing upon what he had done; it is not a prayer that the matter in which he had been engaged should be successful; but it is an utterance of wavering and

distracted feeling; and that wavering and distracted feeling is rightly uttered to God. We all know perfectly well that faith as it exists in us is not complete in its power. Sometimes we can look over, we might almost say, the boundaries of our earthly horizon and see the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem and the hills of the celestial city, but at other times the depths of the valley of the shadow of death seem to hide it all from our view. Sometimes we can hold firmly to the truth which God has been pleased to set before us with unequivocal assertion, and with demonstration of power to our believing heart; but at other times our grasp upon it seems to relax, and it appears almost as if it would slip through our hands. When there is anything of this, what will a person who really has faith do, although that faith may not be in the most perfect state and in the fullest exercise? He will take all his difficulty to God. Do we find any difficulties about the way of salvation? Let us go and ask God to throw light, as far as that light is necessary, upon the truths whereby we are to be saved. Is there any question about my own connection with, or interest in, the work of Christ? Let me go and spread it before God, and ask Him to make my salvation clear to me. God never said that there should be no difficulty in the Christian's path. God never told us that there should be nothing hard to understand in the truth that the Christian has to believe respecting Himself. III. Again, we have this ILLUSTRATION OF THE NATURE AND THE POWER OF TRUE FAITH:—it joins obedience prompt and full with reliance implicit and abiding. Why does the inspired writer tell us the little particulars of the transaction? Would it not have been enough to say, "I bought the field"? No, because the object was to show that, in the full confidence that what God had said would come to pass, Jeremiah had left nothing whatever undone. There was no flaw in the document; all legal forms were complied with exactly; the two kinds of deeds that were always used, the one sealed and the other open, were provided; the earthen jar was obtained; the deeds were put in it and intrusted to a man of rank and standing; the money was paid; and all was done in the presence of witnesses, just as if Jeremiah had hoped to take possession of the little estates the very next day. This shows that the obedience of faith will be prompt and full and will omit nothing. Jeremiah never expected to get possession of that estate personally. He himself spoke of seventy years as the period of the captivity, and he did not therefore expect that he should ever be put in possession of the little piece of land, the reversion to which he had purchased. Faith does not bind its expectations to the present; it does not limit them to a man's own life here; it looks beyond. And the faith of a Christian looks farther still than Jeremiah's. It does not look merely to a deliverance at the end of seventy years, and a possession by some of our descendants or representatives at that time of a little spot in the earthly Canaan. It looks to the close of this mortal life, to the day of resurrection, and to glory with the risen Saviour throughout eternity. (*W. A. Salter.*) *Jeremiah's purchase*.—I. THE REASONS FOR THIS PURCHASE. 1. We may perhaps suppose that kindness to a kinsman, as Matthew Henry suggests, had something to do with it; for kindness is kinnedness, and it is very hard if we cannot show kindness to our kith and kin when they are in need. If Jeremiah has no need of the land, we may still infer, under the circumstances of Jerusalem in a state of siege, that his cousin Hanameel has great need of money. Some of us, perhaps, who maintain that business is business, and should be conducted always on the strictest business principles, may think that as to this matter of kindness to a kinsman, about the most inexpedient way of showing it is by mixing it with matters of business. As nearest kinsman his was the right of redemption, and it was already his in reversion in case of the death of his cousin; this cousin being, as we assume, in straits for want of money, and Jeremiah being a considerate, reasonable, and kind-hearted man, concedes to his cousin's proposal, buying the land for what it is worth, and perhaps for something more. And if the opportunity should occur to us of helping a needy relative in some such way—if with anything like a reasonable prospect of success we can give him another chance, a new start in life, helping him to help himself—then, looking at the example of Jeremiah, I think we may all hear a voice speaking to us, and saying, "Go thou and do likewise." 2. We may suggest, as another reason for this purchase, Jeremiah's interest in future generations. Anathoth was one of the cities of the priests, and this field was ecclesiastical property. It might well be, therefore, that, unless Jeremiah bought it, it might in those confused times pass into other hands, by which it would become alienated from its sacred purposes, and so the law of Moses suffer violation. He was a Jew, and we know how the Jews looked on to the future and backward to the past, linking the past to the present and the present to the

future, finding in the present a focus in which both past and future met, and so in the nation's unity finding its immortality. We know how that great national anthem, that prayer of Moses the man of God, begins, "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations"; and we know how it closes, "Let Thy work appear unto Thy servants, and Thy glory unto their children, and establish Thou the work of our hands upon us, yea, the work of our hands establish Thou it." We have a more sure word of prophecy, we anticipate a more glorious future, and we also know that even as to this life the best that we can do for those who are to come after us is not by making "purchases," not buying fields or houses, not saving fortunes for our children, but by living godly, devout, Christ-like lives, shall we leave to them the best inheritance. 3. Let us assume, again, that Jeremiah, magnifying his prophet's office, would have it made plain that he himself believed in his own predictions. The land was indeed to be desolate for seventy years, to have its Sabbaths, and to lie fallow; but after that time the people were to return from their captivity, take joyful possession once more of houses, and fields, and lands: and this particular piece of land, Jeremiah believed, would then revert to its rightful owners, the priests and Levites. For ourselves, making no pretension to the prophet's office—that is, in the sense of foretelling—yet let us take care that our practice shall not conflict with our theory, that we practise what we preach, and so adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. "Let your conversation be as cometh the gospel of Christ." 4. Lastly, as summing up all, we may say that Jeremiah evidently believed it to be the will of God. I marvel much how anyone calling himself a Christian, can ever hesitate as to doing what he believes to be the will of God, especially when the question is of something simple and easily done. I am asked sometimes, Is baptism necessary to salvation? and I answer, No, a thousand times, no. Salvation precedes baptism, and is in nowise a consequence of it; but surely, if we once admit that it is the will of God, that we have for it at once the example and precept of the Lord, that should be enough for us. II. JEREMIAH'S DOUBTS AND DIFFICULTIES AS TO THIS PURCHASE. No sooner was it completed than he seems to have been oppressed as with a burden, his brain clouded, and his nervous system rendered irritable by it. 1. Perhaps he is beginning to doubt whether after all he had rightly interpreted the vision, and the subsequent visits of Hanameel, as making it quite certain that he was to accept his kinsman's offer. He still thinks so, as it would seem, upon the whole, but yet his mind is opening to a doubt, and he is in sore perplexity of spirit. 2. It may be also that he is distressed at the thought that perhaps his very confidence in the promises of God, and his wish to show that he believed in his own predictions, may be turned against him. The sneering, who understand so well the motives of others, may be saying, "Don't tell me that this man is so unselfish as to part with his money for a piece of land that somebody else seventy years hence is to enjoy! He knows better than that, and fully expects before very long to take possession of it himself"; and possibly, hearing such things, he might be in the confused condition of Bunyan's Christian in the valley of the shadow of death, when the foul fiend whispered into his ear those terrible thoughts which he could hardly distinguish from his own. There is nothing at all unusual, moreover, in such an experience as this, that when a man, acting by such light as he has, has done what seems to him a wise thing and a good thing, there comes for a time a sort of morbid reaction, by which he sinks into despondency and gloom. And herein lies the difference between those who fall away and those who, enduring to the end, are saved: not that either is exempt from doubts, conflicts, and temptations; but that in the one case these are yielded to, and in the other, faith ultimately gains the victory over them. III. HOW JEREMIAH OVERCAME AND SOLVED HIS DOUBTS AND DIFFICULTIES. "I prayed unto the Lord." Whether or not he prayed to the Lord about his purchase before he made it we are not told. Perhaps he did not. There are some things that seem so plain to us as matters of duty and of daily habit, that there is no need to pray for Divine direction concerning them. As the Lord said to Moses when Israel's duty was so plain, "Wherefore criest thou unto Me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." But in any case we are sure that the spirit of prayer, the continued lifting up of the heart to God, was in all that Jeremiah had done. But when we find him bringing this matter of the "purchase" specially before the Lord, seeking as he does for help and strength and grace, in weakness, perplexity, and trouble, we are encouraged by his example to bring all our affairs to the throne of the heavenly grace, however commonplace, mechanical, and routine they may be. (J. W. Lance.) *A patriot's faith in the future*.—This was bravely done, to make

a purchase at such a time, when the enemy was seizing upon all. That Roman is famous in history who adventured to purchase that field near Rome wherein Hannibal had pitched his camp. But the Romans were nothing near so low at that time as the Jews were at this. A striking parallel to this confidence of Jeremiah, in the midst of near and present troubles, as to the ultimate glory of his nation, is furnished in the recently published *Memoir of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, whose father, Gabriel Rossetti, an Italian patriot who sought asylum in this country, yet never lost faith in the future of his native land. His biographer says: "When he died in 1854, the outlook seemed exceedingly dark; yet heart and hope did not abate in him. The latest letter of his which I have seen published was written in September or October 1853, and contains this passage, equally strong-spirited and prophetic: '*The Arpa Evangelica* . . . ought to find free circulation through all Italy.' I do not say the like of three other unpublished volumes, which all seethe with love of country and hatred for tyrants. These await a better time—which will come, be very sure of it. The present fatal period will pass, and serves to whet the universal desire. . . . Let us look to the future. Our tribulations, dear Madam, will not finish very soon, but finish they will at last. Reason has awakened in all Europe, although her enemies are strong. We shall pass various years in this state of degradation; then we shall rouse up. I assuredly shall not see it, for day by day—nay, hour by hour, I expect the much-longed-for death; but you will see it.'" *Into the ground to die*:—Whilst shut up in the court of the prison, perhaps fastened by a chain that restrained his liberty, Jeremiah received a Divine intimation that his uncle would shortly come to him with a request for him to purchase the family property at Anathoth. This greatly startled him; because he had so clear a conviction, which he cherished as divinely given, of the approaching overthrow of the kingdom, and the consequent desolation of the land. He gave, however, no outward sign of his perplexities; but when his uncle's son entered the courtyard with his request, the prophet at once assented to the proposal, and purchased the property for seventeen shekels (about £2). In addition to this, Jeremiah took care to have the purchase recorded and witnessed with the same elaborate pains as if he were at once to be entering on occupation. The two deeds of contract—the one sealed with the more private details of price; the other open, and bearing the signatures of witnesses—were deposited in the charge of Baruch, with the injunction to put them in an earthen vessel and preserve them. They were probably not opened again until the return from the captivity. But Jeremiah was not a sharer in that glad scene. He did as God bade him, though the shadow of a great darkness lay upon his soul, for which he could only find relief, as the Lord on the Cross, in recourse to the Father. He fell into the ground to die, as the seed does, which bodes at its heart a principle of life, that can only express itself through death, and can only bless men when its sowing, amid the depression and decay of autumn, has been complete. I. HOURS OF MIDNIGHT DARKNESS. It is only in service that anything reaches its fullest life. A bit of iron is condemned to solitude and uselessness till it becomes part of a great machine. A man who lives a self-contained life, of which the gratification of his own ambition and selfhood is the supreme aim, never drinks the sweets of existence, nor attains his full development. It is only when we live for God, and, in doing so, for man, that we are able to appropriate the rarest blessedness of which our nature is capable, or to unfold into all the proportions of full growth in Christ. In the deepest sense, therefore, Jeremiah could never regret that he had given the strength and measure of his days to the service of others. But none can give themselves to the service of others except at bitter cost of much that this world holds dear. This will explain the privations and sorrows to which Jeremiah was subjected. Death wrought in him, that life might work in Israel, and in all who should read the Book of his prophecy. 1. He died to the dear ties of human love. "Thou shalt not take thee a wife, neither shalt thou have sons or daughters in this place," was early said to him. What he held in his heart belonged to the race, and might not be poured forth within the narrower circle of the home, of priestly temple-duty, or of the little village of Anathoth. 2. He died to the goodwill of his fellows. None can be indifferent to this. It is easy to do or suffer, when the bark of life is wafted on its way by favouring breezes, or the air thrills with expressions of love and adulation. Then a man is nerved to dare to do his best. It was his bitter lot to encounter from the first an incessant stream of vituperation and dislike. "Woe is me, my mother," he cried sadly, "that thou hast borne me a man of strife and contention to the whole earth. I have not lent on usury,

neither have men lent to me on usury; yet every one of them doth curse me." 3. He died to the pride of national patriotism. No patriot allows himself to despair of his country. However dark the lowering storm clouds and strong the adverse current, he believes that the ship of State will weather the storm. He chokes back words of despondency and depression, lest they should breed dismay. But Jeremiah was driven along an opposite course. A loftier patriotism than his never hazarded itself in the last breach. His belief in Israel was part of his belief in God. But he found himself compelled to speak in such a fashion that the princes proposed, not without show of reason, to put him to death, because he weakened the hands of the men of war. 4. He died to the sweets of personal liberty. A large portion of his ministry was exerted from the precincts of a prison. Repeatedly we read of his being shut up and not able to go forth. 5. He died, also, to the meaning he had been wont to place on his own prophecies. Up to the moment when Jehovah bade him purchase the property of Hanameel, he had never questioned the impending fate of Jerusalem. It was certainly and inevitably to be destroyed by sword, famine, pestilence, and fire. But now the Word of God, demanding an act of obedience, seemed to indicate that the land was to remain under the cultivation of the families that owned it. II. JEREMIAH'S BEHAVIOUR. But amid it all he derived solace and support in three main directions. 1. He prayed. Take this extract from his own diary: "Now, after I had delivered the deed of the purchase unto Baruch, the son of Neriah, I prayed unto the Lord, saying, Ah, Lord God!" There is no help to the troubled soul like that which comes through prayer. 2. He rested on the word of God. The soul of the prophet was nourished and fed by the Divine word. "Thy words were found," he cries, "and I did eat them: and Thy words were unto me the joy and the rejoicing of my heart." 3. He faithfully kept to the path of duty. "And I bought the field." It does not always happen that our service to men will be met by rebuff, ill-will, and hard treatment; but when it does there should be no swerving, or flinching, or drawing back. The fierce snow-laden blast, driving straight in your teeth, is not so pleasant as the breath of summer, laden with the scent of the heather; but if you can see the track, you must follow it. To be anywhere off it, either right or left, would be dangerous in the extreme. Such are the resorts of the soul in its seasons of anguish. III. COMPENSATIONS. To all valleys there are mountains, to all depths heights; for all midnight hours there are hours of sunrise; for Gethsemane, an Olivet. We can never give up aught for God or man, without discovering that at the moment of surrender He begins to repay as He foretold to the prophet; "For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron." Nor does God keep these compensations for that new world, "where light and darkness fuse." It were long to wait, if that were so. But here and now we learn that there are compensations. The first movement from the selfish life may strain and try us, the indifference of our fellows be hard to bear; but God has such things to reveal and give, as pass the wildest imaginings of the self-centred soul. So Jeremiah found it. His compensations came. God became his Comforter, and wiped away his tears; and opened to him the vista of the future, down whose long aisles he beheld his people planted again in their own land. He saw men buying fields for money, and subscribing deeds and sealing them, as he had done. There was compensation also in the confidence with which Nebuchadnezzar treated him, and in the evident reliance which his decimated people placed in his intercessions, as we shall see. So it will be with all who fall into the ground to die. God will not forget or forsake them. The grave may be dark and deep, the winter long, the frost keen and penetrating; but spring will come, and the stone be rolled away; and the golden stalk shall wave in the sunshine, bearing its crown of fruit; and men shall thrive on the bread of our experience, the product of our tears, and sufferings, and prayers. (F. B. Meyer, B.A.)

Ver. 8. Then I knew that this was the Word of the Lord. — *Missed opportunities*. — No person who understands, and still less he who values, life as a sacred opportunity of doing something for the world before he dies, but has often wished that he could overleap the bounds of the present and understand what the result of his action shall be, so that, with the larger experience of the future, he might go the better armed against the perplexing problems and conditions of duty which beset him in the present. If only we had the education which will come

in the future, how we should be protected against the mistakes of the present ! And thus we feel a certain impatience against time. Now, the incident recorded in this chapter suggests to us exactly that thought of the way in which time may rebuke our rashness and rebuke also our dulness. The incident which is recorded is a very simple one, but it is suggestive and significant. A certain sort of dream, as we might call it, passed through the mind of Jeremiah, then in close imprisonment because of the jealous anger of the king. Whatever else he was, he was a Jew at heart, and he had that capacity which was singularly, I suppose, possessed by the Jew—the tenacious love of the soil which gave him birth. It was a joy for him to think that the land which was given by God to his forefathers belonged in succession of family inheritance to his own kinsman of that day ; and the dream crossed his mind that perchance that moment might come when he would have the opportunity of becoming the possessor of his ancestral heritage. That was his thought. It came to him as a dream ; he describes it afterwards as the direction of the Word of the Lord coming to him. But it was not, I imagine, realised as the Word of God at the first moment of its approach : it was only a later circumstance—an actual incident which occurred in his life—which enabled him to see that the first suggested thought was, indeed, the Word of the Lord. Now, the first thought which naturally arises from a thing like that is this. We may act upon our first impressions, our impressions may be very strong, and they may be ready to link themselves with our natural ambitions, but it is not every impression that is the word of light, still less the Word of the Lord. Religion divides itself very often, if we were to classify it, into two families or types. It has often been made the subject of mere mental impressions. The presence of the Spirit, the consciousness of a spirit working within, that has been emphasised to such a degree that at last men, driven by their impulse or suggestion of some passing impression, have committed deeds of violence and wrong which the common conscience of humanity condemns. That is to say, early impressions, strong impressions, even impressions which jump with the spirit of what we believe to be right, impressions which wed themselves to our darling dreams, however much they may justify themselves by the exercise of our imaginative conscience, are not in themselves to be accepted as truly Divine suggestions. We must wait for the light of other circumstances. Authority in religion is never on the one side or the other ; authority is never wholly within, nor yet wholly without. If it is wholly within, it is open to the declaration of being a mere subjective impression ; if it is wholly without, it lays no weight upon the spiritual nature of man, and receives no response from his conscience. But, when there comes to us this which, on the one hand, links itself with our inner nature, and by its own commanding presence makes us feel that it is true, and brings to it also the verifying evidence of providential opportunity—then duty leaps up and can draw her sword, because she knows that she is not the victim of a passing impression alone, but that two things, the law without and the law within, have been combining within his life—then he may know that this also is the Word of the Lord. But if, on the one side, an accident like this may be taken to rebuke the rash impulsiveness of men who would act upon their own subjective impressions, it also, and I think still more strikingly, witnesses against our dulness, which fails to perceive the true significance of the incidents of life as they occur. It was an impression on Jeremiah's mind, and it was only afterwards, when the light of that later circumstance of Hanameel's visit occurred, that he perceived its full significance. "Then I knew that this was the Word of the Lord." Now mark that this experience is very true in our ordinary life. How often it happens that we have failed to realise the full value of our opportunities till later circumstances flash new light on their meaning ! To take the simplest illustration which might come to our minds, you are in the midst of a crowd ; you are anxiously looking out because it is a crowd where many of the celebrities of life are gathered ; and after you have passed some one suddenly says to you, "Did you see him ?" and immediately there flashes upon you the thought, you have been close to one whose name you have heard, whose works perchance you have read, of whom you have had the greatest desire to have some knowledge. Just then the after circumstance of the utterance of your friend flashes upon you the true meaning of this ; you have been close to that greatness which you have worshipped, you have missed the opportunity. Or there are incidents in your own life. Have you never had some friend who in early life was your familiar companion ? You played with him, studied the same tasks with him ; and now life has diverged, and he has

risen to greatness, and we remain where we were on the commonplace level of life. People meet us and say, "You know him; tell me some incidents of his early life." But now the dimness of the past comes upon your memory, and all the anecdotes have dropped away; the multitude of other affairs has obscured your recollection. But then, by the light of this after greatness, you know you have been by the side of one who was possessed of conspicuous genius, one of whom you would say, "Would that I had husbanded those stories of the past; would that I had observed him, for his life would have a further meaning to me had I been one who had noted carefully the characteristics, the features of his talent, of his life." In other words, later circumstances are constantly forcing upon us the dulness with which we have confronted the incidents of life as they have occurred. And surely that is the common witness of history. What is the history of all human progress? What is the history of literary life? "Who killed John Keats?" has often been asked. To the men of his day he was but a raw youth, full of a kind of rude desire for poetic fame; but now we recognise the genius which lay there; we go back and say how true it is that the men of their day failed to recognise the glory of these men, have persecuted them, and let them starve, and afterwards have built their monuments. It is the same in the history of our Lord. You are not surprised that the same thing should be fulfilled in His life who was in all points as we are—tempted, yet without sin. We say, "If we had lived in those days our hand would not have been lifted up against that sacred life, we should have torn the crown of thorns from His brow, we should have welcomed His mission, we should have adored Him." But the men of that day did not see the beauty that they should desire Him. "Thou art a Samaritan and hast a devil," were the words with which He was greeted. John the Baptist pointed out their dulness—"There standeth One among you Whom ye know not." But we forget that this may be true in us. Even in our midst Christ stands, and we fail to recognise Him. Why is it we are perpetually visiting with our severe criticism the dulness of the past, when we may be dull ourselves—dull to duty, dull to opportunity, dull to the meaning of the age in which we are living, dull to the very call of God, dull to the presence of Christ? Every duty, every opportunity of kindness, every incident of our life, if we are alive to see it in its brighter light, in its true significance, would never be deemed to be trivial and insignificant at all. When we begin to see light, when the light shall flash upon it, when the grave is opening upon us, this very flash of the circumstance which we call death may shine so back upon the trivial incidents of our life, that we shall realise for the first time that those commonplace things, those duties which I shirked, those things from which I turned away, thinking them of no moment at all—those also were the Word of the Lord. May I, then, ask you to observe the application of that truth, that time reveals to us our dulness in relation to certain aspects of our life? 1. First, the circumstances of the presence of God. We are often disposed to say that our lot in this century is cast in what we may call unfavourable circumstances for faith. Splendid miracles no longer happen. May not the presence of God be as real amongst the ordinary conventional aspects of our daily life—in the sun that rises and sets, in the harvests that are sown and reaped? And may it not be also that the hour might come upon us when the light from some new combination of circumstances might so flash upon our present or our past life as to reveal to us "God was there indeed"? 2. Or take it with regard to what we may call the providential circumstances of life. Have you never felt that your burden in life is a larger one to bear than your neighbour's? We think that others who go cheerily through the world have less affliction than we; we wish we could change with them. But suppose the Lord Almighty did meet you, who understands exactly the conditions of flesh and blood, who knows those special conditions which you have inherited through the long succession of your ancestors, if He were to come to you and say, "I am about to bring upon you this sorrow—you will lose pecuniarily, or you shall have this illness, or that true one shall be swept from your side; I ask you to bear for My sake, My child, this burden; and if that measure your strength, I know exactly what you can bear; and I know also the sweet and the glorious bounty of grace which shall come to you in the bearing of it." Not one amongst us with the face of God's strength looking into ours, and the smile of God encouraging us to patience and fortitude, would ever bear to shrink from the burden; we would gird up the loins of our nature to bear whatever it was—sorrow, bereavement, loss. But that which we would do if God so spake to us is surely that which we might have the faith

to do—seeing that later circumstances may just flash upon us this revelation—“It was God, indeed, who brought that burden upon me.” That loss, that bereavement, that sickness—were brought by the loving hand of God, who sought to help you through the discipline of life into a better and truer faith and spirit. 3. Lastly, I would ask you to see the light which that thought throws upon the suggestions of duty—duty, stern daughter of the voice of God. If that has any meaning, it has a claim upon your life and mine. But what I ask you to observe is this. We never realise the splendour and the significance of the duties which are laid upon us, when measured by our own small life; they seem so trifling. Look for a moment at the prophet. That which he did might, from one standpoint, be said to be merely the desire of a man to possess some landed property, merely the wish of a man that he may be in the possession of his ancestral heritage; but when the opportunity came he said, “This suggestion is the Word of the Lord.” For his action was no longer a commercial action done between himself and his kinsman; it became then a great action, typical, representative, manifesting to Israel the real attitude of strength with which Israel should confront its dangers. Like the old Roman, it was the purchase of the land while the enemy was in possession which gave dignity to his action. The Roman by his action said, “Though the enemy be at the gates, I do not despair of the welfare of the republic.” Jeremiah’s action said more: “I do not believe that one rood of the sacred soil shall ever permanently be in the possession of the enemies of God”; and it was the splendour therefore, the significance, of the action which was flashed upon him at the moment when the opportunity of the purchase came; and that which was once a dream is become a reality. And he could therefore prove to the people the reality of his faith in the hope and in the destiny of Israel. The meaning and the significance of that action none of his countrymen could gainsay, because he was ready to venture his money. That is the spirit of it. Every duty costs something: it costs some trouble, some pains, some thought, some money. Duty, whatever is in your life, is not always an easy thing, unless your nature has been celestialised, and duty has become a delight. But that, after all, belongs rather to the higher levels of life than that commonly apportioned to humankind. Would duty be less noble if duty were easy? Is it not precisely because the steep up which you climb is rocky; because you must sometimes fall, and climb on hands and knees ere you can get to the height where the light of God is shining; because it means the expenditure of fame, money—whatever it is; because the duty is shirked—that therefore the duty is noble? It does cost something; and the man who talks glibly about duty, but is never ready to pay the price of his duty, to purchase his duty by the laying down of some present price, either of money or of time—that man, whatever else he may say, does not believe in the splendid imperative of duty, he does not believe in the voice of God behind it. If I want now to correct the dulness of my eyesight and be illumined by that light which will enable me to perceive that the Divine light is there, which will enable me to hear in every call the voice of the Lord, what shall be my best means of achieving this? Let the past illumine the present; go back on your life and observe it. You now can perceive exactly where it was you missed your way, because you now know that, if you had done this or omitted to do that, if you had not been the victim of that delusion, you would have been in a different position. You see now that that voice at your side was indeed the voice of the Lord. Let the past illumine the present. Do not treat duties as trivial and commonplace, because as your present life illuminates your past life, and shows you how God’s voice has been in it, so the future may illumine the duties which appeal to you to-day. We often say that the dead are canonised in our memory. When they pass away with their greatness, they seem to move from the crowd of men and march with stately steps, and take their place in the great banquet-halls of those whom memory holds illustrious and dear; and from out those banquet-halls they look down with eyes brimming with reproach, because we do not value them as we might. So our duties, canonised by the light which the present throws upon them, march stately before us; they take their place high above, and there are reproaches in their eyes; and the future will have reproaches like this, if we do not perceive the voice of the Lord at our side. The real thing which dims our eyes is the limited light we bring, measuring all the incidents of life by self. Bring in the larger light. Why, that old Roman brought in the larger light, when he saw in the purchase of the land not his own private gain but the welfare of the republic. He saw his duty in the larger light of the well-being of the men and women about him. Let

in the light of other men's interests, let in the light of the welfare of those about you, and then you cannot say that the duties are insignificant, then their voice will be to you the voice of humanity's need, and you will see a dignity in obeying it. Look upon every action of your life, not in relation to self or to the men and women about you, but in relation to God. Let in that larger light. Then every action of yours has its transcendent significance; then His Divine voice appeals to you; then you say, "Every habit I contract, every word I speak, every opportunity I miss, may be a Divine opportunity slighted, the Divine voice turned back upon." (*Bp. Boyd Carpenter.*)

Vor. 14. **Take these evidences, . . . and put them in an earthen vessel—Sealed and open evidences:**—I am going to make a parable, not to bring out what the text teaches, but to use it parable-wise. When Jeremiah bought this piece of land, it was transferred to him by two documents. The first was a title-deed, drawn up and signed by witnesses and then sealed up, not to be opened any more unless required to settle a dispute. That was his real title-deed. Then there was a counterpart of this transfer made, and signed by witnesses. This was not rolled up, and not sealed; but left open, so that Jeremiah might refer to it, and that, when desired, the open deed might be read and examined by others. Now, with regard to our redemption, our inheritance which Christ has bought for us, at a price immense, we, too, have two sets of evidences. The one is sealed up from all eyes but our own; in part, too, I might say that it is sealed up from our own eyes. The other, the counterpart of that, equally valid, is open to ourselves and open to others. 1. **THE SEALED EVIDENCES OF OUR FAITH,** the evidences which are sealed, at least in a measure, from our fellow-men. 1. And, first, I would say, among the sealed evidences is this: the Word of the Lord has come to us with power. If anyone asked himself, "Have I a right to the covenant of grace, and to the 'all things' which are ours if we are in that covenant? Have I a right to the purchased possession? Have I a right to the Lord Jesus Christ, and all that comes to believers in Him?"—in part, the answer must be, "Has the Word of the Lord come to you with power, not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the Word of God?" There is a mystic influence, a Divine unction, which really goes with the Word of God, in many cases, so that it enters the heart, sheds a radiance upon the understanding, pours a flood of delightful peace and joy upon the soul, and affects the whole mental and spiritual being in a way which nothing else does. You cannot explain this to others; do you know it yourself? If so, that will be to you the sealed evidence that the eternal heritage is yours. The Lord has given you the spiritual perception of these things. 2. The next one of these sealed evidences is this, if indeed this heavenly heritage is ours, we have a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name." 3. Another sealed evidence of our interest in Christ is that we have life in Jesus. You have risen from the lower sphere of mere soulish life into the higher condition of spiritual life, and now you consort with God, you speak with Christ, you have become familiar with heavenly things, and are raised up to sit in the heavenlies with Christ Jesus. 4. This leads me to the fourth evidence, which is that now we have communion with God in prayer. The prophet Micah said, "My God will hear me," and if you can truly, from your soul, say the same, you have a blessed evidence that you are an heir of heaven. 5. I rank very highly among the sealed evidences of our inheritance the fact that we have the fear of God before our eyes. That holy awe of God, that consciousness of His majestic presence, that dread of doing anything contrary to His will, that tender, loving, filial fear, which love does not cast out, but rather nourishes and cherishes, he that has this holy fear is a child of God. 6. Another evidence is this: we have secret supports in the time of trouble. "Underneath are the everlasting arms"; you are sustained when enduring a awful pain, comforted under deep depression of spirit, strengthened for the work for which in yourself alone you are quite unequal, borne upward with holy joy in the midst of cruel slander; surely that is enough evidence for you. 7. Another sealed evidence is the secret love which the child of God has to all others of the children of God. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." As to the love we have to Jesus, "We love Him because He first loved us," and our love to Him is one of the evidences of His love to us. We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 8. Those inward conflicts which you now have, that struggling in your soul between right

and wrong, the new man seeking to get the victory over the old corrupt nature, all these are your sealed evidences. So, also, are the victories which God gives you, when He treads evil passions beneath the feet of the new-born Man-child, who is the image of Christ within you, when you conquer yourself, when you subdue anger, when you go forth to do, by the strength of God, what else your nature would shrink from; all these are blessed evidences, signed, and sealed, to be rolled up, and put away, to be seen by no eye but your own, and the eye of the Most High.

II. THE OPEN EVIDENCES OF OUR FAITH. 1. The first of such evidences that we are the children of God must be the open Word of God itself. I read the Bible, and I say, "Well, if this Book be true, I am a saved man: if this is really a Divine revelation, then I am saved." Beloved, have you that open evidence of your salvation? That is the best evidence in the whole world. 2. Next to that, the open evidence of our right to the inheritance is a thorough change of life such as other people can see. Is it so with you? Has there been a distinct crisis in your being? Have you been turned from darkness unto light? Have you been brought from the power of Satan unto God? 3. Another open evidence is separation from the world. A man who is really a child of God cannot, after his conversion, consort with his old companions. 4. The next open evidence is found in union with the people of God, making them your companions, taking a delight in them. 5. One very clear open evidence is strict honesty, uprightness, and integrity in business. Your word must be your bond, and you must sooner fail in business than do the smallest thing that would be contrary to the strictest integrity. 6. One very open evidence of a change of heart, and of our possession of the inheritance, is a readiness to forgive. 7. Another open evidence is one which we often get, and do not like, that is, the opposition of the world. Thank God, Isaac, when Ishmael mocks you; for it is a mark that you are of the true seed, and that Ishmael is not. 8. Another open evidence, and one that is very sweet, is a holy patience in time of trouble, and especially in the hour of death.

III. THE USES TO WHICH WE PUT THESE EVIDENCES.—1. One of them is that they often yield us comfort. It takes the sting out of every trouble when we know that the heavenly inheritance is surely ours. 2. Then again, these evidences answer the unjust charges of Satan when he comes and says, "You are not a child of God." 3. And above all things, I think that we ought to value these evidences because they will be produced in court at the last day. That is the most solemn thing of all. "I was an hungered and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink": and so on. He produces this evidence of a work of grace in their hearts, and says to them, "Come, ye blessed of My Father," &c. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 17. *Thou hast made the heaven and the earth.*—*Creation—an argument for faith*:—I would to God we had in the religion of these modern times a more potent infusion of this heroic faith in God. When Edward Irving preached that memorable sermon concerning the missionary, who he thought was bound to go forth without purse or scrip, and trusting in his God alone, to preach the Word, a howl went up to heaven against the man as a fanatic. They said he was visionary, unpractical, mad, and all because he dared to preach a sermon full of faith in God. If once again we could, like the world, be hanged upon nothing but the simple power and providence of God, I am sure we should find it a blessed and a safe way of living, glorious to God, and honourable to ourselves. I. TO STIMULATE THE EVANGELIST. And who is the evangelist? Every man and woman who has tasted that the Lord is gracious. Here is your encouragement: the work is God's, and your success is in the hand of Him who made the heaven and the earth. 1. Remember that the world was created from nothing. He spake and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. The case of the sinner is a parallel one. You say there is nothing in the sinner. Ay, then, there is room here for a re-creating work; for the Eternal God to come, and with His outstretched arm to create a new heart and a right spirit, and put His grace where there was none before. 2. But you have none to help you or go forth in your work with you. When God made the world—and the same God is with thee—He worked alone. 3. But you reply, "My sorrow lieth not so much in that I am alone, as in the melancholy fact that I am very conscious of my own weakness, and of my want of adaptation for my peculiar work. I am not sufficient for these things; but rather I feel like Jonah, that I would flee into Tarshish, that I might escape from the burden of the Lord against this Nineveh." Ay, but cast thy thoughts back again upon creation. The Eternal needed no instruments in

creation. He saveth not by man's strength, nor by human learning, and eloquence, and talent. It is His strength, and not the strength or weakness of the instruments to which we must look. 4. Dost thou still complain, and say—"Alas! it is little I can say! When I speak, I can but utter a few plain words—true and earnest, but not mighty. I have no power to plead with souls with the tears and the seraphic zeal of a Whitfield. I can only tell the tale of mercy simply, and leave it there." Well, and did not God create all things by His naked word? At this day, is not the Gospel in itself the rod of Jehovah's strength? Is it not the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth? 5. Another pleads, "You are not aware of the darkness of the district in which I labour. I toil among a benighted, unintelligent, ignorant people. I cannot expect to see fruit there, toil as I may." Ah! brother, and while you talk so you never will see any fruit, for God giveth not great things to unbelieving men. But for the encouragement of thy faith, let me remind thee that it is the God that made the heavens and the earth on whom thou hast to lean. 6. "Ay," saith one, "but the men among whom I labour are so confused in their notions, they put darkness for light and light for darkness; their moral sense is blunted; if I try to teach them, their ears are dull of hearing and their hearts are given to slumber. Besides, they are full of vain janglings and oppose themselves to the truth; I endure much contradiction of sinners, and they will not receive the truth in the love of it." Did not the Holy Spirit brood with shadowing wings over the earth when it was chaos? Did He not bring out order from confusion? 7. "Ah," say you, "they are all so dead, so dead!" Ay, and remember how the waters brought forth life abundantly; and how the earth brought forth the creeping thing, and the cattle after its kind; and how, at last, man was made out of the very dust of the earth. 8. See how fair and glorious this earth is now! Well might the morning stars sing together, and the sons of God shout for joy! And dost thou think that God cannot make as fair a heart in man, and make it bud and blossom, and teem with hallowed life? II. TO ENCOURAGE THE INQUIRER. Many really desirous to be saved are full of doubts, and difficulties, and questionings. 1. Your mind is so dark. "I cannot see Christ," says one; "I feel benighted; it is all darkness, thick as night with me." Yes, but then there is the question, Can God roll this night away? And the answer comes, He who said, "Let there be light," and there was light, can certainly repeat the miracle. 2. Another of your doubts will arise from the fact that you feel so weak. You cannot do what you would. You would leave sin, but still fall into it; would lay hold on Christ, but cannot. Then comes the question, Can God do it? And we answer, He who made the heavens and the earth without a helper, can certainly save thee when thou canst not help thyself. 3. "Ay," sayest thou again, "but I am in such an awful state of mind; there is such a confusion within me; I cannot tell what is the matter with me; I know not what I am; I cannot understand myself." Was not the world just so of old, and did not all the beauty of all lands rise out of this dire confusion? 4. There is more hope in thy case than there was in the creation of the world, for in the creation there was nothing done beforehand. The plan was drawn, no doubt, but no material was provided; no stores laid in to effect the purpose. But in thy case the work is done already, beforehand. On the bloody tree Christ has carried sin; in the grave He has vanquished death; in resurrection He has rent for ever the bonds of the grave; in ascension He has opened heaven to all believers; and in His intercession He is pleading still for them that trust Him. 5. Yet again, God has done something more in thee than there was done before He made the world. Emptiness did not cry, "O God! create me." Darkness could not pray, "O Lord! give me light." Confusion could not cry, "O God! ordain me into order." But see what He has done for you! He has taught you to cry, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." 6. It was in God's power to make the world or not, just as He pleased. No promise bound Him; no covenant made it imperative upon Him that His arm should be outstretched. Sinner, the Lord is not bound to save thee except from His own promise, and that promise is, "He that calleth upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." He cannot withhold saving thee if thou callest upon Him. 7. It is certain that there is more room in your case for God to glorify Himself than there was in the making of the world. In making the world He glorified His wisdom and He magnified His power, but He could not show His mercy. III. TO COMFORT BELIEVERS. You are greatly troubled, are you? It is a common lot with us all. And you have nothing on earth to trust to now, and are going to be cast on your God alone? Happy trouble that drives thee to thy Father!

Blessed storm that wrecks thee on the Rock of Ages! Glorious billow that washes thee upon this heavenly shore! And now thou hast nothing but thy God to trust to, what art thou going to do? To fret? Oh, do not thus dishonour thy Lord! Show the world that thy God is worth ten thousand worlds to thee. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

The power of God.—I. LOOK AT THE POWER OF GOD IN WHAT HE HAS MADE. A little child can take a grain of wheat, and drop it into the earth; by the aid of the earth, the air, the sun, the rain, and the dew, it grows and fills the ear of wheat. By a little grinding at the mill, the coarse and fine parts are separated, and you have flour. By a little adding of water, and by baking, you have bread. You eat the bread, and it becomes flesh, and blood, and bone. But suppose you had to do all this. Could you make the grain of wheat? Could you make it grow when made? Could you make it turn into blood, and bone, and flesh? What power of God is seen in every grain of wheat! You can bring two drops of water together, and you might, by great digging, and much hard work, turn the channel of the small brook, and make the brook run in a different place; but could you make a basin of waters, ten thousand miles across its top, and so deep, that no man can measure it even with the longest rope? Could you make such basins again and again, till all the oceans on the earth were made? Could you dig great channels, some of them many miles wide, and fill them all with waters, and thus make all those great rivers which pour their waters on towards the great ocean, and which will thus run as long as the world lasts? No, you cannot. No man can. But God can do all this! Men can shoot a bird on the wing; they can subdue the horse and the elephant; they can spear the fish, and crush the insect with the foot. But who has power to make the smallest insect that creeps or flies, or the most tiny fish that swims? God can do all this. Suppose you could see a chain held in the hand of God, which holds every weed and flower, every insect and creature that lives, every mind that thinks, whether in this or in any other world, would you not feel that the hand of God was strong, to hold all up, every moment, from the morning of creation to the end of all things? "He fainteth not, neither is He weary." "There is nothing too hard for the Lord." Men are born and die; trees grow up and fall away; nations grow and perish; but all the works of God continue as they were from the beginning, because from age to age God remains the same, almighty in power, unaltered, undiminished, untired, unceasing! What a being God is! II. LOOK AT THE POWER OF GOD AS HE GOVERNS THE WORLD. God made the body, and the spirit in the body, and knows just how to reach and guide the spirit. Herod and Pilate may lay their plans just as will please themselves; and the wicked in hell may curse and swear day and night for ever, if they wish; but God knows how to make all this wickedness turn, so as to bring honour to His own name. 1. He can make great joy to come from great sorrows. 2. The power of God can keep His people when in danger. 3. The power of God is seen in turning the plans of Satan, the greatest sinner, against himself. III. HAVING PROVED THAT GOD HAS ALMIGHTY POWER, I INFER SOME THINGS. 1. I infer that He can aid us to carry the Bible to all people. 2. That the power of God gives us faith in His government. 3. That the power of God is terrible to wicked people. What an eye God has! No darkness can hide from it: no cave shut it out! 4. That the power of God should make His people feel happy. (John Todd, D.D.) *The Creator's regard and provision for man.*—I see a mother that, as the twilight falls and the baby sleeps, and because it sleeps out of her arms, goes about gathering from the floor its playthings, and carries them to the closet, and carries away the vestments that have been cast down, and stirring the fire, sweeping up the hearth, winding the clock, and gathering up dispersed books, she hums to herself low melodies as she moves about the room, until the whole place is once again neat and clean, and in order. Why is it that the room is so precious to her? Is it because there is such beautiful paper on the walls? because there is so goodly a carpet on the floor? because the furniture in the room is so pleasing to the eye? All these are nothing in her estimation except as servants of that little creature of hers—the baby in the cradle. She says, "All these things serve my heart while I rock my child." The whole round globe is but a cradle, and our God rocks it, and regards all things, even the world itself, as so many instruments for the promotion of our welfare. When He makes the tempest, the pestilence, or the storm, when He causes ages in their revolutions to change the world, it is all to serve His own heart through His children—men. When we are walking through this world, we are not walking through long files of laws that have no design; we are walking through a world that has natural laws, which we must both know and observe; yet these must have their

master, and Christ is He. And all of these are made to be our servants because we are God's children. (*Christian Age.*)

Ver. 10. **Great in counsel, and mighty in work.**—*The greatness of God's wisdom, and the abundance of His power.*—I. CONSIDER THE SUBJECT SPECULATIVELY. 1. My first proofs shall be taken from the nature of God. The nature of God proves that He is great in counsel. Consider the perfect knowledge that He hath of all possible beings, as well as of all the beings which do actually exist. The knowledge of all possible beings, diversified without end by the same intelligence that imagines them: What designs, or, as our prophet expresseth himself, What greatness of counsel doth it afford the Supreme Being? But let us not lose ourselves in the world of possible beings; let us confine our attention to real existences. I am willing even to reduce them to two classes. Let each of you imagine, as far as his ability can reach, how great the counsel of an intelligence must be, who perfectly knows all that can result from the various arrangements of matter, and from the different modifications of mind. The Supreme Being perfectly knows what must result from every different arrangement of the parts of bodies infinitely small; and He perfectly knows what must result from every different arrangement of the parts of bodies infinitely great. What treasures of plans! What myriads of designs! or, to use the language of my text, What greatness of counsel must this knowledge supply! But God knows spirits also as perfectly as He knows bodies. If He knows all that must result from the various arrangements of matter, He also knows all that must result from the different modifications of mind. Human spirits, of which we have but an imperfect knowledge, are thoroughly known to Him. He knows the conceptions of our minds, the passions of our hearts, all our purposes, and all our powers. But what is this object of the Divine knowledge? What is this handful of mankind, in comparison of all the other spirits that compose the whole intelligent world, of which we are only an inconsiderable part? God knows them as He knows us; and He diversifies the counsels of His own wisdom according to the different thoughts, deliberations, and wishes of these different spirits. We have proved then, by considering the Divine perfections, that God is great in counsel, and we shall endeavour to prove by the same method that He is mighty in work. These two, wisdom and power, are not always united; yet it is on their union that the happiness of intelligent beings depends. In God, the Supreme Being, there is a perfect harmony of wisdom and power: The efficiency of His will, and the extent of His knowledge are equal. Carry your thoughts back into those periods in which the Perfect Being existed alone. Sound reason must allow that He hath so existed. What could then have been the rule or model of beings which should in future exist? The ideas of God were those models. And what could cause those beings, that had only an ideal existence in the intelligence of God, actually to exist out of it? The efficiency of His will was the cause. The will of the same Being then, whose ideas had been the exemplars, or models, of the attributes of creatures, caused their existence. The Supreme Being therefore, who is great in counsel, is mighty in work. This being granted, consider now the ocean of God's power, as ye have already considered the greatness of His counsel. God not only knows what motion of your brain will excite such or such an idea in your mind, but He excites or prevents that idea as He pleaseth, because He produceth or preventeth that motion of your brain as He pleaseth. God not only knows what objects will excite certain passions within you, but He excites or diverts those passions as He pleaseth. God not only knows what projects your passions will produce, when they have gained an ascendancy over you, but He inclines you to form, or not to form, such projects, because, as it seems best to Him, He excites those passions, or He curbs them. 2. Let us take another method (and here I allege the second proof of the truth of my text, that is, the history of the world, or of the Church): Let us take, I say, another method of proving that God, who is great in counsel, is also mighty in work. What counsel can ye imagine too great for God to execute, or which He hath not really executed? Let the most fruitful imagination exert its fertility to the utmost; let it make every possible effort to form plans worthy of an infinite intelligence, it can invent nothing so difficult that God hath not realised. (1) God hath the power of making the deepest of His children's afflictions produce their highest happiness. (2) God establisheth His Church by the very means that tyrants use to destroy it. (3) God turneth the victories of Satan to the ruin of his empire. Here fix your attention upon the work of redemption, for the perfections of God, which we celebrate to day, are more

illustriously displayed in it than in any other of the Creator's wonders. II. CONSIDER THE GREATNESS OF GOD'S COUNSEL, AND THE OMNIPOTENCE OF HIS WORKING, IN A PRACTICAL LIGHT. When we have proved that God is great in counsel, and mighty in work, in my opinion, we have sufficiently shown, on the one hand, the extravagance of those madmen who pretend to exercise wisdom and understanding, and counsel against the Lord: and, on the other, the wisdom of those who, taking His laws for the only rules of their conversation, commit their peace, their lives, and their salvation, to the disposal of His providence. Only let us take care that we do not flatter ourselves into an opinion that we possess this wisdom while we are destitute of it: and let us take care, while we exclaim against the extravagance of those madmen, that we do not imitate their dangerous examples. But what! Is it possible to find, among beings who have the least spark of reason, an individual mad enough to suppose himself wiser than that God who is great in counsel, or, is there one who dare resist a God mighty in working? But who then, ye will ask me, who are those men, who presumptuously think of overcoming God by their superior knowledge and power? Who? It is that soldier, who, with a brutal courage, defies danger, affronts death, resolutely marches amidst fires and flames, even though he hath taken no care to have an interest in the Lord of hosts, or to commit his soul to His trust. Who? It is that statesman, who, despising the suggestions of evangelical prudence, pursues stratagems altogether worldly; who makes no scruple of committing what are called State crimes; who, with a disdainful air, affects to pity us, when we affirm that the most advantageous service that a wise legislator can perform for society is to render the Deity propitious to it; that the happiest nations are those whose God is the Lord. Who? It is that philosopher, who makes a parade of I know not what stoical firmness; who conceits himself superior to all the vicissitudes of life; who boasts of his tranquil expectation of death, yea, who affects to desire its approach, for the sake of enjoying the pleasure of insulting his casuist, who hath ventured to foretell that he will be terrified at it. Who? It is that voluptuary, who opposeth to all our exhortations and threatenings, to the most affecting denunciations of calamities from God in this life, and to the most awful descriptions of judgment to come in the next, to all our representations of hell, of an eternity spent in the most execrable company, and in the most excruciating pain; who opposeth to all these the buzz of amusements, the hurry of company, gaming at home or diversions abroad. Let us abhor this disposition of mind; let us entertain right notions of sin; let us consider him who commits it as a madman, who hath taken it into his head that he hath more knowledge than God, the fountain of intelligence, more strength than He beneath whose power all the creatures of the universe are compelled to bow. When we are tempted to sin, let us remember what sin is. Let each of us ask himself, What can I, a miserable man, mean? Do I mean to provoke the Lord to jealousy? Do I pretend to be stronger than He? Can I resist His will? (*J. Saurin.*) For Thine eyes are upon the sons of men.—*Perfect observation and estimation of character*.—In the course of a discussion in a society of artists, a singular fact was mentioned about a well-known painter. It is that he paints beyond the "skin-deep" beauty and expression of his sitters, and where the character has warranted it, he has brought out all of the latent beauty and portrayed almost the very soul of the person. He sometimes has made enemies of his sitters because of his conscientious efforts to portray character. There is the story of a society beauty, who, when she received her portrait from this artist, took it to her room, studied it for a while, recognised the fact that the artist had laid bare her true character on the canvas, and in a moment of fury cut out the face and destroyed it. She did not want that peculiar nature of hers staring her in the face from the walls of her room. Yet an unerring portrait of character is really being painted of every one, and will at last be exposed.

Ver. 23. **They have done nothing of all that Thou commandedst them to do.**—*Sins of omission*.—Omissions cannot be trivial, if we only reflect what an influence they would have upon an ordinary commonwealth, if they were perpetrated as they are in God's commonwealth. If one person has a right to omit his duty, another has and all have. Then the watchman would omit to guard the house, the policeman would omit to arrest the thief, the judge would omit to sentence the offender, the sheriff would omit to punish the culprit, the government would omit to carry out its laws; then every occupation would cease, and the world die of stagnation; the merchant would omit to attend to his calling, the husband-

man would omit to plough his land : where would the commonwealth be ? The kingdom would be out of joint ; the machine would break down, for no cog of the wheel would act upon its fellow. How would societies exist at all ? And surely if this is not to be tolerated in a society of men, much less in that great commonwealth of which God is king. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 26, 27. Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh : is there anything too hard for Me ?—"Is anything too hard for the Lord ?"—This method of questioning the person to be instructed is known to teachers as the Socratic method. Socrates was wont, not so much to state a fact, as to ask a question and draw out thoughts from those whom he taught. His method had long before been used by a far greater teacher. Putting questions is Jehovah's frequent method of instruction. Questions from the Lord are very often the strongest affirmations. He would have us perceive their absolute certainty. They are put in this particular form because He would have us think over His great thought, and confirm it by our own reflections. The Lord shines upon us in the question, and our answer to it is the reflection of His light. I. Consider the wonderful question of our text which the Lord put to the prophet, VIEWING IT AS NECESSARY. 1. It was needful to tell the prophet this, though he knew it. He never doubted that the Lord is almighty, and yet it was needful for Jehovah Himself to speak home this truth to his mind and heart. It is often necessary for the Lord Himself to drive home a truth into the mind of His most faithful servant. We learn much in many ways, but we learn nothing vitally and practically till the Spirit of God becomes our schoolmaster. The God of truth must teach us the truth of God or we shall never learn it. 2. It is necessary for us to be thus specially instructed, even though we know a truth well enough to plead it in prayer, as Jeremiah did when he cried, "There is nothing too hard for Thee." That man is no mean scholar in the classes of Christ who has learned to handle scriptural truths when pleading with the Lord. Oh, that we used more argument in prayer ! Prayers are weak when they lack pleadings. 3. It is necessary for God thus to reveal truth individually to each of our hearts even though we may have acted on it. Jeremiah had acted on the fact that nothing was too hard for God. After his obedience, he began to look back on what he had done, and to be considerably bewildered, while trying to make out how God would justify what he had done. The best of men are men at the best. If the Lord lifts you up into the purity and dignity of a childlike faith, yet you will have your moments when you will cry, "Lord, speak to me Thyself again, even though it be out of the whirlwind ; and let me know that I have done all these things according to Thy Word, and not after my own fancy." Even the practice of truth does not raise us above the need of having it again and again laid home to the soul. 4. Another necessity for this arises out of further manifestations with which we are to be favoured. God had caused Jeremiah to know His omnipotence so far, but he was to see still more of it. Faith has led you into marvellous places ; but there are greater things before you, and the Lord presses truth upon you that you may receive more of it. II. Look at the text REGARDING IT AS DECISIVE. 1. For the argument is fetched from the Lord Himself. When we look to God alone, and think, by the help of His Spirit, of who He is and what He must be, then we realise that nothing can be too hard for Him. Meditate much upon the Divine Father, Creator and Preserver ; upon the Divine Son, the risen Redeemer, who hath all power in heaven and in earth ; upon the sacred Spirit, of whom the rushing mighty wind in the tornado is but a faint symbol, and you will feel that here is the source of all might. 2. But He means us also to see the argument as founded on His name, "I am Jehovah." The name brings out the personality of God. It also signifies self-existence. God does not exist because of His surroundings : He draws nothing from without, His life is in Himself. All things were made by Him, and He sustaineth all things by the Word of His power. The name of Jehovah reminds us that He has within Himself sufficiency for all His will ; He hath adequate power of performance for all His purposes and decrees ; Jehovah wills, and it is done. Moreover, the name sets forth the truth that He is immutable : He is "I am that I am." Time does not affect Him, nor change come near Him. He is never less than Jehovah ; He cannot be more. 3. The argument is also founded on the Lord's relation to man. "I am the Lord, the God of all flesh." How is the worm linked to the immortal ! Happy men who have such a God ! Not that flesh and blood, as they are, can inherit the kingdom of God, nor that corruption can dwell with incorruption ; but for

believers in the Lord Jesus there is a resurrection which shall lift us into a body of a nobler sort. The argument is that, since Jehovah is the God of all flesh, He can effect His purposes by men, and work among them things which seem impossible. 4. The argument is so great that it puts all other arguments out of court. Is anything too hard for Jehovah? Come, Jeremiah, rake up your difficulties; set in order the discouraging circumstances; call in your friends, who all shake their heads at you, and point their fingers to their brows, as much as to insinuate that you are a little gone from your senses; and then, answer them all with this, "Nothing is too hard for Jehovah." This clears the deck of every doubt that would board your vessel. Blessed argument which answers every difficulty, and sets faith upon a rock from which it cannot be removed! "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from Him." III. APPLYING IT IN DETAIL.

1. Apply this question to the justification of your obedience. If you do what God bids you, the responsibility of your conduct lies with Him, and He will bear you through. He will bring forth our judgment as the light, and our righteousness as the noonday. 2. Apply this glorious truth to the sure fulfilment of all the Divine promises. Consider a great one to begin with. This chapter evidently shows that the Jews are one day to be converted and restored. They that crucified the Lord of Glory shall look on Him whom they pierced, and shall mourn for Him. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" 3. Apply this to any case of great sin. Select any one whom you know to be especially hard-hearted, and pray for him earnestly and hopefully. 4. Apply this to difficult truths. I will put before you a problem. If man acts freely in his sinful actions how can predestination be a fact? If every man acts after his own will, how, then, does God foreordain all things? I answer, "Is anything too hard for Jehovah?" The solving of this great problem constrains me to worship the Lord; for He does solve it in actual history. Consider another hard case—the hardest of all: human salvation. How can it be possible for God to exercise the fulness of His mercy, and yet discharge the necessities of His justice? All men and all angels put together would have made but one fool in trying to solve that difficulty. The Lord has answered it. He gave His Son to bear our sin. "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" 5. Bring hither your own little problems. You are always getting into tangles and snarls. Prudent friends try to help you, but the tangle grows worse. Bring your hard cases to one who is wiser than Solomon, and He will draw out a clear thread for you. IV. Treat the text as USING IT WITH DELIGHT. 1. Use the text as a preventive of unbelieving sin. Do God's work thoroughly, heartily, intensely, and God will reward you in His grace. 2. Use it next for consolation in the time of trouble. Jehovah hath delivered those who trust in Him, and He will yet deliver us. 3. Next, use the text as a window through which you look with expectation. The Lord's blessing is coming upon the Churches: look for it! 4. Let this text be a stimulus to you to engage in great enterprises. Launch out into the deep. Fall back upon omnipotence, and then go forward in the strength of it. 5. Let the text be a reason for adoration. O Thou to whom nothing is hard, we adore Thee! We worship Thee with all our hearts, and this day we believingly link our weakness with Thine omnipotence. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *God above us all:*—In one of his letters to John Sterling from Scotsbrig, Thomas Carlyle says, "One night, late, I rode through the village where I was born. The old kirkyard tree, a huge old gnarled ash, was nestling itself softly against the great twilight in the north. A star or two looked out, and the old graves were all there, and my father and my sister; and God was above us all." What comfort in this for the soul bewildered by life's sudden changes! He is watching: He knows: He will not fail us. Above the graves where His saints are sleeping, above the homesteads where His children are weeping, God is above us all. (*Quiver.*) *Faith's work:*—There are three particulars connected with the wording of the text, to which it is desirable to direct attention. You observe the notice of time, "Then came the Word of the Lord unto Jeremiah." The context shows you that this was in answer to Jeremiah's prayer. In the next place, we notice that Jehovah claims to be the "God of all flesh"; an expression which evidently answers the question, whether the Scriptures of the Old Testament, such as this with which we have to do, are confined to the Jewish people? Then, thirdly, we observe the question, "Is there anything too hard for Me?" We have before us, then, Jeremiah as an example of faith—as one who possessed and exercised that faith for which Abraham was so remarkable. Let us consider how faith deals with mysteries. Jeremiah's faith was tried by what was a great mystery to him upon this occasion, in connection

with God's providential dealings. What use was there in purchasing land which was in possession of the enemy? And yet God told him to do it. Then, if God told him to do it, why give the whole of the land into the possession of the enemy? Here was a mystery. Jeremiah's faith had to grapple with that mystery, and to persevere, as he did, in that holy consistency by which he had an opportunity of testifying both to Israel and to Israel's foes concerning the honour and the truth of the God of Israel. Now, we too have, in the course of our lives, to meet with mysterious dispensations in God's providence. There are difficulties before us. There are two clear convictions in our minds; first of all, we can have no doubt, as believers, that God directed us to pray, and heard our prayers; but then, on the other hand, we can have no doubt that God is permitting, in His providence, these difficulties that now perplex us. And these two plain facts coming together at the same point of time do not harmonise with each other; but they come, as it were, into collision, and they clash; and we say, "How can this be? How mysterious this is, that it should be God's will that I should seek Him in prayer, and yet God's will that, notwithstanding my prayer, there should be this difficulty connected with this matter, or these circumstances should arise!" It is a blessing when, under such circumstances, you are enabled still to hold fast to the confidence of faith. Some persons may say, "Why does God permit mystery?" An answer may be easily given. Bring common sense to bear upon this question. How is it that a father deals with the children of the family of which he is the head? There are many things which the father must necessarily say and do, that must occasion perplexity to the children who listen to what he says and observe what he does. Those children will have recourse to their father again and again, to ask for an explanation of what they cannot understand. Sometimes the parent will give the explanation, but at other times the parent declines to explain; he knows that the subject is beyond the present capacity and intelligence which his children possess; and, therefore, he points them into the way of duty, but tells them to wait until they can more fully understand before they ask anxiously for reasons to account for things that now are difficult and perplexing to them; and their confidence in their father, their faith in their father's word, promotes the proper discipline of such a well-regulated family. Now, we are all of us children with reference to our Heavenly Father's dealings with us. "Why do you say so much of faith?" some people ask. The simple answer is, that the creature that is happy must be dependent upon the Creator, and that dependence can only be felt or maintained by the exercise of faith. God in Christ has manifested Himself in such a way that we, His poor sinful creatures, may approach Him; and if we are enabled to rest upon that Saviour who is almighty, whatever mysteries there be around us, or connected with our own experience, faith in the Lord Jesus—that feeling of the soul which leads us to rest upon Him as our Saviour and Friend, though it cannot solve the mysteries, will be contented to wait until time shall so bring things to light, and eternity shall so manifest the purposes and counsels of God, that the Saviour's assurance shall be fulfilled. "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." But now take the case of impossibilities, and see how faith deals with them. Jeremiah might have argued, "Why should I go and purchase this piece of land? it can never be mine; it is impossible." Now, how did Jeremiah's faith deal with this? He simply did what God told him; and he left the solution of the difficulty with God. Now, this obedience of faith is that to which we need give attention. There can be no difficulty about duty, though there may be difficulty about the reasons why God calls us to that particular duty. We may have this plainly before us by an illustration. I may say to my child, "Go and fetch me that book"; the child may not know my reasons for asking him to fetch that book; it might be possible that I could not explain my reasons to the child, or if I did explain them, that the child would only be puzzled, and his difficulty increased. It might be utterly impossible for the child to understand why I asked him to do this particular act of obedience; but there is no difficulty at all in the child going and fetching the book. The path of duty is quite plain, but the reasons in the parent's mind for commanding the duty at a particular time might be unintelligible and inexplicable. And so with reference to our position with God; the path of duty which He calls us to tread is always plain to him that seeks understanding and wisdom from Him. It is only when we begin to ask the why and wherefore that difficulties spring up; when we ask, "Lord, why art Thou doing this?" then we come into the presence of impossibilities. But when we ask, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

then the path of duty lies before us, and with our hearts set at liberty we run in the way of God's commandments. But now we have to consider the promises of faith in connection with the difficulties of our daily experience; and here, too, the example of Jeremiah is instructive. We have seen that he maintained the exercise of faith and resisted temptations, notwithstanding mysteries; that he went forward in the path of simple obedience, notwithstanding seeming impossibilities; but was he not severely exercised and tried with all this mystery, and difficulty, and seeming impossibility? Certainly he was. But faith led him to prayer. And this is the way in which faith deals with difficulty—it takes men to God. (*W. Cadman, M.A.*) *The infinite capability of God*:—It is the glory of God, that there is nothing “too hard” for Him but wrong. The fact of God's infinite capability should lead us—I. To **RENDER HIM SUPREME HOMAGE**. Surely, before Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His will, all should bow with profoundest reverence and awe. II. To **PLACE IN HIM UNBOUNDED CONFIDENCE**. Confide in Him—I. To supply all wants. He can do “exceeding abundantly,” &c. 2. To fulfil all promises. There are wonderful promises—the conversion of the whole world, the resurrection of the mighty dead. He is able to fulfil them all; and He is “faithful that hath promised.” III. To **EXPECT FROM HIM WONDERFUL MANIFESTATIONS**. He is always at work. He has done wonders, is doing wonders, and will continue to do wonders through all ages. He “fainteth not, neither is weary.” With such a God, what wonderful things await us! (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 33. They have turned unto Me the back, and not the face.—*Human wickedness*:—I. AS **CONTEMNING DIVINE AUTHORITY**. To turn the back upon any one, not only indicates an utter lack of interest in him, but a dislike. To turn the back upon God means—1. An ignorance of His existence. The language of wickedness is, “Depart from me, I desire not a knowledge of Thy ways.” The wicked are “without God in the world.” They shut their eyes to the greatest fact of facts. God is not in all their thoughts. 2. A repugnance to His presence. What a monstrous sight is this, man turning his back on God. II. AS **REGARDLESS OF DIVINE INSTRUCTION**. God is constantly teaching men early and late—teaching them—1. In the operations of nature. 2. In the events of their history. 3. In the monitions of their consciences. 4. In the declarations of His Word. (*Homilist.*) **Though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction.**—*Disregard of God's teaching*:—I. God's **MERCIFUL INSTRUCTION** is given to man according to man's capacity and present situation; and is of that special and particular nature that no one need mistake it; and is so simple and yet so full and impressive in itself that a child even may comprehend it. 1. We have no cloudy pillar resting over our churches, no fire from heaven blazing forth upon an altar of sacrifice, no voice of prophecy attended with signs and wonders, no mysterious “Urim and Thummim” sparkling on the breastplate of a high priest, nor do we hear the voice of God speaking to us audibly from the summit of a mountain encircled with fire and with loud peals of thunder: but the Deity nevertheless teaches us by means equally potent. We have gathered into one source of Divine instruction the accumulated experience of many centuries—the Bible, and this carries with it the evidence of its own Divinity. We have the Church with her solemn sacraments, her public forms of worship, her large assemblies of believers, and her glorious history of martyrs and confessors of the faith. We have the Divine Spirit entering the hearts of the humble, and by the glory of His light piercing the darkest abodes of ignorance, and leading the teachable disciple of Christ into all truth. We have the providence of God showing us in many ways how quickly the sands of life drop away, how uncertain and how frail it is, how like the flower of the field we look for an instant bright and joyous, but the next, droop from the blight of disease, and crumble away into the ashes of the grave. God teaches us also through our own everyday feelings, and the very common concerns of our daily existence. 2. The words of Jeremiah express an earnestness in the Divine teaching. God is spoken of as “rising up early and teaching them.” He is the first among teachers. He is so desirous that His people should be guided by His counsels that He will be with them in the earliest dawn of their existence, both nationally as well as personally. II. **MAN'S DISREGARD OF THE DIVINE INSTRUCTION**. “They have turned unto Me,” saith the Lord, “the back and not the face”; and again, “they have not hearkened to receive instruction.” The Jews stand not alone in this matter. We may see some

such strange manifestations in our own day. The same spirit of practical infidelity is abroad now, and the same infatuation which makes the most sublime subjects of religion matters for scorn and mockery, may be witnessed in our own land of freedom and enlightenment. We are happy to say the good sense of society and the spread of intelligence keeps this spirit down within narrow boundaries; but nevertheless it may be observed publishing itself with the godless jest, with the boast of independence, and with the mocking contempt of all which bears the stamp of religious profession. (*W. D. Howwood.*)

Ver. 30. **I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear Me for ever.**—*Whole-hearted religion*:—In reference to the heart, one of the earliest works of Divine grace is to unite it in one. Strange to say, I should be equally truthful if I said that one of the first works of grace is to break the heart; but so paradoxical is man that when his heart is unbroken it is divided, and when his heart is broken, then, for the first time, it is united; for a broken heart in every fragment of it mourns over sin, and cries out for mercy. Every shattered particle of a contrite spirit is united in one desire to be reconciled to God. There is no union of the heart with itself till it is broken for sin and from sin. **I. UNITEDNESS OF THE HEART.** 1. It is naturally divided. Sin is confusion, and at its entrance it created a Babel, or a confusion, within the heart of man. The lusts crave for that which the intellect condemns; the passions demand that which the reason would deny; the will persists in that which the judgment would forego. To many a man it is given to admire things that are excellent, and still to delight in things which are abominable. His conscience bids him rise to a pure and noble life, but his baser passions hold him down to that which is earthly and sensual. Frequently, too, there is a very great division between a man's inward knowledge and his outward conduct. Men are often wise in the head and foolish in the hand: they know the right and do the wrong. Man is a puzzle, and none can put him together but He that made him at the first. He is a self-contradiction, a house divided against itself, a mystery of iniquity, a maze of folly, a mass of perversity, obstinacy, and contention. 2. If our heart be not whole and entire in following after God we cannot meet with acceptance. 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. It is idle to attempt to serve two such masters as holiness and iniquity. It was once proposed to the Roman senate to set up the image of Christ in the Pantheon among the gods, but when they were informed that He would not agree that any worship should be mingled with His own, the senate straightway refused Him a shrine. In this they acted in a manner consistent with itself; but those are altogether inexcusable "who swear by the Lord and swear by Malcham." 3. It must be united for sincerity: a divided heart is a false heart. Declare that thou wilt serve Belial ever so little, and I know that thy service of Christ is but Judas' service—mercenary, temporary, traitorous. 4. Our heart must be united, next, for intensity of life. True religion needs the soul to be ever at a fervent heat. None climb the hill whereon the New Jerusalem is built except such as go on hands and knees, and laying aside every weight give themselves wholly to the Divine ascent. 5. The heart must be united to be consecrated. Will God be served with broken cups and cracked flagons, and shall His altars be polluted with torn and mangled sacrifices? 6. We must have our heart united, or else none of the blessings which are to follow in covenant order can possibly reach us. For, look, "I will give them one heart," and then it follows, "one way";—no man will have a consistent, uniform way while he has a divided heart. Read next, "That they shall fear Me for ever"; but no man will fear God for ever unless fear has taken possession of his whole heart. The convert may profess to follow the Lord for awhile, but he will soon turn aside; he who does not begin with his whole heart will soon tire of the race. 7. God will give His chosen this unified heart. "I will give them one heart." This the Lord does in part by enlightenment through the light of His Holy Spirit. He shows us the worthlessness and deceptiveness of everything that would attract our hearts away from Jesus and from our God; and when we see the evil of the rival, we give our heart entirely to Him whom we worship. The Lord works this also by a process more thorough still; for He weans us from all idolatrous loves. **II.** If we have this

we may now advance to the second blessing of the covenant here mentioned, which is **CONSISTENCY OF WALK**. "I will give them one way." 1. Without this unity there can be no truth in a man's life. If he spins by day, and unravels at night, he is acting out a falsehood. 2. We must have one walk, or else our life will make no progress. He who travels in two opposite directions will find himself no forwarder. 3. We must choose and keep to one way, or we cannot attain to usefulness. If a man speak for God to-day, and so lives to-morrow that he virtually speaks for the devil, what power has he over those around him? How can he lead who has no way of his own? 4. No person can come to any true personal assurance while his life is of a double character. But if I know that I have one heart, and that my heart belongs to my Lord, and that I have one way, a way of obedience to Him, then may I be assured that I am His. A plain way will make our condition plain. This unity of way is a covenant blessing: it comes not of man, neither by man, but God gives it to His own elect as one of the choice favours of His grace. "I will give them one heart and one way." III. Notice the next covenant blessing, **STEADFASTNESS OF PRINCIPLE**. "That they may fear Me for ever." Get the heart and the way right, and then the spiritual force of the fear of God will abide in us in all days to come. Notice the basis of true religion,—it is the fear of God: it is not said that they shall join a church and make a profession, and speak holy words for ever; but that "They may fear Me for ever." When God has given us a true spiritual fear of Him it will abide all tests. Outward religion depends upon the excitement which created it; but the fear of the Lord lives on when all around it is frost-bitten. Persecution comes, Christians are ridiculed in the workshop, they are pointed out in the street, and an opprobrious name is hooted at them; now we shall know who are God's elect and who are not. Then, perhaps, comes a more serious test, the trial of prosperity. A man grows rich, he rises into another class of society. If he is not a real Christian he will forsake the Lord, but if he be a true-born heir of the kingdom he will fear the Lord for ever, and consecrate his substance to Him. A heart wholly given to God will stand the wear and tear of life in all conditions, whether in honour or in contempt. With some of you old age is creeping on; but I rejoice to know that your grace is not decaying. Oh, what a mercy it is to have within us a fear of God, which is not to last for a period of years, but for ever! IV. **PERSONAL BLESSEDNESS**. "For the good of them." Where God gives us one heart and one way, and steadfast principle, it must be for our good in the highest sense. Tell me who are the happiest Christians. They will be found to be whole-hearted Christians. Plunge into the river of life; let body, soul, and spirit be immersed into its floods, and you shall swim in joy unspeakable. Lose sight of the shores of worldliness and you shall see God's wonders in the deeps. In intense devotion to the Lord, you will find the rare jewel, satisfaction. V. The last is a **RELATIVE BLESSING**. "And for their children after them." Whole-hearted Christians are usually blessed with a posterity of a like kind. Be thorough and true, and your family will respect your faith. The almost inevitable consequence of respect in a child towards his parent is a desire to imitate him. It is not always so, but as a rule it is so: if the parents live unto God in a thorough-hearted way, their sons and daughters aspire to the same thing. They see the beauty of religion at home around the fireside, and their conscience being quickened they are led to pray to God that they may have the like piety, so that when they themselves commence a household they may enjoy the like happiness (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 40. **I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good.**—*The application of the covenant of grace.*—I. IT IS ALL OF GRACE. Its grand end seems to be, to glorify all God's attributes, indeed, but especially to manifest "the exceeding riches of His grace." 1. God was under no necessity of making such a covenant. Man, as fallen, guilty, and depraved, might most justly have been left in the destruction into which his sins had brought him. He could have no claim upon God for a second covenant, merely because he had ruined himself by his breach of the first. God is indeed merciful and gracious, but He is not thereby laid under any necessity to show His goodness in the way of saving sinners of the human race, any more than He was obliged to save the angels who fell. Grace and mercy are, and must be, absolutely free, and spontaneous, and self-moved. God, too, is infinitely independent of all His creatures—self-sufficient, yea, self-satisfied. Though all sinners had been left to perish, His

happiness and glory would not have been thereby diminished. 2. God is the party contracting in the covenant for both sides. God the Father engages for the God-head ; and God the Son, as the God-man Mediator, engages for sinners. Moreover, it is an absolute covenant of the richest and the freest promises ; for, so far as we sinners are personally concerned, there are no meritorious conditions or prerequisite qualifications. 3. If you consider the character of those persons to whom the covenant is fulfilled, that they are not only all heinous sinners, but that, very often, they are the oldest and the vilest sinners that burden and pollute God's earth, who are brought to enjoy it ; you will see another proof, that it must be a covenant of the freest grace, since it embraces such hell-deserving sinners. "It begins at Jerusalem." "The publicans and harlots are brought into the kingdom," while, generally, "the scribes and Pharisees," the decent, moral, respectable men and women, are left out. "Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in Thy sight." II. IT IS VERY KIND AND BENEFICENT. It is all about doing us good, especially by making us good, holy, and happy. Coming from God, the infinitely good one, "the author of every good and perfect gift," it is just one great promise of ceaseless and unmixed love to us. It is just a constellation of blessings. Observe, too, their certainty. Nothing will provoke God to turn away from thus doing His people constant good ; and even with regard to afflictions and temptations, they shall be enabled to say, "It was good for us that we were afflicted." You will observe that there is no limitation upon the good here promised, and why should we restrict ? We must view it in its universal comprehensiveness. It includes all good—good temporal, spiritual, and eternal—good for the body, the mind, and the soul—all true happiness in time, at death, and through eternity—grace and glory—all the good that God can bestow, or that we can receive. It includes good in three distinct periods of time. Good before our conversion—to bring us into being—to preserve us alive notwithstanding all dangers—to prevent our committing the unpardonable sin, or in any other way putting a tombstone upon our souls, and sealing them over under the curse—and to bring about an effectual calling at the appointed time. Good after conversion and union to Christ, comprehending all the blessings of grace. And glory in eternity. In the first period, eternal life is only coming certainly towards them, and as yet they have no personal title to or enjoyment of it ; during the second period, they have the title, and a begun but still an imperfect enjoyment ; and during the last period they have both the perfect title and the perfect enjoyment, and that for ever, too ! III. IT IS VERY FULL AND COMPREHENSIVE. The three following ideas will illustrate its amplitude and completeness. 1. First, you will observe that it not only provides for all on the part of God, but that it also secures everything on the part of the sinner with relation to his enjoyment of it, which, strictly speaking, is all that he has to do with it. Hence, it is so suitable to our helpless spiritual condition, who, of ourselves, could do nothing but just sin on, and so deserve fresh wrath, and the upbreking of the covenant, if that were possible. 2. Again, you will notice that God here provides for the making of this covenant with each and all of His people in the way of their being brought to close with it. The application of it is as much God's work and promise as is the decreeing of it or the fulfilling of its conditions. "I will make," and who will or can prevent Him ? Neither the devil, nor guilt, nor their own wicked and unbelieving hearts shall. 3. Once more, you will observe that the line of this covenant runs through all time. It is from everlasting to everlasting, like its parties—as endless as the soul of the sinner on which its blessings are to be bestowed. How ample then—how all-comprehensive is God's covenant ! There is no redundancy, but there is no deficiency. IV. IT IS PERSONAL AND PARTICULAR. It is made or fulfilled with each and all of God's people individually and separately, and not merely with the whole Church as a corporate body. The persons with whom it is actually made, are not all men without exception. The countless heathen never so much as hear of its existence or offer. It includes, then, only all God's elect people—all those given to Christ as Mediator by the Father, and accepted by Him as such—all Christ's mystical members—His spiritual seed—God's true spiritual Israel. Their names are all enrolled in the book of life, and engraven on Jesus' breastplate. They are constantly in His eye, and in His breast, and so they are in His prayers, and in His working, and in His dying. "The Lord knoweth them that are His," directly and unerringly. We again can ascertain them only in so far as we can see this covenant fulfilled to them, enjoyed by them, and exemplified (extracted as it were) in their lives. But when we see the Lord thus doing good to any soul, and putting His fear into any heart, then and there we see God's seal and mark, and behold His

election realised in their sanctification. V. IT IS VERY HOLY. God, the maker of it, is holy in all His works, and peculiarly so here in this, the glory of them all. Hence, we find Zecharias calling it (Luke i. 72), "God's holy covenant." Two observations will show its sanctity. First, it preserves unsullied, yea it peculiarly displays the righteousness and holiness of God's character and government in at all saving sinners, only through the infinite and vicarious sufferings, death, and obedience of the God-man Mediator, in their room, and on their behalf. Secondly, it secures the personal holiness of all who are brought into the covenant. God here engages to do them good, and especially in the way of making them really and spiritually good. It gives to each a twofold righteousness, corresponding to the twofold unrighteousness he inherited from Adam—the imputed righteousness of Christ for justification, and the inwrought righteousness of the Spirit for sanctification of heart and life; and it never gives the one without the other. VI. IT IS EVERLASTING. It would be comparatively valueless, if it could ever end. Oh, how tantalising it would be to be stripped of the enjoyment of its blessings after we had enjoyed them for a period, and so had just come to know their incalculable value! Deprivation of such blessedness would be torture, exquisite just in proportion as we had tasted its sweetness. The reminiscence and the contrast would then make the loss all the more agonising. But it is "everlasting"—"a covenant of salt"—which can never fail, or change, or intermit, or end. It must be so; for you will remember that the condition of the covenant has been already performed by Christ, and accepted by the Father. Now, God will not—indeed, He cannot—alter or reverse what has been already done, for that is an impossibility. Moreover, the condition being the infinitely perfect, unchangeable, and everlasting righteousness of Jesus, the covenant founded thereon must be absolutely unalterable and eternal. The very holiness, justice, and truth of God are all pledged to Christ to secure its permanency and everlasting continuance. VII. FAITH IN CHRIST IS THE ONLY WAY OF OUR BEING BROUGHT INTO THE ENJOYMENT OF IT. Faith is just a receiving and resting upon Christ and upon all the promises as in Him yea and amen to the glory of God. Nothing more is requisite in us. The fidelity and omnipotence of the promises ensures their fulfilment to the soul that believes and rests on them. There is nothing left for us to do but thus just to receive and rely upon these promises, and Christ in them, by the empty hand of faith. And even this faith, and its act of closing with the covenant, is here previously secured. It is included in the "good" to be done to us. Faith is God's gift—one of His promises and one of the operations of His Spirit. Faith and repentance, and new obedience, are all blessings in the covenant, and not conditions of it. At the very most, they are only conditions of connection and of order in the enjoyment of its various and well-regulated blessings. (*F. Gillies.*) **I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me.—Perseverance in holiness.**—I. THE EVERLASTING COVENANT. "I will make an everlasting covenant with them." In the previous chapter, in the thirty-first verse, this covenant is called "a new covenant"; and it is new in contrast with the former one which the Lord made with Israel when He brought them out of Egypt. It is new as to the principle upon which it is based. Brethren, take care to distinguish between the old and the new covenants; for they must never be mingled. If salvation be of grace, it is not of works, otherwise grace is no more grace; and if it be of works, it is not of grace, otherwise work is no more work. The new covenant is all of grace, from its first letter to its closing word; and we shall have to show you this as we go on. It is an "everlasting" covenant, however: that is the point upon which the text insists. The other covenant was of very short duration; but this is an "everlasting covenant." 1. The first reason why it is an everlasting covenant is, that it was made with us in Christ Jesus. He is, both in His nature, and in His work, eternally qualified to stand before the living God. He stands in absolute perfectness under every strain, and, therefore, the covenant stands in Him. 2. Next, the covenant cannot fail because the human side of it has been fulfilled. The human side might be regarded as the weak side of it; but when Jesus became the representative of man that side was sure. He has at this hour fulfilled to the letter every stipulation upon that side of which He was the surety. Since, then, that side of the covenant has been fulfilled which appertains to man, there remaineth only God's side of it to be fulfilled, which consists of promises—unconditional promises, full of grace and truth. Will not God be true to His engagements? Yes, verily. Even to the jots and tittles, all shall be carried out. 3. Furthermore, the covenant must be everlasting, for it is founded upon the free grace of God. Sovereign grace declares that He will have

mercy upon whom He will have mercy, and will have compassion on whom He will have compassion. This basis of sovereignty cannot be shaken. 4. Again, in the covenant, everything that can be supposed to be a condition is provided. If there be, anywhere in the Word of God, any act or grace mentioned as though it were a condition of salvation, it is in another Scripture described as a covenant gift, which will be bestowed upon the heirs of salvation by Christ Jesus. 5. Moreover, the covenant must be everlasting, because it cannot be superseded by anything more glorious. The moon gives way to the sun, and the sun gives way to a lustre which shall exceed the light of seven days ; but what is to supersede the light of free grace and dying love, the glory of the love which gave the Only-begotten that we might live through Him ! II. THE UNCHANGING GOD OF THE COVENANT. "I will not turn away from them, to do them good." 1. He will not turn away from doing them good, first, because He has said so. That is enough. Jehovah speaks, and in His voice lies the end of all controversy. 2. Still, let us remember that there is no valid reason why He should turn away from them to do them good. You remind me of their unworthiness. Yes, but observe that when He began to do them good they were as unworthy as they could possibly be. Moreover, there can be no reason in the faultiness of the believer why the Lord should cease to do him good, seeing that He foresaw all the evil that would be in us. He entered into a covenant that He would not turn away from us, to do us good ; and no circumstance has arisen, or can arise, which was unknown to Him when He thus pledged His Word of grace. Moreover, I would have you remember that we are by God at this day viewed in the same light as ever. We were undeserving objects upon whom He bestowed His mercy, out of no motive but that which He drew from His own nature ; and if we are undeserving still, His grace is still the same. If it be so, that He still deals with us in the way of grace, it is evident that He still views us as undeserving ; and why should He not do good towards us now as He did at the first ? Moreover, remember that He sees us now in Christ. Behold, He has put His people into the hands of His dear Son. He sees us in Christ to have died, in Him to have been buried, and in Him to have risen again. As the Lord Jesus Christ is well pleasing to the Father, so in Him are we well pleasing to the Father also ; for our being in Him identifies us with Him. 3. The Lord will not turn away from His people, from doing them good, because He has shown them so much kindness already ; and all that He has done would be lost if He did not go through with it. When He gave His Son, He gave us a sure pledge that He meant to finish His work of love. 4. We feel sure that He will not cease to bless us, because we have proved that even when He has hidden His face He has not turned away from doing us good. When the Lord has turned away His face from His people, it has been to do them good, by making them sick of self and eager for His love. 5. I close with this argument, that He has involved His honour in the salvation of His people. If the Lord's chosen and redeemed are cast away, where is the glory of His redemption ? III. THE PERSEVERING PEOPLE IN THE COVENANT. "I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me." The salvation of those who are in covenant with God is herein provided for by an absolute promise of the omnipotent God, which must be carried out. It is plain, clear, unconditional, positive. "They shall not depart from Me." 1. It is not carried out by altering the effect of apostasy. If they did depart from God, it would be fatal. If the Holy Ghost has indeed regenerated a soul, and yet that regeneration does not save it from total apostasy, what can be done ? 2. Neither does this perseverance of the saints come in by the removal of temptation. No, the Lord does not take His people out of the world ; but He allows them to fight the battle of life in the same field as others. He does not remove us from the conflict, but "He giveth us the victory." 3. This is effected by putting a Divine principle within their hearts. The Lord saith, "I will put My fear in their hearts." It would never be found there if He did not put it there. What is this fear of God ? It is, first, a holy awe and reverence of the great God. Taught of God, we come to see His infinite greatness, and the fact that He is everywhere present with us ; and then, filled with a devout sense of His Godhead, we dare not sin. The words, "My fear," also intend filial fear. God is our Father, and we feel the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, "Abba, Father." There moves also in our hearts a deep sense of grateful obligation. God is so good to me, how can I sin ? He loves me so, how can I vex Him ? But if you ask, By what instrumentality does God maintain this fear in the hearts of His people ? I answer, It is the work of the Spirit of God : but the Holy Spirit usually works by means. The fear of God is kept alive in our hearts by the hearing of the Word ; for faith cometh by

hearing, and holy fear cometh through faith. Be diligent, then, in hearing the Word. That fear is kept alive in our hearts by reading the Scriptures; for as we feed on the Word, it breathes within us that fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom. This fear of God is maintained in us by the belief of revealed truth, and meditation thereon. Study the doctrines of grace, and be instructed in the analogy of the faith. Know the Gospel well and thoroughly, and this will bring fuel to the fire of the fear of God in your hearts. Be much in private prayer; for that stirs up the fire, and makes it burn more brilliantly. In fine, seek to live near to God, to abide in Him; for as you abide in Him, and His Words abide in you, you shall bring forth much fruit, and so shall you be His disciples. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Bible religion.—The world abounds with religions. There is but one true religion, that of the Bible. It is sometimes spoken of as "trust" in God, sometimes as "love" for God, sometimes "obedience" to God; here it is spoken of as the "fear" of God. It is the fear of not pleasing in all things the object of the affections. The fear of not coming up to the Divine idea of goodness. I. As having its SEAT IN THE HEART. "Fear in their hearts" There is something in man's spiritual nature analogous to the heart in his physical organisation. The heart of the body is the most vital of all its organs; it sends the life-blood through all the parts. What in man's spiritual nature is like his heart, and which the Bible calls his "heart"? It is the chief liking of the soul. The chief liking is the spring of human activity; it works and controls all the faculties of man. Bible religion takes possession of this, inspires this, makes goodness and God the chief objects of liking, so that the soul feels that God is its all in all. 1. Bible religion is in the heart, not merely in the intellect. 2. Not merely in the sentiments. 3. Not merely in occasional service. II. AS IMPARTED BY GOD. How does He put this priceless principle into the heart? Not miraculously, not irrespective of man's activities. 1. By the revelation of Himself to man. 2. By the ministry of His servants. III. AS A SAFEGUARD AGAINST APOSTASY. Is it possible for man to depart from his Maker? In a sense, no. No more than from the atmosphere he breathes, no more than from himself. But there is a solemn sense in which men can and do depart from Him. It is in sympathy of aim. All unregenerate souls are far off from God, vagrants, ever wandering, settling nowhere. To depart from Him is to depart from light, health, harmony, friendship, all in fact that makes life worth having. What can prevent this, the chief of calamities? God's fear in the heart. This is that law of moral attraction that will bind the soul for ever to God as its centre. (Homilist.)

Ver. 41. I will plant them in this land assuredly with My whole heart and with My whole soul.—*The whole-heartedness of God in blessing His people*.—I. CONSIDER OUR TEXT FOR INSTRUCTION. 1. God blesses His people heartily. "With My whole heart." Notice, in passing, that word "assuredly"; for it confirms the word as full of truth and certainty. He is slow to wrath, but He is swift to mercy, for He delighteth in it. When He deals out His grace to His people, then you see the loving God, for "God is love"; and you see the living God, for He blesses you with His whole soul. 2. He does this work of blessing His people thoughtfully, for it is added, "and with My whole soul." Not only the affections of God, speaking after the manner of man, but the great mind and life of God is thrown into the work of saving and blessing His people. His essence, His soul, is here at home. The design argument, when brought to bear upon nature, proves the existence of God. Much more when that argument is brought to bear upon the works of grace do we see the Lord; for in the transactions of grace there is design in everything. 3. We notice, next, that if that be so, then He employs all His resources to bless His elect. The Lord our God—I speak as a man, and with deep reverence—is absorbed in doing good to His people: there is nothing that He is, there is nothing that He has, but what He will bring it to bear upon the design upon which He has set His whole heart and His whole soul. Behold ye, what God hath done for His people! He has given them His all: all the wisdom of His providence shall be theirs while here, and all the glory of His heaven hereafter. God has His abode in heaven; behold, He makes it the abode of His chosen for ever. Angels are His courtiers—they shall be ministering spirits to His elect. The throne of His Son they shall sit upon with Him. The victories of God shall furnish them with palms, and the delight of God shall find them harps. But stop, there is something more than all! It was little for God to give earth and heaven, but He must needs give His Son, the express image of His

glory, His other self. 4. The Lord subordinates all other works to that of His love. Everything, whether of creation or destruction, mercy or judgment, shall work, like the wheels of some vast machinery, to produce good to those who are the people of the living God. 5. The Lord gives to His people and for His people without stint. When He feeds His children, though once they would have been thankful to eat the crumbs from His table, He sets them among princes, and gives them to eat of the king's meat. He lays eternity under contribution to provide for the needs, nay, for the desires, for the joys of His people. 6. Another point sets forth most plainly that the Lord blesses His people with His whole heart and with His whole soul, for He perseveres in it. Are you not surprised with the variety of His favours towards you? An old writer says that "God's flowers bloom double," for He sends two blessings where there seems but one; but I would say they are like the light: they are sevenfold, even as in every ray from the sun we have seven colours blended in harmony. What sevens and sevens of infinite love are contained in every beam of mercy that comes to the redeemed! 7. As the Lord perseveres in His work, so He succeeds in it. God is determined to make something of His people, and He will. 8. God delights in all that He does for His own. We are happy when God blesses us, but not so happy as God is. Our God has all the instincts of motherhood and fatherhood blended in one; and when He looks upon His Church He calls her "Hephzibah"—"My delight is in her." He does not rejoice in the works of His hands so much as in the works of His heart.

II. CONSIDER THE TEXT WITH THE EVIDENCE. In order to prove that God doth thus bless us with His whole heart and with His whole soul, I would remind you that the whole Trinity is engaged in the blessing of the chosen. 1. First comes the Father. It was He that chose us—chose us, not because He must choose us or none, but freely with "His whole heart." Wisdom from her throne determined the way in which God would lead His people, and bless His people, and sanctify His people, and perfect His people. 2. In reference to the ever-blessed Son of God, whom we worship as most truly God, we have the same truth to state. He loved us ages before He came to earth as man. 3. I must not omit the Holy Spirit, "to whom be all honour and glory." When we were mad with sin, and ravenous after the pleasures of it, He followed us, to check us in our headlong career, to beckon us to better things, to draw us thither, and to help us when we began to incline to the right. He gave us life, and light, and liberty. III. CONSIDER THE INFERENCES WHICH FLOW FROM THE TEXT. 1. The first inference is one of consolation. Does God bless us with His whole heart and with His whole soul? Oh, then, how happy we ought to be! 2. Another inference, and I have done: it is one of exhortation. Let us love our God with our whole heart and with our whole soul. Trust Him for the past, the present, and the future; trust Him completely, implicitly, unhesitatingly. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The enthusiasm of God*:—Who can but admire a man who speaks thus? Enthusiasm quickens life. It is salt and light for common days. It makes earth flash with heaven. But was it a man who said this? No. This voice came from heaven. Then did some strong and radiant angel thus avow himself? No. This is the voice of God. Well may Calvin annotate my text, saying, "The words are indeed singular." God is telling His people the great things He purposes to do for them, and He declares He will accomplish all with His whole heart and with His whole soul. Here we are brought face to face with the kindling fact that God is a God of enthusiasm. In one sense, Calvin's remark on the singularity of these words is very pertinent. But surveying them from another view-point, the Divine declaration is not "singular." Enthusiasm is an impressive element of Bible theology. Scripture gives us peeps into God's nature. Only peeps. The open vision would blind us. And assuredly we frequently behold in the Holy Book the outflashing of the Divine enthusiasm. Isaiah uses the wonderful phrase, "The zeal of the God of hosts." It is God's quenchless enthusiasm which is to establish in triumph the ever-increasing kingdom and peace of Emmanuel. This quality of God is one Isaiah delights in. Isaiah on the enthusiasm of God is a stimulating study. He says of a wonderful and apparently impossible deliverance of God's people from their iron oppressor, "The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this." Courage, sad-hearted and foo-encircled brother! The enthusiasm of God is pledged to thy deliverance! In another place the poet-theologian describes God as a warrior, and cries, "He . . . was clad with zeal as a cloak." Grand is the vision of God as He appears in ruby-red robe of zeal. Ezekiel, "his feet on earth, his soul floating amid the cherubim," represents God's enthusiasm in its vengeful form

when he declares how the wrath Divine shall bruise impenitent transgressors, "and they shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it in My zeal, when I have accomplished My fury in them." If enthusiasm be a quality which Old Testament theology ascribes to God, it is also emphatically accredited to Him by the theology of the new covenant. It is revealed as an outstanding feature of Him to have seen whom is to have seen the Father. "With My whole heart and with My whole soul," was the motto of His incarnate life. Holy enthusiasm was the temper of His words and deeds. "The zeal of Thy house will eat me up." Thus our Lord fulfilled the scriptural ideal of enthusiasm as He fulfilled all scriptural ideals. God in Christ is always a God of enthusiasm. How intense He is! How He prays! The fervour of His prayers is never chilled. How He meditates! His inexplorable thoughts breathe themselves through eternity. The Christ of the New Testament is the Jehovah of the Old Testament, in white-hot enthusiasm, as in everything, august, and gentle, and lovely. Enthusiasm must surely be an essential of a true theology. One cannot conceive of an impassionate God. An apathetic God would depress the universe. An ancient Greek finely described enthusiasm as "a God within." And such all grand enthusiasm is, and must be evermore. How attractive is our God by reason of His enthusiasm. Who would not love Him with his might who is ready to bless with His whole heart and with His whole soul? Such a God allures us. Who are they for whom God promises to labour so enthusiastically? Notice the repetitions "them" in this verse. Equally recurrent is the "them" in the previous verse. In verse 38 the "them" is indicated. It refers to "My people." God will do wonderfully for His people. He prizes His people beyond compare. Nothing is too great for Him to do for those who are in His sight so lovely. And no enthusiasm is too lavish to expend upon their interests. Is there caprice in this wealthy enthusiasm over His people? By no means. God's "people" represent character. And God's enthusiasm for character is shown in His enthusiasm for His people. God's enthusiasm is evoked by character. Our poor unworthy enthusiasms are often pitifully misdirected. The zeal of God never misses the true mark. God is enthusiastic to help men of character. See how in the neighbourhood of this text He rains golden showers of promises upon such. "I will not turn away from them, to do them good" (ver. 40). "I will rejoice over them to do them good" (ver. 41). "I will plant them in this land" (ver. 41). "I will bring upon them all the good that I have promised them" (ver. 42). "And fields shall be bought in this land" (ver. 43). The enthusiasm of God runs forth in temporal helpfulness to men whose ways please Him. He cares even for "fields" which belong to His people. Lay this to heart, burdened business man, if thou art one of God's people! Consider this, depressed agriculturist, who art a man of God! God makes your interests His own interests. God is enthusiastic in respect of the creation and development of character. How abundantly that can be demonstrated from the context! "I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear Me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them" (ver. 39). "I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me." What do these golden words portend? That with all His heart and with all His soul God will perfect the character of His people. The fact is, nothing in man creates such enthusiasm on God's part as the instituting and enhancing of character. Your soul is that in you in which God is most interested, and He is interested in everything about you. He is enthusiastic in incomparable degree for your salvation. The supernatural rectification of the will and of the being which we commonly call conversion draws forth God's intense enthusiasm. With His whole heart and with His whole soul He proposes to develop the good He has already created. He pines to perfect His servants. He has splendid ideals for them. He strongly yearns to make their to-morrows better than their yesterdays. There are those whose so-called enthusiasm is self-centred. Certain "intense" people are intensely selfish. Some have ineffectual enthusiasms. No altruism irradiates them. Nobody is anything bettered for them. They are "fruitless" fires. Not so the enthusiasm of God. God's zeal is to help, to bless, to enrich men. To illumine what is dark in men. To raise what is low. To glorify what is sordid. Temporally and spiritually beneficent is the enthusiasm of God. He delights to help us. Nor can the strong years conquer His enthusiasm. In this, as in respect of all the qualities of the Divine character, we are to be "imitators of God, as beloved children." All enthusiasm is contagious. Thrills thrill. The awful peril is that we imitate evil enthusiasms. Souls of men, be admonished against such devil-born enthusiasm.

God's enthusiasm is the true ideal for man. "Be ye imitators of God." Be ours enthusiasm for holy living. What a rebuke to our tepidity is the enthusiasm of God! What is more remote from God than moral and spiritual coldness? Oh, this Divine enthusiasm is the crying need of modern religion! It is very instructive to study the Bible teaching concerning the enthusiasm of God. It is even more impressive on the negative than on the positive side. God has no spark of enthusiasm for much that man burns about. What discordance there often is between God and man! This is apparent in the objects of their respective enthusiasms. God has no enthusiasm for self-centredness. God has no enthusiasm for worldliness. No matter what form it assumes, He cares not for it. It is all "vanity" to Him. God has no enthusiasm for indifference. Some are zealous for nothing but apathy. They have dead hearts, and there is no death so deadly as the death of the heart. Stoicism is not sanctity. God is quick with sympathy. The omissions from the revealed enthusiasms of God are intensely significant. Take heed lest thou art enthusiastic where thy God is not. A God who, with His whole heart and with His whole soul, seeks man's highest good, is a God who constrains our devotion. He attracts us. He captivates us. Were He a cold, unresponsive God, I should shrink from Him. But being an enthusiastic God, my heart is His. Here is a ground of trustfulness—the enthusiasm of God. Can I fear for the morrow when this God is mine? Here is a ground of hope—the enthusiasm of God. All shall always be well, seeing such a God is mine. Here is a ground of service—the enthusiasm of God. Too much one cannot do for such a God. When He declares, "With My whole heart, and with My whole soul," He prefixes another delectable word, "assuredly." The margin renders it "in truth," or "in stability." So the good Lord assures us of the perpetuity of His kindly enthusiasm. It will never fail His people. Whoever cools toward us, the enthusiastic God of grace will be faithful and fervent still. (*D. T. Young.*)

Ver. 42. **All the good that I have promised.**—*The religion of the promise* (with Num. x. 29):—Obeying a true instinct, the Church of Christ has from the beginning understood the whole story of the transfer of the chosen people from the land of bondage to the land of promise as possessing, over and above its historical value, the preciousness of a divinely-planned allegory. For us, to-day, just as really as for them in days of old, the stimulus continues to be simply this—a promise. Heaven cannot be demonstrated. We merely take God's Word for it. Not enough, in our times, is said—soberly and intelligently said, I mean—about heaven. Very many people have the feeling that the old-fashioned heaven of their childhood's thoughts and hopes has been explained away by the progress of discovery. It seems to them as if heaven were pushed farther and farther off, just in proportion as the telescope penetrates farther and farther into space. The gates of pearl recede with the enlargement of the object-glass, and the search for the Paradise of God, like that for the earthly Eden, seems to become more hopeless, the more accurate our knowledge of the map. The primitive Christians found it comparatively easy to think of heaven as a place just above the stars. To us, who have learned to think of the sun itself as but a star seen near at hand, and of the stars as suns, such localisation of the dwelling-place of the Most Highest is far from easy. Another, and a very different reason for keeping heaven, as it were, in the background, holding the mention of it in reserve, comes from those who believe that there is such a danger as that of cheapening and vulgarising sacred things by too much fluency in talking about them. It cannot be denied that there is a certain amount of reason for this fastidiousness, some strength in this protest. An indulgent rhetoric may throw open the gates with a freedom so careless as to make us wonder why there should be any gates at all; and lips to which the common prose speech of the real heaven would perhaps come hard, were they compelled to try it, can sing of "Jerusalem the Golden," and of the Paradise for which "'tis weary waiting here" with a glibness at which possibly the angels stand aghast. This is a second reason, a very different reason from the first, but still a reason, for observing reticence about heaven. And yet, in the face of both of these reasons, I think it is a sad pity, our hearing so little as we do about the hope of heaven as a motive power in human life. For after all that has been said, or can be said, these two facts remain indisputable; they stare us in the face: first, that this life of ours, however we may account for it, does bear a certain resemblance to a journey, in that the one is a movement through time, as the other is a movement through space; secondly, that any journey which

lacks a destination is, and must of necessity be a dismal thing. Human nature being what it is, we need the attractive power of something to look forward to, as we say, to keep our strength and courage up to the living standard. Christians are men with a hope, men who have been called to inherit a blessing. Nor is the Old Testament lacking in this element of promise. It runs through the whole Bible. What book anywhere can you point to so forward-looking as that Book? As we watch the worthies of many generations pass in long procession onwards, from the day when the promise was first given of the One who should come and bruise the serpent's head, down to the day when the aged Simeon in the Temple took the Child Jesus into his arms and blessed Him, we seem to see upon every forehead a glow of light. These men have a hope. They are looking for something, and they look as those look who expect in due time to find. If this be true of the general tone of the Old Testament Scriptures, doubly, trebly is it true of the New Testament. The coming of Christ has only quickened and made more intense in us that instinct of hope which the old prophecies of His coming first inspired. For when He came, He brought in larger hopes, and opened to us far-reaching vistas of promise, such as had never been dreamed of before. A solemn joy pervades the atmosphere in which apostle and evangelist move before our eyes. They are as men who, in the face of the wreck of earthly hopes, have yet no inclination to tears, because there has been opened to them a vision of things unseen, and granted to them a foretaste of the peace eternal. "The glory that shall be revealed"; "the things eye hath not seen," prepared for those who love God; "the house not made with hands," waiting for occupancy; "the crown of righteousness, laid up"—you remember how prominent a place these hold in the persuasive oratory of St. Paul. The complaint that the progress of human knowledge has made it difficult to think and speak of heaven as believing men used to think and speak of it, is a complaint to which we ought to return for a few moments; for, from our leaving it as we did, the impression may have been conveyed to some minds that the difficulty is insuperable. Let me observe, then, that while there is a certain grain of reasonableness in this argument for silence with respect to heaven and the things of heaven, there is by no means so much weight to be attached to it as many people seem to suppose. For after all, when we come to think of it, this changed conception of what heaven may be like is not traceable so much to any marvellous revolution that has come over the whole character of human thought since you and I were children, as it is to the changes which have taken place in our own several minds, and which necessarily take place in every mind in its progress from infancy to maturity. The really serious blow at old-time notions upon the subject was dealt long before any of us were born, when the truth was established beyond serious doubts that this planet is not the centre about which all else in the universe revolves. But the explanation of our personal sense of grievance at being robbed of the heaven we were used to believe in is to be sought in the familiar saying, "When I was a child, I spake as a child," &c. We instinctively, and without knowing it, project this childish way of looking at things upon the whole thinking world that was contemporary with our childhood, and infer from the change that has come over our own mind that corresponding change has been going on in the mind of the world at large. This fallacy is the more easily fallen into, because it is a fact that, if we go back far enough in the history of thought, we do find even the mature minds seeing things much as we ourselves saw them in our early childhood. But let me try to strike closer home and meet the difficulty in a more direct and helpful way. I do it by asking whether we ought not to feel ashamed of ourselves, thus to talk about having been robbed of the promise simply because the Father of heaven has been showing us, just as fast as our poor minds could bear the strain, to how immeasurable an area the Fatherhood extends. Instead of repining because we cannot dwarf God's universe so as to make it fit perfectly the smallness of our notions, let us turn all our energies to seeking to enlarge the capacity of our faith so that it shall be able to hold more. What all this means is, that we are to believe better things of God, not worse things. It may turn out,—who can tell?—that heaven lies nearer to us than even in our childhood we ever ventured to suppose; that it is not only nearer than the sky, but nearer than the clouds. The reality of heaven, happily, is not dependent on the ability of our five senses to discover its whereabouts. Doubtless a sixth or seventh sense might speedily reveal much, very much of which the five we now have take no notice. Be this as it may, the reasonableness of our believing in Christ's promise, that in the world whither He went He would

prepare a place for us, is in nowise impugned by anything that the busy wit of man has yet found out, or is likely to find out. There is no period of life from which we can afford to spare the presence of this heavenly hope. We need it in youth, to give point and purpose and direction to the newly launched life. We need it in middle life to help us cover patiently that long stretch which parts youth from old age—the time of the fading out of illusions in the dry light of experience; the time when we discover the extent of our personal range, and the narrow limit of our possible achievement. Above all shall we find such a hope the staff of old age, should the pilgrimage last so long. But let us not imagine that we can postpone believing until then. Faith is a habit of the soul, and old men would be the first to warn us against the notion that it is a habit that may be acquired in a day. Those of us who are wise will take up the matter now, at whatever point of age the word may happen to have found us. (*W. R. Huntington, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XXXIII.

VERS. 1-9. The Word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah the second time, while he was yet shut up in the court of the prison.—*A Divine message sent into a prison.*—I. A TRUE CHILD OF GOD AND AN HONOURED PROPHET IN DISGRACE AND AFFLICTION (ver. 1). Let not the child of God think that his sorrows are always because of his sins. II. THOUGH DESPISED OF MAN, THE PROPHET WAS HONOURED OF GOD (vers. 1, 2). 1. To receive communications from the Divine mind is the highest honour. 2. He whom God honours and owns as His child need not fear what man can do. III. DIVINE CONSOLATION TO AN AFFLICTED SERVANT (ver. 3). 1. The most precious of all privileges, that of prayer: "Call unto Me." 2. The most marvellous of all assurances: "And I will answer thee." 3. The most encouraging of all promises: "I will . . . show thee great and mighty things." IV. THE ADVERSITY AND PROSPERITY OF NATIONS ARE UNDER THE CONTROL OF GOD (vers. 4-7). 1. It is impossible properly to construe the history of a nation without reference to the moral government of God. 2. National prosperity or adversity has always been in the line of national virtue or vice. V. THE ESSENTIAL CONDITIONS OF NATIONAL AS WELL AS INDIVIDUAL HEALING (vers. 8, 9). 1. It is essential that God come to do the work. "I will cleanse," &c. 2. It is essential that God work upon our moral natures. "I will cleanse them from all their iniquity." 3. It is essential that God work upon our moral natures by the assurance of the forgiveness of sin. "I will pardon all," &c. 4. This moral and spiritual cleansing and pardon are essential for the appreciation of the Divine goodness: "And they shall fear," &c. 5. This spiritual healing shall manifest forth the glory of God: "It shall be to Me a name," &c. (*D. C. Hughes, M.A.*) *The method of Divine procedure.*—The prophet, when the Word of the Lord came unto him, was in a good hearing place, "shut up in the court of the prison." Shut up unjustly, it was no prison to him, but a sanctuary, with God's altar visibly in it, and God Himself irradiating the altar with a light above the brightness of the sun. How hardly shall they that have riches hear the Gospel. Their ears are already filled; their attention is already occupied. What keen ears poverty has! What eyes the blind man has!—inner eyes, eyes of expectation. We should have had no world worth living in but for the prison, the darkness, the trouble, the blindness, the sorrow, which have constituted such precious elements in our lot. There would have been no poetry written if there had been no sorrow. Jeremiah heard more in the prison than he ever heard in the palace. God knows where His children are. There are a thousand prisons in life. We must not narrow words into their lowest meanings, but enlarge them into their broadest significance. He is in prison who is in trouble, who is in fear, who is in conscious penitence, without having received the complete assurance of pardon; he is in prison who has sold his liberty, is lying under condemnation, secret or open; and he is in prison who has lost his first love, his early enthusiasm that was loaded with dew like a flower in the morning. Whatever our prison is, God knows it, can find us, can send a word of His own directly to us, and can make us forget outward circumstances in inward content and peace and joy. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 3. **Call unto Me, and I will answer thee.**—*An invitation—a promise—a revelation.*—I. A GRACIOUS INVITATION.—“Call unto Me” implies all the constituents of successful prayer. 1. Penitence. 2. Contrition. 3. Humility. 4. Importunity. 5. Restitution. 6. Faith. II. A PRECIOUS PROMISE.—“And I will answer thee.” The invitation accepted, its conditions complied with, always brings the answer. 1. God’s word pledged. 2. God’s nature pledged. 3. Confirmed by the experience of His saints. III. A GLORIOUS REVELATION.—“And will shew thee,” &c. 1. The greatness of God’s love. 2. The power of Jesus to forgive sin. 3. The worth of the soul. 4. The joys and comforts of religion. 5. The victory of faith in death. (*J. T. Davies.*) *Prayer.*—I. THE INVITATION TO PRAYER. 1. Whose is it? 2. To whom is the invitation addressed? 3. What is the tenor of the invitation? II. THE PROMISE. 1. It is general. 2. It is special. Apply—(1) Reprove the prayerless. (2) Encourage the prayerful. (*G. Brooks.*) *The golden key of prayer.*—God’s people have always in their worst conditions found out the best of their God. Those who dive into the sea of affliction bring up rare pearls. I. PRAYER COMMANDED. 1. This is great condescension. So great is the infatuation of man on the one hand, which makes him need a command to be merciful to his own soul, and so marvellous the condescension of God on the other that He issues a command of love. 2. Our hearts so despond over our unfitness and guilt that but for the command we might fear to approach. 3. It is remarkable how much more frequently God calls us to Him in Scripture than we find there our sinfulness denounced! 4. Nor by the commands of the Bible alone are we summoned to prayer, but by the motions of His Holy Spirit. II. AN ANSWER PROMISED. 1. God’s very nature, as revealed in Jesus Christ, assures us that He will accept us in prayer. 2. Our own experience leads us to believe that God will answer prayer; e.g., the conversion of many a child has been an answer to parents’ pleadings with God. 3. Yet God does not always give the thing we ask. Lord Bolingbroke said to the Countess of Huntingdon, “I cannot understand, your ladyship, how you can make out earnest prayer to be consistent with submission to the Divine will.” “My lord,” she said, “that is a matter of no difficulty. If I were a courtier of some generous king, and he gave me permission to ask any favour I pleased of him, I should be sure to put it thus: ‘Will your majesty be graciously pleased to grant me such and such a favour; but at the same time, though I much desire it, if it would in any way detract from your majesty’s honour, or if in your majesty’s judgment it should seem better that I did not have this favour, I shall be quite as content to go without it as to receive it.’ So you see I might earnestly offer a petition, and yet might submissively leave it with the king.” III. ENCOURAGEMENT TO FAITH. 1. Promised to God’s prophet, this specially applies to every teacher. The best way for a teacher or learner in Divine truth to reach the “deeper things of God” is to be much in prayer. Luther says, “Bene orare est bene studuisse”—To have prayed well is to have studied well. 2. The saint may expect to discover deeper experience and to know more of the higher spiritual life, by being much in prayer. 3. It is certainly true of the sufferer under trial; if he waits on God he shall have greater deliverance than he ever dreamed of (Lam. iii. 57). 4. Here is encouragement for the worker. We know not how much capacity for usefulness there is in us. More prayer will show us more power. 5. This should cheer us in intercession for others. 6. Some are seekers for your own conversion. Pray, and see if God will not “show you great and mighty things.” (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Prayer encouraged.*—The text belongs to every afflicted servant of God. It encourages him in a threefold manner.—I. TO CONTINUE IN PRAYER. “Call unto Me!” 1. Pray, though you have prayed (see chap. xxxii. 16, &c.). 2. Pray concerning your present trouble. In chap. xxxii. 24, the prophet mentions “the mounts” which were raised against Jerusalem, and in ver. 4 of this chapter the Lord answers on that very point. 3. Pray though you are still in prison after prayer. If deliverance tarries, make your prayers the more importunate. 4. Pray; for the Word of the Lord comes to you with this command. 5. Pray; for the Holy Spirit prompts you, and helps you. II. TO EXPECT ANSWERS TO PRAYER. “I will answer thee, and shew thee.” 1. He has appointed prayer, and made arrangements for its presentation and acceptance. He could not have meant it to be a mere farce: that were to treat us as fools. 2. He prompts, encourages, and quickens prayer; and surely He would never mock us by exciting desires which He never meant to gratify. 3. His nature is such that He must hear His children. 4. He has given His promise in the text; and it is often repeated elsewhere: He cannot lie, or deny Himself.

5. He has already answered many of His people, and ourselves also. III. To EXPECT GREAT THINGS AS ANSWERS TO PRAYER. "I will shew thee great and mighty things." We are to look for things—1. Great in counsel; full of wisdom and significance. 2. Mighty in work; revealing might, and mightily effectual. 3. New things to ourselves, fresh in our experience and therefore surprising. We may expect the unexpected. 4. Divine things: "I will shew thee." (1) Health and cure (ver. 6). (2) Liberation from captivity (ver. 7). (3) Forgiveness of iniquity (ver. 8). (*Ibid.*) *Prayer and its answer*.—A young engineer was being examined, and this question was put to him: "Suppose you have a steam-pump constructed for a ship, under your own supervision, and know that everything is in perfect order, yet, when you throw out the hose, it will not draw; what should you think?" "I should think, sir, there must be a defect somewhere." "But such a conclusion is not admissible; for the supposition is that everything is perfect, and yet that the pump will not work." "Then, sir," replied the student, "I should look over the side of the ship to see if the river had run dry." Even so it would appear that if true prayer is not answered the nature of God must have changed. *Instant in prayer*.—Sir Walter Raleigh one day asking a favour from Queen Elizabeth, the latter said to him, "Raleigh, when will you leave off begging?" To which he answered, "When your Majesty leaves off giving." Ask great things of God. Expect great things from God. Let His past goodness make us "instant in prayer." *Prayer the soul's wings*.—Thomas Brooks, alluding to the old classical myth of Dædalus, who, being imprisoned in the island of Crete, made wings for himself, by which he escaped to Italy, says, "Christians must do as Dædalus, who, when he could not escape by a way upon earth, went by a way of heaven." Holy prayers are the wings of the soul's deliverance. (*Ibid.*) *Calling unto God*.—What is this calling unto God? Is it a verbal exercise? Is it a mere act of exclamation? Nothing can be further from the meaning. It is a call that issues from the heart; it is the call of need, it is the cry of pain, it is the agony of desire, it is enclosure with God in profound and loving communion. If we have received no answers, it is because we have offered no prayers. "Ye have not because ye ask not or because ye ask amiss,"—you have been praying obliquely instead of directly; you have been vexing yourselves with circumlocution when your words ought to have been direct appeals, sharp, short, urgent appeals to Heaven: to such appeals God sends down richness of dew, wealth of blessing, morning brighter than noonday. God will shew His people "great and mighty things." There is nothing little. The bird in the heavens upon its trembling wing is only little to us, it is not little to God. He counts the drops of dew, He puts our tears into His bottle, He numbers our sighs, and as for our groans, He distinguishes one from the other; these are not little things to Him, they are only little to our ignorance, and folly, and superficiality. God looks at souls, faces, lives, destinies, and the least child in the world He rocks to sleep and wakes in the morning, as if He had nought else to do; it is the stoop of Fatherhood, it is the mystery of the Cross. As to these continual revelations, they ought to be possible. God is infinite and eternal, man is infinite and transient in all his earthly relationships; it would be strange if God had told man everything He has to tell him, it would be the miracle of miracles that God had exhausted Himself in one effort, it would be incredible that the eternal God had crushed into the moment which we call time every thought that makes Him God. Greater things than these shall ye do; when He, the Paraclete, is come, He will guide you into all truth; grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ; add to your faith, until you scaffold yourselves up into brotherly love and charity, for from that pinnacle the next step is right into heaven. The question is, Are we in need of further revelation? Do we call for it? We may call for it speculatively, and no answer will be given; we may ask for it for the sake of mere intellectual delectation, and the heavens will be dumb and frowning; but if we try to outgrow God, then we shall know what God is in reality; He challenges the sacred rivalry, He appeals to our emulation to follow Him and study Him, and try to comprehend Him, and then how like a horizon He is, for we think we can touch Him in yonder top, but having climbed the steep the horizon is still beyond. To cleverness God has nothing to say; to vanity He is scornfully inhospitable; but to the broken heart, to the contrite spirit and the willing mind, to filial, tender, devout obedience, He will give Himself in infinite and continual donation: "To this man will I look, for I see My own image in him. My own purpose is vitalised in his experience—the man who is of a humble and contrite

heart, and who trembleth at My word, not in servility, but in rapture and wonder at its grandeur and tenderness." (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *God's gracious answers to our prayers*.—When poor men make requests to us we usually answer them as the echo does the voice; the answer cuts off half the petition. We shall seldom find among men Jaci's courtesy, giving milk to those that ask water, except it be, as this was, an entangling benefit, the better to introduce a mischief. There are not many Naamans among us, that, when you beg of them one talent, will force you to take two; but God's answer to our prayers is like a multiplying glass, which renders the request much greater in the answer than it was in the prayer. (*J. Reynolds.*) *Answers to prayer should be eagerly expected*.—One of the heathen poets speaks of Jupiter throwing certain prayers to the winds,—dispersing them in empty air. It is sad to think that we often do that for ourselves. What would you think of a man who had written and folded and sealed and addressed a letter, flinging it out into the street and thinking no more about it? Sailors in foundering ships sometimes commit notes in sealed bottles to the waves for the chance of them being some day washed on some shore. Sir John Franklin's companions among the snows, and Captain Allen Gardiner dying of hunger in his cove, wrote words they could not be sure anyone would ever read. But we do not need to think of our prayers as random messages. We should therefore look for a reply to them and watch to get it. (*J. Edmond.*) *And shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not*.—*Prevailing prayer*.—There are different translations of these words. One version renders it, "I will shew thee great and fortified things." Another, "Great and reserved things." Now, there are reserved and special things in Christian experience: all the developments of spiritual life are not alike easy of attainment. There are the common frames and feelings of repentance, and faith, and joy, and hope, which are enjoyed by the entire family; but there is an upper realm of rapture, of communion, and conscious union with Christ, which is far from being the common dwelling-place of believers. We have not all the higher privilege of John, to lean upon Jesus' bosom; nor of Paul, to be caught up into the third heaven. There are heights in experimental knowledge of the things of God which the eagle's eye of acumen and philosophic thought hath never seen: God alone can bear us there; but the chariot in which He takes us up, and the fiery steeds with which that chariot is dragged, are prevailing prayers. Prevailing prayer is victorious over the God of mercy. "By his strength he had power with God: yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto Him: he found Him in Bethel, and there He spake with us." Prevailing prayer takes the Christian to Carmel, and enables him to cover heaven with clouds of blessing, and earth with floods of mercy. Prevailing prayer bears the Christian aloft to Pisgah, and shows him the inheritance reserved; it elevates us to Tabor and transfigures us, till in the likeness of our Lord, as He is, so are we also in this world. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 6. *Behold I will bring it health and cure*.—This passage, in its more immediate application, relates to the city and people of Jerusalem, and conveys a promise to the unhappy nation of the Jews of blessings which are yet in store for them. *The Great Physician*.—I. THE VISIT WHICH THIS GOOD PHYSICIAN PAYS TO THE POOR PATIENT WHO HAS NEED OF HIM. The patient is a wretched being, who, in a spiritual point of view, is diseased from head to foot, and hath "no soundness in him." He has the disease of human nature, the disease which you and I have—sin. He has become painfully alive to the humiliating fact that there is no good thing in him—that all his doings have been evil—and that the sentence of death eternal hangs over his soul. He cannot heal himself. His fellow-sinners cannot heal him. Is not then his case desperate? It would be so indeed were it not for a voice from heaven which saith of this poor sinner, "I will bring him health and cure." Every word is a word of comfort to that sinner's soul. There is comfort in the first word "I"—I will do it. For who is it that speaks? It is Jesus, the great, the mighty Saviour of the soul—that famous, that renowned Physician who hath healed already such a multitude of sinners, and hath never lost a single patient. There is comfort in the next word, "I will bring"—for, alas! this sinner cannot fetch his cure. But look at the last words of the sentence, and behold still more abundant comfort for this perishing transgressor. "I will bring," saith the Lord—What? A medicine? A healing application that will be likely to avail—that may conduce towards recovery? No, but—Oh, bold words! words only fit for an Almighty Saviour!—"I will bring him health and cure"—something so sovereign

in its virtue, so sure, so swift in its effects, that, the moment it is tried upon the patient, he is well; not only in part restored; not only altogether freed from his disease; but well—in full, in perfect health. The balm which the Physician brings to cure the sinner with is the blood which He hath shed for them, the life which He hath given for them, the full, the perfect and sufficient sacrifice which He hath offered up for them. And this balm, is not medicine only—for that may heal or not heal; that is a mere experiment upon a broken constitution, and may be ineffectual; but the balm which Jesus brings the sinner may well be styled “health and cure”; for it is everything at once which the sinner’s case requires. This precious blood “cleanseth from all sin.” But we have not yet attended this Good Physician to His patient. We have not yet ascertained, I mean, how He may be said to “bring” this “health and cure” to the poor sinner’s soul. It is when He opens that sinner’s eyes to view Him as a Saviour—when, by His word or by His ministers, He sets His love before that sinner’s soul, and by His Holy Spirit makes him see it. II. OBSERVE THE GOOD PHYSICIAN ACTUALLY CURING THE POOR PATIENT HE ATTENDS. There is a difference between a remedy brought near, and a remedy applied; and there is a difference again between Christ’s “bringing health and cure” to the sinner, and that sinner’s being cured. “The grace of God that bringeth salvation” is said to “appear unto all men”; but we know that all men to whom it appeareth are not saved by it. Many men perceive that Christ is their Physician, yet will not take His remedy; and many men believe that they have used the remedy when they have only done so in appearance. The patient we have endeavoured to describe is a really humbled and awakened soul, and the Lord, who brings him health, gives him faith also, to be healed. He believes in Jesus as a Saviour. He casts his soul on Him for pardon and righteousness. III. NOW PROCEED TO THE BLESSINGS MY TEXT DESCRIBES HIM AS BESTOWING ON THE POOR PATIENTS HE HAS HEALED. “I will reveal to them,” says He, “the abundance of peace and truth.” 1. We may regard this peace and truth as the privileges of the redeemed sinner. When our poor sick bodies are recovered unexpectedly from a painful and a dangerous disease, how do we rejoice in our newly acquired health! How are our fears calmed and our anxieties removed! but these natural emotions are not to be compared for a moment with the spiritual feelings and experiences of the pardoned sinner; no sooner hath the Good Physician healed the soul than what doth He reveal to it? “The abundance of peace and truth.” Peace—for “being justified by faith, he hath peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Christ “revealeth” also to him “the abundance of truth.” He enjoys, through the Spirit which Christ sends him, a glorious and most comfortable apprehension of the truth of God—the of the truth of His grace, of the truth of His covenant, of the truth of His promises. 2. Consider this “abundance of peace and truth” as referring also to the character acquired by the believer in consequence of his faith. Christ may be said to have revealed to His people the “abundance of peace” in that He hath given them a peaceful spirit—in that He hath sent that Dove-like Messenger to rest upon their souls who is “first pure, then peaceable,” and who makes the hearts He enters like Himself. And Christ may be said also to have revealed to him “the abundance of truth,” by enabling him to walk in truth. He is “an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile,” no crooked policy, no artful management. His aim is, on all occasions, to be “a child of the light and of the day”—“sincere and without offence unto the day of Christ”—“having no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reproving them.” (A. Roberts, M.A.) *Health for the soul* :—I. THE PATIENT AND HIS DISEASE. The patient is man; the disease is sin. We see the disease equally in the most refined as in the most ignorant. It stares us in the face when we read of an African negress sacrificing a fowl to her little image; and it shows itself equally when we read of a Grecian philosopher proposing before his death the sacrifice of a cock to Esculapius. We see the ignorance of the true God; we see at the same time such a consciousness of sin that something must be done to appease the apprehension which they have of the reality of a God. But we need a closer application of the subject. You may all of you say perhaps, “I have never been guilty of idolatry; I am neither Mohammedan, nor Socialist, nor Communist, nor an infidel.” Let us look, then, at some of the peculiar features of the disease of sin, and see whether it is not preying upon you as it is upon other men in the world. Now, it is well illustrated by the effect which sickness produces upon our body. For instance, sickness produces languor through the whole body; and this is exactly God’s account of the effect of sin (Isa. i. 5, 6).

Take the faculties of man. Take his understanding. The understanding, we are told, "is darkened," so that man is no longer wise to do good; he is only wise to do evil. Again, look at his will. The will of man has a wrong bias. Once, I cannot doubt, it was true of Adam, as spoken of our Lord in the fortieth Psalm, "I delight to do Thy will, O God; yea, it is within my heart." I cannot doubt there was a time when that was the natural expression of Adam's heart; but now it is not the expression of any man's heart until he is renewed by the Holy Ghost. But again: sickness takes away our desire for what is wholesome. So it is with sinners. They "put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter"; they call darkness light, and light darkness, and evil good, and good evil: whereas the spiritual man delights in the law of God after the inward man renewed by the Holy Ghost. Another effect produced by sickness upon the frame is, that it takes away the comfort of life. There is no enjoyment in anything put before the sick man enfeebled by disease, anything in which he was once able to take delight. Yea, life itself often becomes a burden. Now, what is the burden? Why, sin is the burden; it is this, only you do not know it; it is this which at times poisons the joy even of the most thoughtless—the consciousness of sin, the consciousness of your opposition to a holy God. II. THE PHYSICIAN AND THE CURE. "Behold I will bring it health and cure"—"I"—Jesus. And it has been Jesus always. The remedy may have been stated more distinctly under the Gospel than under the law, but not more really. It was Jesus always, it was the precious blood of Jesus always, pointed at in the very first promise that was made by God, that "the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head." And salvation has always been shut up in that seed. It may have been expressed sometimes as being Abraham's seed, sometimes the seed of Isaac, and sometimes the seed of Jacob, but it had only one meaning; as the apostle said in the third chapter of Galatians, "Not unto seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ." There is the Physician that God has always revealed. And what is His character? I cannot give you a better picture of Him than He has given of Himself in the parable of the good Samaritan. The wounded man had no charges; he had nothing to pay; the good Samaritan paid for all. It is so with Jesus. The only fee, if I may so speak with reverence of Jesus, is—all He asks of us is, that we should trust Him, that we should believe in Him. He holds out to us in the Gospel perfect cure of all our disease, whatever it may be, and however aggravated; and He only says, "Let Me cure you." And when I point you to this Good Samaritan as a Physician, I would have you remember that He is the only One. I call this another inexpressible mercy, that the poor sinner's mind, anxious for relief, is not distracted in the Gospel by choosing between physicians. As the sun is clear in the firmament of heaven at noonday, so does Jesus shine forth as the Sun of Righteousness "with healing in His wings" to every poor sinner. And observe how He brings this before you. He says, "Direct your attention, 'behold,' take notice, 'I will bring you health and cure.'" Here is purpose, here is determination, here is sovereign will. "I will cure, I will heal, I will reveal abundance of peace and truth." We may ask, then, if the way be so simple, "why is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?" Yes, there is balm, there is the blood of Jesus; there is a Physician, there is Jesus Himself. Then "why is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" I will put before you some reasons. Some are not healed because they do not know they are sick. There is often very great mischief going on in our frames without our knowing it. That is the way in which mortal diseases get hold of a man. Then some are not healed because they love their disease. Yea, they love sin. We read of a very celebrated man, St. Augustine, that there was a time when his conscience was so harassed by the oppression of sin, at the same time that his affections were set upon the enjoyment and indulgence of it, that he declared he was afraid his prayers should be heard when he prayed for deliverance from sin. Now I would ask whether that is not the case with many. Some, again, are not healed because they are not willing to be healed. Our Lord says, "Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life." Again, some hearts are not healed because they will not take the Gospel remedies. What are the two great remedies that Jesus proposes? Repentance towards God, and faith towards Himself. But these are bitter and nauseous draughts to the natural man. There is one other reason which I would give why some are not healed—because they put no confidence in the Physician. Here is the root of all the evil—a want of faith. If they trusted

Hum, they would trust His word; and if they trusted His Word, they would take His remedies. (*J. W. Reeve, M.A.*)

Ver. 8. **I will cleanse them from all their iniquity.**—*Our Cleanser* (with Psa. xix. 12):—Many think that Jesus came into the world to forgive our sins; which is true, but it is only a part of the truth; for the New Testament reveals that He came to save us from our sins. Forgiveness is a great thing; but cleansing from sin is greater. Any kindly hearted man can forgive an injury; but only an omnipotent God can wash the love of sin from our nature. The Bible reveals that God has both the will and the power to give a clean heart. **I. IT IS A NEEDFUL PRAYER.** "Cleansc Thou me from secret faults." 1. Do not our secret thoughts need cleansing? 2. Our secret imaginations need to be cleansed. Children build fairy castles in the air, and tenant them with the pure, the brave, and the true; but as we grow older, our airy castles begin to be peopled with those whose actions are tainted with sin; and when we arrive at manhood, the unconverted soul builds castles in its imagination in which iniquity abounds without any obstacle to hinder it. 3. Our secret desires need cleansing. If there were no desire for sin, there would be no transgression; and we, therefore, need to pray continually, "Lord, cleanse my sinful desires! Let my longings be washed from their bias to transgression!" 4. Our secret habits need cleansing. When a man yields to a sinful habit it is difficult to break it off. You need superhuman power; and that power shall be granted to all who sincerely ask of God. The sculptor who forms a figure in marble does it gradually by thousands of chisel strokes; and in the same way, when you are forming your soul either for goodness or badness, it is a gradual work. As no man is made an angel in a moment, so no man is made a devil in a moment. It is a work of time. It is first a thought, then a picture in the mind, then a desire, then a hesitating step, and afterwards the boldness of habit. It is hard work battling against a world inclined to sin; it is more difficult to resist a loved one who tempts us; but the hardest battle ever man can fight in this world is when he struggles against his soul's inclination to think or do evil. And I feel persuaded that no man can cleanse his secret faults without the help of God. But however bad your secret sins may be, you can be purified. Is there anything too hard for the Lord? Christ has unfurled the flag of liberty, and His Spirit now calls on every man who is bound by sin to cry to Him for life! **II. UNBELIEF HINDERS US FROM BEING CLEANSSED.** Some men say, "Nobody can be saved from all their secret faults!" But if the Lord say He will cleanse us from all our iniquity, is it not a wicked thing to doubt it? Perhaps, somebody remarks, "Well, I used to think I might be cleansed from sin, and I tried, but failed every time." Now let me ask you a question. Were you not a great deal happier when you were seeking to conquer your secret faults than you are now? You reply, "Yes, I was happier; but why did I not succeed?" A man who is trying to crush down the sin of his heart is happier than he who is content with the slavery of sin. If he do not succeed, the reason is that he is trying to do for himself what cannot be done without God. Ask the Lord to cleanse. It is your work to bring your soul in faith and prayer to Him, and it is His work to cleanse it. **III. HOW DOES THE LORD CLEANSSE US?** The Jews in times of old were cleansed by being sprinkled with the blood of a beast. But this is not the way in which we are cleansed from secret faults. The Spirit of Christ can enter our souls and can cleanse us from sin. (*IV. Birch.*) *A threefold disease and a twofold cure*:—Jeremiah was a prisoner in the palace of the last King of Judah. The long, national tragedy had reached almost the last scene and the last act. The besiegers were drawing their net closer round the doomed city. The prophet never faltered in predicting its fall, but he as uniformly pointed to a period behind the impending ruin, when all should be peace and joy. His song was modulated from a saddened minor to triumphant jubilation. The exiles shall return, the city shall be rebuilt, its desolate streets shall ring with hymns of praise, and the voices of the bridegroom and the bride. The land shall be peopled with peaceful husbandmen, and white with flocks. There shall be again a King upon the throne; sacrifices shall again be offered. That fair vision of the future begins with the offer of healing and cure, and with the exuberant promise of my text. The first thing to be dealt with was Judah's sin; and that being taken away, all good and blessing would start into being, as flowerets will spring when the baleful shadow of some poisonous tree is removed. **I. A THREE-FOLD VIEW OF THE SAD CONDITION OF HUMANITY.** Observe the recurrence of the same idea in our text in different words. "Their iniquity whereby they have

sinned against Me." . . . "Their iniquity whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against Me." You see there are three expressions which roughly may be taken as referring to the same ugly fact, but yet not meaning quite the same—"iniquity, or iniquities, sin, transgression." Suppose three men are set to describe a snake. One of them fixes his attention on its slimy coils, and describes its sinuous gliding movements. Another of them is fascinated by its wicked beauty, and talks about its livid markings, and its glittering eye. The third thinks only of the swift-darting fangs, and of the poison-glands. They all three describe the snake, but they describe it from different points of view. And so it is here. "Iniquity," "sin," "transgression" are synonyms to some extent, but they do not cover the same ground. They look at the serpent from different points of view. First, a sinful life is a twisted or warped life. The word rendered "iniquity," in the Old Testament, in all probability, literally means something that is not straight; that is bent, or, as I said, twisted or warped. That is a metaphor that runs through a great many languages. I suppose "right" means the very same thing—that which is straight and direct; and I suppose that "wrong" has something to do with "wrung"—that which has been forcibly diverted from a right line. We all know the conventional colloquialism about a man being "straight," and such-and-such a thing being "on the straight." All sin is a twisting of the man from his proper course. Now there underlies that metaphor the notion that there is a certain line to which we are to conform. The schoolmaster draws a firm, straight line in the child's copybook; and then the little unaccustomed hand takes up on the second line its attempt, and makes tremulous, wavering pot-hooks and hangers. There is a copyhead for us, and our writing is, alas! all uneven and irregular, as well as blurred and blotted. There is a law, and you know it; and you carry in yourself—I was going to say, the standard measure, and you know whether, when you put your life by the side of that, the two coincide. This very prophet has a wonderful illustration, in which he compares the lives of men who have departed from God to the racing about in the wilderness of a wild dromedary "entangling her ways," as he says, crossing and recrossing, and getting into a maze of perplexity. Ah! is that not something like your life? All sin is defection from the straight road, and we all are guilty of that. Let me ask you to consult the standard that you carry within yourselves. It is easy to imagine that a line is straight. But did you ever see the point of a needle under a microscope? However finely it is polished, and apparently regularly tapering, the scrutinising investigation of the microscope shows that it is all rough and irregular. The smallest departure from the line of right will end, unless it is checked, away out in the regions of darkness beyond. The second of them, rendered in our version "sin," if I may recur to my former illustration, looks at the snake from a different point of view, and it declares that all sin misses the aim. The meaning of the word in the original is simply "that which misses its mark." Now, there are two ways in which that thought may be looked at. Every wrong thing that we do misses the aim, if you consider what a man's aim ought to be. "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever." That is the only aim which corresponds to our constitution, to our circumstances. And so, whatever you win, unless you win God, you have missed the aim. Anything short of knowing Him and loving Him, serving Him, being filled and inspired by Him, is contrary to the destiny stamped upon us all. Then there is another side to this. The solemn teaching of this word is not confined to that thought, but also opens out into this other, that all godlessness, all the low, sinful lives that so many of us live, miss the shabby aim which they set before themselves. I do not believe that any man or woman ever got as much good, even of the lowest kind, out of a wrong thing as they expected to get when they ventured on it. If they did they got something else along with it that took all the gilt off the gingerbread. The drunkard gets his pleasurable oblivion, his pleasurable excitement. What about the corrugated liver, the palsied hand, the watery eye, the wrecked life, the broken hearts at home, and all the other accompaniments? There is an old story that speaks of a knight and his company who were travelling through a desert, and suddenly beheld a castle into which they were invited, and hospitably welcomed. A feast was spread before them, and they each ate and drank his fill. But as soon as they left the enchanted halls they were as hungry as before they sat at the magic table. That is the kind of food that all our wrong-doing provides for us. "He feedeth on ashes," and hungers after he has fed. And now, further, there is yet another word here, carrying with it important lessons. The expression which is translated in our text "transgressed," literally means

"rebelled." And the lesson of it is, that all sin is, however little we think it, a rebellion against God. That introduces a yet graver thought than either of the former has brought us face to face with. Behind the law is the Lawgiver. When we do wrong, we not only blunder, we not only go aside from the right line, we lift up ourselves against our Sovereign King. Sins are against God; and, dear friends, though you do not realise it, this is plain truth, that the essence, the common characteristic, of all the acts which, as we have seen, are twisted and foolish, is that in them we are setting up another than the Lord our God to be our ruler. We are enthroning ourselves in His place. Does not that thought make all these apparently trivial and insignificant things terribly important? Treason is treason, no matter what the act by which it is expressed. It may be a little thing to haul down a union-jack from a flagstaff, or to tear off a barn-door a proclamation with the royal arms at the top of it, but it may be rebellion. And if it is, it is as bad as to turn out a hundred thousand men in the field, with arms in their hands. II. THE TWOFOLD BRIGHT HOPE WHICH COMES THROUGH THIS DARKNESS. "I will cleanse . . . I will pardon." If sin combines in itself all these characteristics that I have touched upon, then clearly there is guilt, and clearly there are stains; and the gracious promise of this text deals with both the one and the other. "I will pardon." What is pardon? Do not limit it to the analogy of a criminal court. When the law of the land pardons, or rather when the administrator of the law pardons, that simply means that the penalty is suspended. But is that forgiveness? Certainly it is only a part of it, even if it is a part. What do you fathers and mothers do when you forgive your child? You may use the rod or you may not; that is a question of what is best for the child. Forgiveness does not lie in letting him off the punishment; but forgiveness lies in the flowing to the child, uninterrupted, of the love of the parent's heart. And that is God's forgiveness. Do you need pardon? Do you not? What does conscience say? What does the sense of remorse that sometimes blesses you, though it tortures, say? I know not any gospel that goes deep enough to touch the real sore place in human nature, except the Gospel that says to you and me and all of us, "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!" But forgiveness is not enough, for the worst results of past sin are the habits of sin which it leaves within us; so that we all need cleansing. Can we cleanse ourselves? Let experience answer. Did you ever try to cure yourself of some little trick of gesture, or manner, or speech? And did you not find out then how strong the trivial habit was? You never know the force of a current till you try to row against it. You may have the stained robe washed and made lustrous "white in the blood of the Lamb." Pardon and cleansing are our two deepest needs. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Our sins swallowed up*:—You see the Thames as it goes sluggishly down through the arches, carrying with it endless impurity and corruption. You watch the inky stream as it pours along day and night, and you think it will pollute the world. But you have just been down to the seashore, and you have looked on the great deep, and it has not left a stain on the Atlantic. No, it has been running down a good many years and carried a world of impurity with it, but when you go to the Atlantic there is not a speck on it. As to the ocean, it knows nothing about it. It is full of majestic music. So the smoke of London goes up, and has been going up for a thousand years. One would have thought that it would have spoiled the scenery by now; but you get a look at it sometimes. There is the great blue sky which has swallowed up the smoke and gloom of a thousand years, and its azure splendour is unspoiled. It is wonderful how the ocean has kept its purity, and how the sky has taken the breath of the millions and the smoke of the furnaces, and yet it is as pure as the day God made it. It is beautiful to think that these are only images of God's great pity for the race. Our sins, they are like the Thames, but, mind you, they shall be swallowed up—lost in the depths of the sea, to be remembered against us no more. Though our sins have been going up to heaven through the generations, yet, though thy sins are as crimson, they shall be as wool, as white as snow. (*W. L. Walkinson.*) *I will pardon all their iniquities.*—*The pardon of sin*.—I. The pardon of sin which Almighty God, in infinite mercy and grace, is now offering to sinners in the Gospel, is a FULL PARDON—that is, it comprehends and extends to every sin, however sinful, and includes all sins, however numerous. It was foretold in ancient prophecy that when the Messiah should come "to make His soul an offering for sin," He should, by His atoning death, "finish transgressions, make an end of sins, make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness." Our blessed Saviour having come, as it was thus written of Him,

and having suffered the "just for us the unjust," the Gospel testimony of His vicarious sufferings declares that His expiatory death has made a full and perfect atonement for all the sins of His people—that He has thereby fully reconciled them to God—that "His blood cleanseth them from all sin"—that "He is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God through Him." II. The pardon proclaimed in the Gospel is FREE—it is vouchsafed by an infinitely gracious God, suspended on no condition whatever to be performed by the sinner as the meritorious ground of its bestowal. It is this absolute freeness of the forgiveness of sin proclaimed in the Gospel that makes it worthy of an infinitely gracious God's bestowal, and good news to poor, miserable, and wretched sinners. Were it otherwise, it could be no rest to an awakened and alarmed conscience—to a weary and heavy sin-laden soul. III. The pardon proclaimed to sinners in the Gospel is EVERLASTING. This makes it a complete pardon. (A. M. Watt.)

Ver. 9. **They shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it.**—*Chastened happiness* :—Our text suggests at the outset the remark that all the good things which make up prosperity are to be traced unto the Lord. These benefits are not from beneath, but from above; let them not be passed by in ungrateful silence, but let us send upward humble and warm acknowledgments. He who forgets mercy deserves that mercy should forget him. Remark next, that temporal mercies are always best when they come in their proper order. Blessed be God if He has given to us first the fruits of the sun of grace, and then the fruits put forth by the moon of providence. The main thing is to be able to sing, "Bless the Lord, who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases," and after that it is most pleasant to add, "Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things." What shall I say of the happiness of those persons who have spiritual and temporal blessings united, to whom God has given both the upper and the nether springs, so that they possess all things needful for this life in fair proportion, and then, far above all, enjoy the blessings of the life to come? Such are first blessed in their spirits and then blessed in their basket and in their store. In their case double favour calls for double praise, double service, double delight in God. And yet, and yet, if we are very happy to-day, and though that happiness be lawful and proper, because it arises both out of spiritual and temporal things in due order, yet in all human happiness there lurks a danger. There is a wealth which hath a sorrow necessarily connected with it, and I ween that even when God maketh rich and addeth no sorrow therewith, yet He maketh provision against an ill which else would surely come. The text speaks of goodness and prosperity procured for us, and then tells us that all danger which might arise out of it is averted by a gracious work upon the heart. The Lord sends a chastened joy. "They shall fear and tremble." I. Let us think a little about the TONING DOWN OF OUR GREAT JOYS. 1. In the cup of salvation there are drops of bitterness, and so must it be, for unmixed delight in this world would be dangerous. When the sea is smooth the ship makes poor sailing. Men are bird-limed by their rest and ease, and have small care to fly heavenward. We are apt to lose our God among our goods. Is it not so? If the world's roses had no thorns should we not think it paradise, and forego all desire for the gardens above? 2. Unmixed joy would be fallacious, because there is no such thing here below. If a man should become perfectly contented with the things of this world, it would be the result of a false view of things. This is an error against which we should pray; for this world cannot fill the soul, and if a man thinks he has filled his soul with it, he must be under a gross delusion. As to spiritual joy, I say that in no man's experience can it be long without admixture and yet be true. Never at any moment can a Christian be in such a position that he has not some cause either for dissatisfaction with himself, or fear of the tempter, or anxiety to be faithful in service. 3. Unmixed delight on earth would be unnatural. When the Dutch had the trade of the East in their hands they were accustomed to sell birds of paradise to the untravelled people of these realms. These specimen birds had no feet, for they had craftily removed them, and the merchants declared that the species lived on the wing and never alighted. There was so much of truth in the fable that had they been really and veritably "birds of paradise" they would not have found a place for their feet upon this globe. Truly, birds of paradise do come and go, and flit from heaven to earth, but we see them not, neither can we build tabernacles to detain them. While you are here expect reminders of the fact that this is not your rest. II. THE FEELINGS BY WHICH THIS SOBERING EFFECT IS PRODUCED. "They shall

fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it." Why fear and tremble? 1. Is not this in part a holy awe of God's presence? "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." The argument for fear and trembling is the work of God in the soul. Because God is working in you there must be no trifling. If the eternal Deity deigns to make a workshop of my nature, I too must work, but it must be with fear and trembling. 2. But next to that there arises up in the mind of every favoured Christian a deep repentance for past sin. Have you not felt as if you could never open your mouth any more because of all your unkindness to your heavenly Friend? Such penitent reflections keep the Lord's people right, by creating a fear and trembling in the presence of His overflowing goodness. 3. Has not your deepest sense of unworthiness come upon you when you have been conscious of superlative mercy? We tremble and are afraid, because of the unutterable grace which has met our utter unworthiness, and rivalled it, until grace has gotten unto itself the victory. 4. Have you never noticed how the Lord brings His people to their bearings, and keeps them steady, under a sense of great love, by suggesting to their hearts the question, "How can I live as becometh one who has been favoured like this?" Did you ever feel that the glory of the palace of love made you afraid to dwell in it? 5. And have you never felt a fear lest God's goodness should be abused by you? He who has never questioned his own condition had better make an immediate inquiry. He who has never felt great searchings of heart needs to be searched with candles. No man's hell shall be more terrible than that of the self-confident one who made so sure of heaven that he would not take the ordinary precaution to ask whether his title-deeds were genuine or no. 6. One more thought may also occur to the most joyous believer. He will say, "What if after rejoicing in all this blessedness I should lose it?" "What," cries one, "do you not believe in the final perseverance of the saints?" Assuredly I do, but are we saints? There's the question. Moreover, many a believer who has not lost his soul has, nevertheless, lost his present joy and prosperity, and why may not we? III. THE MEASURE IN WHICH YOU AND I CAN ENTER INTO THIS EXPERIENCE. We have hundreds of us perceived the benefits of the dark lines and shadings of life's picture, and we see how fit and proper it is that trembling should mingle with transport. As the fruit of experience I have learned to look for a hurricane soon after an unusually delightful calm. When the wind blows hard, and the tempest lowers, I hope that before long there will be a lull; but when the sea-birds sit on the wave, and the sail hangs idly, I wonder when a gale will come. To my mind there is no temptation so bad as not being tempted at all. The worst devil in the world is when you cannot see the devil at all, because the villain has hidden himself away within the heart, and is preparing to give you a fatal stab. Since there is an everlasting arm that never can be palsied, since there is a brow that knows no wrinkle, and a Divine mind that is never perplexed, we go forward in hope, and cast ourselves upon our eternal Helper once again. You have heard of the ancient giant Antæus, who could not be overcome, because as often as Hercules threw him to the ground, he touched his mother earth, and rose renewed. Such be your lot and mine, often to be cast down, and as often to rise by that downcasting. "When I am weak then am I strong." Let us glory in infirmity, because the power of Christ doth rest upon us. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Vers. 10-13. *The voice of joy, and the voice of gladness.*—*Joy after desolation.*—We are called upon to realise the fullest meaning of desolation. Think of a forsaken city, think of being afraid of the sound of your own footfall! Even in that desolation there comes an overpowering sense of society, as if the air were full of sprites, ghostly presences. What a singular sense there is too of trespass, encroachment, of being where you have no right to be—as if you were intruding upon the sanctuary of the dead—as if you were cutting to the life some spiritual ministry, conducting itself mysteriously but not without some beneficent purpose. You have broken in upon those invisible ones who are watching their dead; you want to escape from the solitude—in one sense it is too sacred for you, wholly too solemn; you would seek the society of your kind, for other society is uncongenial, unknown, and is felt to be a criticism intolerable, a judgment overwhelming. Yet if you do not fasten your attention upon the possibilities of desolation, darkness, forsakenness, loneliness, how can you appreciate what is to follow? May we not then hasten to inquire what is to follow? Can God work miracles here?

It is just here that He works His grandest miracles ; it is when all light dies out that He comes forth in His glory ; it is when we say, There is no more road, the rock shuts us out, our progress is stayed,—it is then that a path suddenly opens in rocky places, and footprints disclose themselves for the comfort and inspiration of the lone traveller. Notice how exactly God's miracles fit human circumstances. They overflow them, but they first fill all their cavities and all the opportunities which they create and present. Thus God displaces darkness by light ; thus God does not drive away the silence with noise but with music ; it is no battering of rude violence that brings back human intercourse into plains that have been swept with human desolation ; it is a festival, a banquet, a wedding scene, and already the forsaken valley vibrates as if under the clash of wedding bells. What was the quality of the joy that was wrought ? It was profoundly religious. The voices that were uplifted were to say, " Praise the Lord of hosts : for the Lord is good ; for His mercy endureth for ever." There are times when men must praise the Lord. The heart leads the judgment ; the uppermost feeling, elevated and sanctified, tells the whole man what to do, uses the understanding as one might use some inferior creature to help him in carrying out the purposes of life. What is this highest faculty, what is this mysterious power, that takes to itself understanding, imagination, conscience, will, and all elements of energy ? It is religious emotion ; not sentimentalised and frittered away into mere vapour, but high, intelligent, noble feeling, glowing, passionate enthusiasm, a consecration without break or flaw or self-questioning, a wholeness of consent and devotion to the supreme purpose of life. When this desolation is banished, when this wedding feast is held, by what picture is the safety of the people represented ? By a very tender one. We had in England shepherds who long ago spoke of taking care of their flocks under the idiom of " telling their tale "—counting the flock one by one. There shall be no hurrying, crowding into the fold, but one shall follow another, and each shall be looked at in its singularity ; there shall be nothing tumultuous, indiscriminate, promiscuous ; every process of providence is conducted critically, individually, minutely : so there is no hope for a man getting into the fold without the Shepherd seeing him ; every sheep of the flock has to pass under the hand of him that telleth his tale. Until we realise the personality of the Divine supervision we shall flounder in darkness and our prayers will be mere evaporations, bringing back no answer, no blessing, no pledge from heaven. This is the picture presented by the prophet. Not one tittle of this providential order has been changed ; the whole mystery of human life is to be found within its few lines. Consider what desolation good men have been called upon to realise. Never let us shut our eyes to the suffering aspect of human life. On the contrary, let us dwell upon it with attentive solicitude, that we may wonder, and learn to pray and trust. Say nought to the mocker, for he is not worth heeding, but say to the poor suffering heart itself, Wait : joy cometh in the morning : it is very sore now ; the wind is very high, the darkness is very dense ; our best plan, poor heart ! is to sit down and simply wait for God : He will come we cannot tell when, in the early part of the night, or not until the crowing of the cock, but come He will ; it hath pleased Him to keep the times and seasons wholly to Himself, without revelation to narrow human intellects ; let us then wait, and there is a way of waiting that amounts to prayer : poor heart ! we have no words, we could not pray in terms, because we should be mocked by the echo of our own voice, but there is a way of sitting still that by its heroic patience wins the battle. Consider what changes have been wrought in human experience. You thought you could never sing again when that last tremendous blow was dealt upon your life, yet you are singing more cheerfully now than you ever sung in any day of your history ; you thought when you lost commercial position that you never really could look up again, for your heart was overpowered, and behold, whilst you were talking such folly, a light struck upon your path, and a voice called you to still more strenuous endeavour, and to-day you who saw nothing before you but the asylum of poverty are adding field to field and house to house. You have been raised again from the very dead, you have forgotten your desolation, and you are now sitting like guests invited by heaven's own King at heaven's great banqueting table. Hold on ; the end will judge all things. Hope steadfastly in God ; prayer is sweetest in the darkness ; when there seems to be no road over which to travel up to heaven, then it works its miracles, it finds a pathway in the night-cloud. What is the joy that is depicted in this text ? It is religious joy. The joy created by religion is intelligent. It is not a bubble on the stream,

it has reason behind it; it is strengthened and uplifted, supported and dignified, by logic, fact, reality. Religious joy is healthy. It is not spurious gladness, it is the natural expression of the highest emotions. Religious joy is permanent. It does not come for a moment, and vanish away as if it were afraid of life and afraid of living in this cold earth-clime; it abides with men. Let us know by way of application that there is only one real deliverance from desolateness. That is a Divine deliverance. Let us flee then to the living God; let us be forced to prayer. (J. Parker, D.D.) And of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise.—*In what sense praise is a sacrifice*.—If I wanted to use, which I do not, mere theological technicalities, I should talk about the difference between sacrifices of propitiation and sacrifices of thanksgiving. But let us put these well-worn phrases on one side, as far as we can, for a moment. Here, then, is the fact that all the world over, and in the Mosaic ritual, there was expressed a double consciousness—one, that there was, somehow or other, a black dam between the worshipper and his Deity, which needed to be swept away; and the other, that when that barrier was removed there could be an uninterrupted flow of thanksgiving and of service. So on one altar was laid a bleeding victim, and on another were spread the flowers of the field, the fruits of the earth, all things gracious, lovely, fair, and sweet, as expressions of the thankfulness of the reconciled worshippers. One set of sacrifices expressed the consciousness of sin; the other expressed the joyful recognition of its removal. (A. Maclaren, D.D.) *Thanksgiving unstinted*.—The sacrifice is thanksgiving. Then there will be no reluctance because duty is heavy. There will be no grudging because requirements are great. There will be no avoiding of the obligations of the Christian life, and rendering as small a percentage by way of dividend as the Creditor up in the heavens will accept. If the offering is a thank-offering, then it will be given gladly. The grateful heart does not hold the scales like the scrupulous retail dealer, afraid of putting the thousandth part of an ounce more in than will be accepted.

“Give all thou canst—high heaven rejects the love
Of nicely calculated less or more.” (*Ibid.*)

Praise to Christ should be spontaneous and unrestrained.—If there is in us any deep, real, abiding, life-shaping thankfulness for the gift of Jesus Christ, it is impossible that our tongues should cleave to the roof of our mouths, and that we should be contented to live in silence. Loving hearts must speak. What would you think of a husband that never felt any impulse to tell his wife that she was dear to him; or a mother that never found it needful to unpack her heart of its tenderness, even in perhaps inarticulate croonings over the little child that she pressed to her heart? It seems to me that a dumb Christian, a man that is thankful for Christ's sacrifice, and never feels the need to say so, is as great an anomaly as either of these I have described. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 15, 16. **This is the name wherewith she shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness.**—*The justified Church*.—It is no slip of the pen—“She shall be called”: it is no mistranslation, or unguarded statement, as might be imagined. It is a deliberate name, based on a great and an everlasting principle; and it is just as true, “she shall be called the Lord our Righteousness,” as it is true that “He,” that is, Christ, “shall be called the Lord our Righteousness.” Why? Because there is a spiritual and yet real identity between Christ and this redeemed and believing throng. He and they are one in time, and will continue one in eternity. Nay, so completely is the Church knit to its Head, that it is said she is “the fulness of Christ”; as if Christ were not complete in heaven, complete in His mediatorial glory, complete in His happiness, until there be added to Him those He has ransomed by His blood, prepared by His Spirit, and at last brought, as the fruits of His grace, to the triumphs of His throne. You will also recollect, that in Scripture, the relationship that subsists between Christ and His Church, is represented as being the relationship which subsists between the husband and the wife. Her responsibilities He has assumed Himself, that they may be absorbed, and disappear before His Cross. It is thus, that a transfer, an exchange, takes place between Christ and His Church—by concentrating all her responsibility on Him; He being answerable for her sins, answerable for her defects, answerable to a perfect law and to a holy God; and she receiving from Him that glorious and everlasting name, which is the Open Sesame at the gates of heaven, and which shall be heard loudest in the songs and hallelujahs of the ransomed around the

throne. Whatever name, I would observe next, is given in Scripture to anything, is a reality. Therefore, when it is said, "This is the name by which she," the Church, "shall be called," it does not imply that it is the investiture of that Church with a mere empty and evanescent honour, but the stamp, the imprimatur of an everlasting and indelible reality; so that the Church, in herself all rags, is made in Christ "the Righteousness of God." In discussing the subject matter of this name, I would lay before you the following facts, in order to show you the absolute necessity of our being "called," or being made, "the Lord our Righteousness," before we can ever expect to see God in happiness. Let me observe, then, there has been, is now, and ever will be, what is called a law. The law of God is just to God Himself what the sunbeam is to the sun—what the rivulet is to the fountain—what the effect is to the cause—what the blossom or the leaf is to the stem or the root. God's law is indestructible,—the everlasting stereotype, which can no more be destroyed than the Eternal Himself can be dethroned from the supremacy of the universe. Setting out, then, with the postulate, that there is, and must be, such a thing as God's moral law,—the language of which is, Do, and live,—Do not, and die,—we proceed, in the second place, to notice, that every member of this justified Church, with every child of Adam, has broken and violated that law. The next inquiry is, How can man be saved, and this law retain its unbending and awful strictness? Shall the whole race perish? for the whole race have broken God's law. Blessed be God, His love and mercy would not suffer this. If not, shall God's holy law be abrogated and annulled in whole or in part? His justice, His truth, His holiness cannot suffer that. Here, then, is the question, which no earthly *Œdipus* can solve; the labyrinth, which no human wisdom can unthread. Ancient philosophers, who saw dim and shadowy the attributes of the Eternal, even they were perplexed with difficulty here; and Socrates himself admitted, that it was extremely difficult to see how God could possibly receive to heaven them that His holiness must see to be sinful. Having thus noticed the impossibility of finding anything that could meet our case, let me ask again, Shall God be unjust, in order that sinners may be saved; or shall God be unmerciful, and this, in order that His law may remain just? God so loved us, that He would not let us perish; and yet God is so just, that He would not let His law be violated; how then can it be, how shall it be, that God shall remain infinitely just, infinitely holy, infinitely true, and yet that His love shall rush forth, and fill men's souls with its fulness, and the wide world with the multiplication of its trophies? The answer is given, "This is the name by which He" (Christ) "shall be called, the Lord our Righteousness"; and "this is the name by which she" (the Church) "shall be called," through an interest in Him, "the Lord our Righteousness." By that atonement which Christ consummated on the Cross, and in virtue of that righteousness which Christ achieved by His life, it now comes to pass, that God may be just whilst He justifies the ungodly that believe. This righteousness of Christ, which constitutes the only title of the believer, is called in Scripture by various names. It is called "the righteousness of Christ," because He perfected and consummated it. It is called "the righteousness of God," because He devised it, and it is His mode of justifying the sinner. It is called "the righteousness of faith," because faith receives it; and it is also called "our righteousness," because it is made ours by the free and sovereign gift of God. 1. Let me now observe of this righteousness that it is a perfect righteousness. When Christ exclaimed on the Cross, in the language partly of agony, and partly of triumph, "It is finished," He announced in these accents that that moment there was provided a perfect robe, of perfect and of spotless beauty, for every sinner under heaven, who would put forth the hand of faith, and appropriate it "without money and without price." 2. This righteousness is an everlasting righteousness. Death shall not tarnish it, the grave shall not corrupt it, the wear and tear of life shall not destroy it. 3. This righteousness is ours, to the exclusion of all other whatever. Christ says to the queen on the throne, and to the meanest beggar by the wayside, "Ye must both be saved by putting on the same perfect righteousness, or ye must be lost for ever." 4. This righteousness is ours by imputation. Our sins were transferred to Him, and He endured the consequences of them; His righteousness is transferred to us, and we realise the fruits of it. 5. This righteousness is received by faith, and by faith alone. There are three things to be noticed; first, the spring; secondly, the water; and thirdly, the pipe that conveys the water. The spring, in this instance, is the love of God; the element, that justifies us, is the righteousness

of Jesus; and faith is the channel, or the conduit, by which that righteousness is conveyed to us and made ours. It is the mere medium, not the merit; it is the mere hand that receives; and in no sense has it any part or share of the merit or glory. 6. I would observe of this righteousness that it insures, wherever it is, everlasting glory. "Whom He justifies," "He glorifies." Where He begins, He finishes; what He commences by grace, that He consummates and crowns in glory. The Church's glory, derived from her Lord, is the righteousness of Christ; her beauty is that moral and spiritual beauty, which derived from heaven, defies the assaults of earth and hell, making its heirs the meet companions of Christ at heaven's high festival. 7. This Church, thus justified in the righteousness of Christ, is, in the next place, free from all condemnation. All things minister peace and blessedness to her who is at friendship with God, and identified with Jesus. For "this is the name by which she shall be called, the Lord our Righteousness." 8. This way of salvation excludes all boasting. Just because man is saved wholly through grace—wholly through the righteousness of another, and his very name is the name of another, therefore, this redeemed, elect, ransomed Church will cast her crown before the throne of God and of the Lamb, and say, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain," &c. 9. I observe that this mode of justification does not make void the law of God. "Nay," says the apostle, "we rather establish the law." You have in this fact clear and decisive evidence that it is the elevation of the Cross that makes all the moralities rise and cling and coil around it, and bloom and blossom. The Gospel alone in fact can give true and high-toned morality. 10. This righteousness is that alone in which we may glory. There is nothing but the Gospel that is worth glorying in. There is a moth in the fairest robe—there is a worm in the goodliest cedar—there is disease in the healthiest frame and rust on the purest gold. None of these things can satisfy men's souls with happiness. There is no glorying but in the righteousness of Christ, that is bright, pure, enduring, the prolific source of all that is good. (*J. Cumming, D.D.*) *Christ, the perfection of righteousness*:—Matthew Arnold, one of the prominent leaders of modern Agnosticism, thus speaks of Christ in his *Literature and Dogma*: "Christ came to reveal what righteousness really is. . . . Nothing will do except righteousness; and no other conception of righteousness will do except Christ's conception of it; His method and secret." And in another part of the same book he writes: "For our race, as we see it now, and as ourselves we form a part of it, the true God is and must be perfect." (*Great Thoughts.*)

Vers. 20-26. **If ye can break My covenant of the day, and My covenant of the night. . . . Then may also My covenant be broken with David My servant.—God's great day-and-night engine, as a witness against scepticism**:—"Day and night in their season" are God's perpetual challenge to unbelief. His sublime witnesses to the perpetuity of His Church. The doubters in Jeremiah's time saw, or thought they saw, in the captivity of Israel already accomplished, and that of Judah foretold as nigh at hand, the complete breakdown of all God's plans and promises as to His people and His Church. They said: "The two families (Judah and Israel) which the Lord did choose, He hath even cast them off." "There's an end of all our fine expectations! Prophecy breaks down! God can't keep His contract! Religion is a failure! We told you so!" But what does God say to them in reply? "Thus saith the Lord, . . . If My covenant of day and night stand not, if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; then will I also cast away the seed of Jacob, and of David My servant," &c. Thus God reminds the sceptic and the doubter that His covenant with His Church is as firm as that with day and night. We of to-day are in the midst of a sceptical age, and some good people are alarmed at the growth of doubt, and at coldness and troubles in the churches. They firmly believe in the truth of Christianity, but they seem to have lost something of their faith in its conquering power. What does God mean by His "covenant of day and night"? It was equal to saying: "If you can stop the daily rotation I have given to this earth, then you may stay the onward rolling wheels of My Messiah's chariot from the conquest of the world!" That's what God meant, and He has thus far made good His word. Judah, like Israel, for her sins, went into captivity. But unlike Israel, Judah was brought back to do God's work for ages longer; and perhaps for more work in the future than we now understand. The Church lives and grows. Her ministers are thousands of thousands. "As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither

the sand of the sea measured," no more can her people. The earth rolls onward, bringing "day and night in their season," and the sun hears the missionary Angelus chiming around the globe. Let us study this sublime illustration. Look at the daily rotation of this globe, and imagine the power necessary to produce and maintain this rotation. Suppose we see what God's oath of day and night means when represented by steam mechanics. Let us build our engine and run this revolving globe a while by steam power. The earth is not a flat fly-wheel set upon its edge, but a massive sphere, 8000 miles in diameter. So, by the ratio of size of shaft to size of paddle-wheel on a large steamboat, the earth must be slung on a steel shaft about 250 miles in diameter and 10,000 miles long. It must be driven by an engine whose cylinder should measure 1200 miles bore and 2000 miles stroke, having a piston-rod 100 miles thick and 2500 miles long, working by a connection-rod 3000 miles long on a crank of 1000 miles arm, with a wrist 200 miles long and 50 miles thick. The piston of this engine will make but one revolution daily; but to do that it will travel 4000 miles, at an average velocity of nearly three miles a minute. The working capacity of this engine will be about fourteen thousand million (14,000,000,000) horse-power. It must be controlled by an automatic governor of infallible accuracy, and supplied with inexhaustible fuel and oil; and so run on, day and night, never starting a bolt, nor heating a journal, nor wearing out a box, age after age. The iron bed-frame for this machine must be 10,000 miles square and 4000 miles high, and not tremble a hair under the stroke that drives the equatorial rim of this fly-wheel globe up to a steady velocity of seventeen and one-half miles a minute, twenty times the velocity of a lightning express train! Who'll take the contract to build and run this engine? The vast mass must fly through space in the earth's orbit around the sun, with a velocity of more than 1100 miles a minute. The Armstrong 100-ton steel rifle sends its 2000-pound steel projectile at the rate of 1600 feet per second clean through a solid wrought-iron plate 22 inches thick. But God fires this globe, 8000 miles in diameter, through space with 60½ times the velocity of the monster projectile, and 2000 times that of an express train at 34 miles per hour. And our engine that gives it its day-and-night rotation must fly with it at that speed, and never lose a stroke! And these are very slow among the velocities of the starry worlds. And yet these velocities only represent what God does every moment by the abiding force of that first impulse He gave to this silent spinning globe when He shot it from His creating hand like a top from a boy's finger! Now, imagine the infidel trying to seize, in its mighty sweep, the flying crank that runs this globe, to stop its revolution! What then? Did you ever see a man caught and whirled and mangled on a little factory shaft, reduced to a shapeless pulp in a moment? Even so it has ever been with those who have tried to stop the engine of Christianity. (*G. L. Taylor, D.D.*) *Divine plans of action unalterable*:—I. THE ALMIGHTY BOTH IN THE MATERIAL AND SPIRITUAL DEPARTMENTS OF HIS UNIVERSE ACTS FROM PLAN. 1. The text speaks of a "covenant" with material nature as well as with David. 2. The Infinite One acts evermore from plan. (1) *A priori* reasoning would suggest this. (2) The constitution of the creation shews this. The laws of nature about which philosophers talk are only parts of His plan which they have discovered. (3) The Bible teaches this. It speaks of Him appointing everything in nature (Gen. i., viii. 21, 22; Isa. iv. 10, 11; Ps. civ. &c.). II. THE PLAN ON WHICH GOD CONDUCTS THE MATERIAL UNIVERSE IS MANIFESTLY BEYOND THE POWER OF HIS CREATURES TO ALTER. 1. This is a blessing to all. If men could alter the order of nature what would become of us! 2. This is an argument for the Divinity of miracles, if miracles are changes in the order of nature. III. THE UNALTERABLENESS OF HIS PLAN IN MATERIAL NATURE ILLUSTRATES THE UNALTERABLENESS OF HIS PLAN IN THE SPIRITUAL DEPARTMENT OF ACTION. It is not impossible for God to reverse the order of nature, but it is impossible for God to act contrary to those principles of absolute truth and justice which He has revealed. (*Homilist.*)

CHAPTER XXXIV.

VER. 17. Ye have not hearkened unto Me, in proclaiming liberty.—*The liberty of sin*.—The Word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah that all bondservants in Israel should be forthwith emancipated. At first the princes obeyed, and the enslaved were allowed to go free. But eventually the princes played falsely, and once more brought their old servants into bondage. Then comes the text with its terrible irony. I. THE MUTINY AGAINST THE LAW. In the first instance the governors felt the reasonableness of the commandment, they agreed to it, but at length they resisted it, violated it. And this spirit of revolt against the higher law is ever working in us and displaying itself in some form of disobedience. 1. There is a theoretical repudiation of the law. Literary men are ever urging upon us that the moral law as given in revelation is unphilosophical, and the sooner it is renounced by all educated people the better. One by one they ingeniously find us a way out of all the ten great precepts. In our simplicity we thought the Saviour taught us that heaven and earth might pass away, but that the moral commandments should persist in absolute authority and force, but eloquent writers affect to show that the commandments are mere bye-laws, ripe for repeal. 2. And if there is a theoretical repudiation of the law on the part of the literary few, is there not a personal, practical mutiny against it on the part of us all? In manifold ways we criticise the law, fret at it, evade it, violate it. We spurn the circumscriptions which deny us so much, and in blind passion break into forbidden ground. And yet how gracious and beautiful is the law! How generous is the law referred to in the text enjoining upon the rich and great mercy and brotherliness! And the whole of the moral law as expressed in revelation is equally rational and benign. The "commandments are not grievous." No, indeed, they are gracious. Every commandment is an illumination, a light shining in a dark place to guide our feet in a dim and perilous way. Every commandment is a salvation. The commandment enjoining love is to save us from the damnation of selfishness; enjoining meekness to save us from the devil of pride; enjoining purity to save us from the hell of lust. Every commandment is a benediction. Scientists are always descanting on the grandeur of natural law, the law which builds the sky, which transfigures the flower, which rules the stars. The scientist, the mathematician, the musician will tell you that law is good, that the secret of the world's beauty is to be found in the wonderful laws which God wrote in tables of stone long before Moses came. And if natural law, which rules things, is so sublime, how much does that moral law, which rules spirits, excel in glory! And yet how blindly do we mutiny against the great words of light and love! Some time ago it was told in the paper that a herd of cows was being driven through a long, dark, wooden tubular bridge. Here and there in the woodwork were knotholes, which let in the sun in bars of light. The animals were afraid of these sun-bars; they shied at them, were terrified at them, and then, leaping over them, made a painful hurdle-race of it, coming out at the other end palpitating and exhausted. We are just like them. The laws of God are golden rays in a dark path, they are for our guidance and infinite perfecting and consolation. But they irritate us, they enrage us, we count them despotic barriers to our liberty and happiness, and too often we put them under our feet. "So foolish was I, and ignorant, I was as a beast before Thee." II. THE LIBERTY OF LICENCE. "Behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the Lord." These nobles wished to be free themselves in enslaving their brethren, but in doing this they gave themselves away into servitude; they wished to enrich themselves, and they lost everything; they sought personal indulgence at the expense of their neighbours, and they suffered sword and famine and pestilence. Disobedience always means bondage, disgrace, suffering, death. A liberty to the sword, the famine, and the pestilence! Most awful is the liberty of unrighteousness; who can express the fulness of its woe! Some of you have visited the Castle of Chillon on the Lake of Geneva. In that castle is a dungeon which contains a shaft, at the bottom of which you see the waters of the lake; that shaft is called the way of liberty. Tradition says that in the old days the jailor in the darkness of the dungeon would whisper to the prisoner, "Three steps and liberty," and the poor dupe, hastily stopping forward, fell down this shaft, which was planted full of knives and spikes, the mutilated, bloody corpse finally dropping into the depths. That is precisely the liberty of sin. The dupe of sin takes a leap in the dark,

he is forthwith pierced through with many sorrows, and mangled and bleeding falls into the gulf. "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." 1. I want you to feel the madness of contending with God, for that is exactly what sin means. 2. I want you to believe that only through self-limitation can you find the highest liberty and blessedness. All civilisation is the giving up of liberty to find a nobler liberty. 3. If you are to keep the law, you must seek the strength of God in Christ. Born of God, living in fellowship with Him, full of faith, of love, of hope, we shall find the yoke of the law easy, and its burden light. The inner force is equal to the outward duty. (W. L. Watkinson.)

CHAPTER XXXV.

VERS. 1-19. **Go unto the house of the Rechabites, and speak unto them, and bring them into the house of the Lord, into one of the chambers, and give them wine to drink.**—*The Rechabites*.—Did the Lord make a proposal to total abstainers to drink wine? Did he send for them to a kind of wine festival? Is this the meaning of the Lord's Prayer, "Lead us not into temptation"? Is not the Lord always thus leading men into temptation?—not in the patent and vulgar sense in which that term is generally understood, but in a sense which signifies drill, the application of discipline, the testing of principles and purposes and character? Is not all life a temptation? The Lord tries every man. There need be no hesitation in offering the prayer, "Lead us not into temptation." People have tried to soften the words. They have said instead of "lead" "leave us not in temptation"; but these are the annotations of inexperience and folly, or superficiality. We are not men until we have been thus moulded, tried, qualified. We can do little for one another in that pit of temptation. We must be left with God. There is one Refiner; He sits over the furnace, and when the fire has done enough He quenches the cruel flame. Think it no strange thing that temptation hath befallen you; yea, think it not strange that God Himself has given you opportunities by which you may be burned. He never gives such an opportunity without giving something else. Alas, how often we see the opportunity and not the sustaining grace! The drinking of wine in this case was to be done in "the house of the Lord." Now light begins to dawn. Mark the limitations of our temptation. The Lord is never absent from His house. Let God tempt me, and He will also save me; let Him invite me into His own house, that there, under a roof beautiful as heaven, He may work His will upon me, and afterwards I shall stand up, higher in nature, broader in manhood, truer in the metal of the Spirit. Observe the details of this mysterious operation. The men who were taken were proved men (ver. 3). When the Lord calls for giants to fight His battle and show the strength of His grace, they are chosen men. All these men were conspicuous witnesses for the truth: they were identified with the faith of Israel; they were the trustees of the morality of society. It is so in all ages. There are certain men whom we may denominate our stewards, trustees, representatives; as for ourselves, we say, it is not safe to trust us; we are weaker than a bruised reed; we cannot stand great public ordeals; we were not meant to be illustrations of moral fortitude; spare us from the agony of such trial! There are other men in society whom God Himself can trust. What did the sons of Rechab say? Herein is a strange thing, that children should obey the voice of a dead father. Yet this is a most pleasing contention; this is an argument softened by pathos. The men stood up, and did not speak in their own name; they said, We be the sons of a certain man, who gave a certain law, and by that law we will live, and ever will live. The trial took place in the chamber of the sons of Hanan, the son of Igdaiah, a man of God, which was above the chamber of Maaseiah. The father of Maaseiah was Shallum, who was the husband of Huldah the prophetess, who had taken an active part in the reformation wrought in the reign of Josiah. So all these were so many guarantees of probity, and strength, and success. There will be no evil wrought in that chamber! Not only are the Rechabites there, but their fathers are with them in spirit. Though our fathers, physical and spiritual, be dead, yet they may live with us in the spirit, and may go with us and sustain us in all the trials and difficulties of life. "We will drink no wine." Note the

definiteness of the answer. No inquiry is made about the kind of wine. Men are saved by their definiteness. A strong, proud, decisive answer is the true reply to all temptation. An oath that strikes as with a fist of iron, a denial that is like a long, sharp two-edged sword,—these must be our policies and watchwords in the time of danger. The reason is given (ver. 6). It is a filial argument. Good advice is not always thrown away; and men should remember that though exhortation may be rejected for a long time, yet there are periods when it may recur to the memory and come upon the whole life like a blessing sent from God. The argument is *a fortiori*. The Lord has shown how the sons of Jonadab can refuse wine: now He will take this example and apply it to the whole host of Judah, and He will say, See what one section of your country can do; if they can do this, why cannot you be equally loyal and true? why cannot you be equally obedient to the spirit of righteousness? for three hundred years this bond has been kept in this family; never once has it been violated: if one family can do this, why not a thousand families? if one section of the country, why not the whole nation? This was God's method of applying truth to those who needed it. Thus we teach one another. One boy can be obedient; why not all boys? One soul can be faithful; why not all souls? God in His providence says: See what others can do, and as they toil and climb and succeed in reaching the highest point, so do ye follow them: the grace that made them succeed will not fail you in the hour of your trial and difficulty. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) **We will drink no wine:** for Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us.—*The Rechabites*:—St. Austin says of the Syrophenician woman, who was both hardly spoken of by our Saviour at first, and anon commended highly before her face; she that took not her reproach in scorn, would not wax arrogant upon her commendation; so these Rechabites who lived with good content in a life full of neglect, may the better endure to have their good deeds scanned, without fear of begetting ostentation. And therefore I will branch out my text into four parts, in every of which they will justly deserve our praise, and in some our imitation. First, when the prophet Jeremiah did try them with this temptation, whether they would feast it and drink wine, they make him a resolute denial, a prophet could draw them to no inconvenient act. Some are good men of themselves, but easily drawn aside by allurements; such are not the Rechabites. He that will sin to please another, makes his friend either to be a God that shall rule him, or a devil that shall tempt him. Three things, says Aristotle, do preserve the life of friendship. 1. To answer love with like affection. 2. Some similitude and likeness of condition. 3. But above either, neither to sin ourselves, nor for our sakes to lay the charge of sin upon our familiars. No, he is too prodigal of his kindness, that giveth his friend both his heart and his conscience. I may not forget how Agesilaus' son behaved himself in this point toward his own father: the cause was corrupt wherein his father did solicit; the son answers him with this modesty: Your education taught me from a child to keep the laws, and my youth is so inured to your former discipline, that I cannot skill the latter. Here let rhetoricians declaim whether this were duty or disobedience. But let us examine the case by philosophy. I am sure that no man's reason is so nearly conjoined to my soul as my own appetite, although my appetite be merely sensitive. And must I oftentimes resist my own appetite, and enthrall it as a civil rebel: and have I not power much more to oppose any man's reason that persuades me unto evil, his reason being but a stranger unto me, and not of the secret council of my soul? Yes, out of question. How it pities me to hear some men say, that they could live as soberly, as chastely, as saintlike as the best, if it were not for company! Fie upon such weakness: says St. Austin, If thy mother speak thee fair, if the wife of thy bosom tempt thy heart, beware of Eve, and think of Adam. The serpent was a wise creature (Gen. iii.), and Eve could not but take his word in good manners. Fond mother of mankind, so ready to believe the devil, that her posterity ever since have been slow to believe God. Never can there be a better season for *nolimus*, for every Christian to be a Rechabite, than when any man reacheth out a cup of intemperance unto us, to say boldly, We will not drink it. Now I proceed to the second part of my text, which hath a strong connection with the former; for why did they resist these enticements, and disavow the prophet (ver. 8)? Their obedience is the second part of their encomium, they will obey the voice of Jonadab their father. The name of father was that wherewith God was pleased to mollify our stony hearts, and bring them into the subjection of the fifth commandment. Surely as a parricide, that killed his father, was to have no burial upon the earth,

but sewed in an ox hide and cast headlong into the sea ; so he that despiseth his father deserves not to hold any place of dignity above others, but to be a slave to all men. For what are we but coin that hath our fathers' image stamped upon it ? and we receive our current value from them to be called sons of men. And yet the more commendable was the obedience of the Rechabites, that their father Jonadab being dead, his law was in as good force as if he had been living. Concerning this virtue of obedience, let us extend our discourse a little further, and yet tread upon our own ground. Obedience is used in a large sense, for a condition, or *modus*, annexed unto all virtues. As the magistrate may execute justice dutifully under his prince, the soldier may perform a valiant exploit dutifully under his captain ; but strictly, and according to the pattern of the Rechabites, says Aquinas. It is one peculiar and entire virtue, whereby we oblige ourselves, for authority's sake, to do things indifferent to be done, or omitted ; for sometimes that which is evil may be hurtful *prohibito* to the party forbidden : as the laws forbid a man to murder himself : sometimes a thing is evil *prohibenti*, so treasons, adulteries, and thefts are interdicted : but sometimes the thing is no way in itself pernicious to any, but only propounded to make trial of our duty and allegiance, as when Adam was forbid to eat the apple ; and this is true obedience, not to obey for the necessity of the thing commanded, but out of conscience and subjection to just authority. Such obedience, and nothing else, is that which hath made the little commonwealth of bees so famous : for are they not at appointment who should dispose the work at home, and who should gather honey in the fields ? they flinch not from their task, and no creature under the sun hath so brave an instinct of sagacity. Let us gather up this second part of my text into one closure : we commend the Rechabites for their obedience, and by their example we owe duty to our parents, natural and civil, those that begot us, those that govern us. We owe duty to the dead, after our rulers have left us in the way of a good life, and changed their own for a better. We owe duty to our rulers in all things honest and lawful ; in obeying rites and ceremonies indifferent, in laws civil and ecclesiastical. But where God controls, or wherein our liberty cannot be enthrall'd, we are bound *ad patendum*, and happy if we suffer for righteousness' sake. Now that the obedience of the Rechabites was lawful and religious, and a thing wherein they might profitably dispense with freedom and liberty, the third part of my text, that is their temperance, will make it manifest, for in this they obeyed Jonadab. To spare somewhat which God hath given us for our sustenance, is to restore a part of the plenty back again ; if we lay hands upon all that is set before us, it is suspicious that we expected more, and accused nature of frugality. And though the vine did boast in Jotham's parable, that it cheered up the heart of God and man, though it be so useful a creature for our preservation, that no Carthusian or Cælestine monk of the strictest order did put this into their vow to drink no wine, yet the Rechabites are contented to be more sober than any, and lap the water of the brook, like Gideon's soldiers. Which moderation of diet did enable them to avoid luxury and swinish drunkenness, into which sin whosoever falls makes himself subject to a fourfold punishment. First, The heat of too liberal a proportion kindles the lust of the flesh. Lot, who was not consumed in Sodom with the fire of brimstone, drunkenness set him on fire with incestuous lust in Zoar. What St. Paul hath coupled (2 Cor. vi.), let us not divide ; fastings go first, then follows pureness and chastity. Secondly, How many brawls and unmanly combats have we seen ? Thirdly, Superfluity of drink is the draught of foolishness. Such a misery, in my opinion, that I would think men had rather lose their right arm than the government of their reason, if they knew the royalty thereof. Lastly, Whereas sobriety is the sustentation of that which decays in man, drunkenness is the utter decay of the body. The Rechabites had encouragement to take this vow upon them for three reasons : 1. As being but strangers to the true commonwealth of Israel. 2. To make the better preparation for the captivity of Babylon. 3. To draw their affections to the content of a little, and the contempt of the world. Now I follow my own method to handle the second consideration of this vow, that these circumstances were not only well foreseen, but that the conditions of the thing vowed are just and lawful. Not to tumble over all the distinctions of the schoolmen, which are as multiplicitous in this cause as in any ; of vows, some are singular, which concern one man and no more, as when David vowed to build an house unto the Lord, this was not a vow of many associated in that pious work, but of David only. Some are public when there is a unity of consent in divers persons to obtest the same thing before the presence of God. And such

was this vow in my text, it concerned the whole family of the Rechabites. That this vow was of some moment in the practice of piety, appears by God's benediction upon them. For as it was said of Socrates' goodness, that it stood the commonwealth of Athens in more stead than all their warlike prowess by sea and land, so that religious life of the Rechabites was the best wall and fortress to keep Judah in peace and safety. And almost who doth not follow Christ rather to be a gainer by Him than a loser. Behold, we have left all and followed Thee; that was the perfection of the apostles, that was the state of the Rechabites; not simply all, everything that belonged to the maintenance of a man, and so to live upon beggary, they have learned to ask nothing but a gourd to cover their head, a few flocks of sheep to employ their hands, the spring water to quench their thirst. They that must have no more, have cut off superfluous desires, that they can never ask more. And so piety and a godly life were chiefly aimed at in the vow of the Rechabites. The end and last part of all is this; That forasmuch as God was well pleased with these abstemious people that would drink no wine, therefore promise unto the Lord, and do the deed; for that is my final conclusion, that a vow justly conceived is to be solemnly performed. When we have breathed out a resolved protestation before God, it is like the hour we spake it in, past and gone, and can never be recalled. Says David, "I have poured out my soul in prayer," as if upon his supplication it were no longer his, but God's for ever. Surely if our soul be gone from us in our prayers, then much more in our vows they are flown up to Heaven, like Lazarus to the bosom of Abraham, they cannot, they should not return to earth again. He that changed his sex in the fable is not so great a wonder, as he that changeth any covenant which is drawn between God and his conscience. He that hath consecrated himself to God, doth, as it were, carry heaven upon his shoulders. Support your burdens in God's name, lest if you shrink the wrath of God press you down to the nethermost pit. I will give a brief answer to one question. Is Christ so austere that He doth reclaim against all dispensation? no, says Aquinas, you are loose again, if the thing in vow be sinful, nay if it be unuseful, nay if it cross the accomplishment of a greater good. This is good allowance, and well spoken. The careful pilot sets his adventure to a certain haven, and would turn neither to the right hand nor to the left, if the winds were as constant as the loadstone, but they blow contrary to his expectation. Suppose a Rechabite protesting to drink no wine, had lived after the institution of our Saviour's Supper, when He consecrated the fruit of the grape, and said, Drink ye all of this, would it pass for an answer at the Holy Communion to say, We will drink no wine? No more than if he had sworn before not to eat a paschal lamb, or any sour herbs, quite against the institution of the passover. There is enough in this chapter to stride over this doubt if you mark it. Jonadab indented with God, that he and his seed should live in tabernacles for ever; and in tabernacles they did live for three hundred years. Then comes the king of Babylon with an army into the country to invade the land. It was dangerous now to live in tabernacles; there was no high priest, I assure you, to absolve them; no money given to the publicans of the Church for a dispensation: but they said, "Come and let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans and Syrians, and let us dwell at Jerusalem." The vow was unprofitable, tabernacles dangerous, and so the bond is cancelled. Yet, do not take all the liberty due unto you, if I may advise you: there are two things which you may choose to untie the knot of a vow. The peremptory rejecting of a bad vow, and that is lawful, and the changing thereof into some other vow, and that is more expedient, that God may have some service done unto Him, by way of a vow. (*Bishop Hacket.*)

Obedience to parental authority:—The first and principal commandment of the moral law, Honour thy father and thy mother, begins with obedience to parents; but must of course be interpreted in a wider sense so as to apply to all who have a right to obedience—the persons to be honoured in that famous and excellent summary of the Catechism are the King, and all in authority under him, my governors, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters, and last of all "my betters"; the falling into disuse of such an instructive word is a fact of very great significance and needs no comment. But duty to parents comes clearly first, which an old writer has called "the band and firmament of Commonwealths"; for society is near its dissolution when this obligation is loosened or weakened in any way. The stability of an empire like that of China is an illustration in point, and I was struck some time ago by hearing a missionary of long experience select this one virtue of reverence for parents as that which has for so many centuries preserved

the cohesion of that people. Affection may indeed be missing, but obedience and respect for authority are, I believe, universal. So it has come to pass that a nation that we despise outdoes us in the discharge of one of the most elementary moral duties ; not that Confucius is a better teacher than Moses, or made any advance upon him, but that we are somehow drifting from a commandment of God, and seem powerless to enforce it. To arrest the widespread mischief we must go back to first principles, and seek to re-establish authority in the family, in the elementary schools, in places of higher education, and perhaps in the university itself. Authority must be taught to be a trust delegated by God to some for the good of the whole body, and the applications of the Christian precept : " All of you be subject one to another," in its several relations, must be laid down fearlessly and with distinctness by teachers and preachers as the safeguard of society. To revert to filial reverence. It was once, I believe, a characteristic of Englishmen, for even as late as the last century sons would address their fathers by the reverential title of " sir." The virtue is not exotic, it can stand our rude climate, and it must not be thought for a moment to be a poor sickly plant, that has no root in strong and masculine natures. On the contrary, take a specimen of it from the most robust of our own countrymen. To most of us is known the compunction of Dr. Johnson which has formed the subject of an historical picture. He has related of himself, how when a young man he refused to stand at his father's stall to sell books ; it was, he says, through pride he disobeyed, a trivial circumstance to a less sensitive man, but it was a burden to him for fifty years, until on the very day he went to the very spot where his father's stall used formerly to be, and on a day of business stood in Uttoxeter market, bareheaded, for an hour exposed to the gibes of the passers-by, and the inclemency of the weather. " This was a penance by which I trust I have propitiated heaven for the only instance I believe of contumacy to my father." Upon which Mr. Leslie Stephen, by no means a sentimental writer, remarks : " The anecdote cannot be read without emotion, and if it illustrates a touch of superstition in Johnson's mind, it reveals too that sacred depth of tenderness which ennobled his character." To both parents we are debtors. Mothers are to be esteemed as highly as fathers, and dutiful obedience rendered to them. Take care you despise them not in their old age or in lonely widowhood. Value them all the more if they are alone. Do not think that you have outgrown their wisdom, for in his mature years Solomon could stamp his own maxims with the authority of his mother's mint, and give them currency as the words which his mother had taught him. The wishes of parents are also to be attended to, for wise fathers dealing with grown-up children will not burden them with commands, but will leave them to act upon what their sons know they would wish done. In a book that furnished my vacation reading I lighted upon a passage in the undergraduate life of Dr. Corrie that will interest some of us. " When he first came up, his father, knowing his son's great love for horses, and fearing the scenes of temptation into which this taste might lead him, expressed a strong desire that he would not go to Newmarket. This injunction was faithfully respected. Though he was fully aware that his father would never ask him whether his wish had been observed, his loyalty would not permit him to trifle with the confidence thus placed in him." A characteristic anecdote of a man who was known as the soul of honour, who if he lacked sons of his own, was looked up to and revered by hundreds of pupils and others, who felt their own principles of duty strengthened by his unswerving fidelity to old traditions. Obedience to a father's law is the whole idea of the incarnation. Not to please Himself at all, but to surrender Himself wholly to the Divine will, runs through all Christ's life. When He cometh into the world He saith, " I am come to do Thy will, O God," and when He is about to leave the world in that great fight of conflicting emotions the thought of submission alone rules His prayer, " Not My will, but Thine be done." Not only as a son, but as a citizen, as a member of the Jewish synagogue and nation, He is obedient to the law, to every ordinance of man, for His Father's sake. Conscious of His Divinity, of His real relation to God at twelve years old, He goes meekly home to be subject to earthly parents and to learn His trade. When the time of His manifestation has come, He allows John to baptize Him, to fulfil an ordinance of God, and by His obedience He approves John's commission in the eyes of the people. Though, as Son of God, He is free from the temple tax, yet He works a miracle to pay the due, that He might give no offence to the rulers who sat in Moses' seat. He even acknowledges that the civil power of the Roman Governor is of God. Under the terms of the new covenant we are no more slaves but sons,

and can claim the spirit of adoption, the will to wish all things in conformity with God's will, and the power to perform the same. I have heard myself from the lips of those whose whole life has been most wilful and contrary such a confession as this, "I love now as much to do things for God as at one time I did everything against God," for the love of Christ converts and subdues a stubborn temper, which to its harm would kick against the pricks into a service where there is no heavy burden, no galling yoke, but all is perfect freedom. (*C. E. Searle, D.D.*)

The obedient Rechabites.—I. THE AUTHORITY OF THE FAMILY. The power of human descent and family tradition in moulding a career is well illustrated in the case of the Rechabites. 1. It controlled the natural tastes. Its members must renounce pleasure, comfort, and fixed habitation; their inheritance was the loss of those very things which sons expect, and parents delight to bequeath. But with the loss came a better gain,—health of body, purity of morals, loyalty of conscience. They had that best possession,—noble character. 2. The authority of the family also controlled their external alliances; those entering it by marriage must accept its obligations. A man may leave father and mother to cleave unto his wife, but may not leave truth and virtue. 3. In the same way the family tradition proved superior to surrounding influences. They were as faithful in the city as in the country, as loyal among strangers as where well known. So from lonely farmhouses among the hills, young men and young women have gone to seek an easier fortune in the great city, or in the lawless West, and been delivered from evil by the abiding influence of their sanctified homes. 4. The faithfulness of the Rechabites displays the normal influence of the family in transmitting a tendency to virtue, and confirming that inherited disposition by congenial surroundings and careful training. This is what God means the family to be,—His surest and mightiest agency for spreading righteousness on the earth.

II. THE HIGHER AUTHORITY OF GOD. If human descent and family tradition exert authority over the individual, the Divine Creator and Governor holds a far higher claim upon him. Whatever depravity sin may breed into the race, virtue is always its normal life, holiness its ideal. The Scriptures describe man as directly connected with God in his origin. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." When the clay was shaped, He "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." The characteristics of our Divine origin are as discernible as the marks of our human descent. Our intellect is made after the likeness of the Divine mind, else the universe would be to us an insoluble mystery. In our tastes we can trace kinship with Him who has adorned the earth with beauty. Pure human affection gives us our worthiest conception of the Divine love. Misfortune cannot turn it, ingratitude cannot chill it, death itself cannot overcome it. The Heavenly Father uses this earthly tie to symbolise His own regard; the Saviour describes His fostering care and close union with the Church by naming it His "bride." Our moral nature is plainly Divine in origin. Conscience is the voice of God in man. He who obeys it is lifted to the plane of Divine action, is made a co-worker with God. Over this lordly realm, crowned its regent by the Creator Himself, is the Personal Soul, the "Self," the "I." Self-consciousness is its throne, self-determination its sceptre. By this solemn conviction "I am," "I will," man separates himself from all the universe around him; through this he balances his soul against the whole world and weighs it down; with it he faces eternity. He is his own, something for which the Infinite asks, and he may give. It is here that man's Divine origin finds its explanation; for the glad choice of God, all the dignity of human nature was given; to this end converge the constant teachings of the revealing universe, the open instructions of the inspired Word, the solemn persuasions of the Holy Spirit. Lessons.—1. The responsibility of parents. One writer on heredity declares that the dispositions of Bacon and Goethe were formed by the simple addition of the dispositions of their ancestors. We know that passionate temper, fretfulness, and despondency may be inherited. Let a parent beware how he sins. 2. The responsibility resting upon the child of godly parents. When one who has had a virtuous ancestry seeks out vice and courts godlessness, he has not long to wait before every red drop in his veins will turn against him and curse him traitor. There is something back of his own will,—an authority he knows not how to resist and cannot defy. 3. The ultimate responsibility of each soul to God. When Samuel J. Mills was struggling against the convictions of the Spirit, he exclaimed, "I wish I had never been born!" His mother replied, "But you are born, my son, and can never escape your accountability to God." The

glad choice of the holy God is the highest exercise of the created will. (*C. M. Southgate.*) *The obedience of the Rechabites*.—I. WHEREIN IT RESEMBLES CHRISTIAN OBEDIENCE. 1. It was total. They did not consult their preferences or their "affinities." They did not proceed upon any law of "natural selection." They did not show punctilious fidelity with reference to one commandment, and great laxity concerning another. This is one essential characteristic of Christian obedience. It is total. If we can make choice of such commands as we feel like obeying and disregard the rest, what are we but masters instead of subjects, dictating terms instead of receiving orders? 2. It was constant. It kept an unbroken path. It bore the stress of storms and tests. And herein it was marked by another essential characteristic of Christian obedience—a beautiful constancy. Enlistment in the Lord's army is for life, and there is no discharge in that war. II. WHEREIN THIS RECHABITE OBEDIENCE WAS UNLIKE CHRISTIAN OBEDIENCE. 1. The Rechabites obeyed Jonadab: Christians obey God. This is a substantive difference. And we must not confound things that radically differ. The source of a command has a great deal to do with the value of obedience to it. The lower relation must give way to the higher when the two conflict. 2. Jonadab's commands, so far as we know, were for temporal and material ends, in the interests of a rugged manhood and a sturdy independence. God's commands are for spiritual ends, for good of soul, and they stand vitally connected with those higher interests that relate not only to the life that now is, but to that which is to come. Rechabite obedience, therefore, conserves temporal good; Christian obedience conserves eternal good. 3. Rechabite obedience was not necessary to salvation; Christian obedience is indispensable. III. WHEREIN IT SHAMES CHRISTIAN DISOBEDIENCE. 1. These Rechabites are obedient to their father Jonadab, a mere man who had been dead nearly three hundred years, while Judah is in open and flagrant disobedience to the Most High God. 2. Jonadab commanded but once, and he had instant and constant heed, generation upon generation, for centuries. "But I," saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel—"I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking. I have also sent unto you," &c. 3. Obedience to Jonadab was at a cost, and it brought at the best only power to endure and the spirit of independence. It left the Rechabites poor and homeless. Obedience to God was also at a cost, but it gave His people assured possessions, peace of conscience, protection from their enemies, and all the exceeding riches of an eternal inheritance in God's kingdom of grace and glory. Yet the Rechabites obeyed Jonadab with a beautiful constancy, while Judah hearkened not to the voice of the Lord. Practical suggestions.—1. The very essence of Christian fidelity is obedience. 2. A true obedience has two infallible signs. It will have no reservations, and it will never dry "Halt!" 3. See the shame and guilt of disobedience under the Gospel. 4. In respect to one particular in this Rechabite obedience, namely, abstinence from wine—three things are clear. (1) Abstinence from wine is not here made obligatory. (2) Abstinence from wine is not wrong. (3) Abstinence from wine for the sake of the stumblers is lifted by the New Testament to the sublime height of a duty, and made imperative (Rom. xiv. 21). Wine-drinking is a sin "for that man who drinks with offence" (Rom. xiv. 20). Wine-drinking is a sin for that man who by it "puts a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in a brother's way" (Rom. xiv. 15). When wine-drinking "wounds a weak conscience" it is "a sin against Christ" (1 Cor. viii. 12). (*H. Johnson, D.D.*) *The obedience of the Rechabites*.—Jonadab saw that his people were but a handful among a more powerful people, and likely soon to be swallowed up by their neighbours, and he hit upon a happy method of preserving their independent existence. He enjoined them "not to drink wine"; this was to save them from luxury and intemperance, which would prey upon them from within, and make them ripe for destruction; and he also commanded them "not to till the ground, nor to have any houses, nor to dwell in cities"; this was in order that they might have no riches to tempt others to make war upon them; and thus, to use his own words, "they might live many days in the land wherein they were strangers." Luxury and wealth are the bane of nations, and by keeping his tribe a simple, pastoral people, pure in their habits, and destitute of property, he accomplished his wishes for them. I. THE OBEDIENCE OF THE RECHABITES CONTRASTED WITH THE DISOBEDIENCE OF ISRAEL TO GOD. An ancestor of that family, who had been dead nearly three hundred years, had issued his commands, and they were still obeyed; but the living God had spoken repeatedly to Israel, by His prophets, yet they would not hear. The commands of Jonadab, too, were very arbitrary.

There could be no sin in cultivating the fields, or in living in houses, whatever moral worth there may have been in the precept to drink no wine; but still, because Jonadab commanded it, they obeyed. The complaint of God has still an application. It is a fact, that among sinners, any and every law, precept, or tradition, of mere human authority, is better obeyed than the laws of God Himself. See, in a few instances, how this has been verified. Mahomet arose, a sensualist, an adulterer, a breaker of treaties, and a robber, and issued his commands, which for centuries have been religiously obeyed. At the cry of the muezzin, and the hour of prayer, every follower of his, whether in the desert, on board the ship, in the city, or the field, suspends his labour, his pleasures, and even his griefs, and casts himself upon his knees in prayer. But the blessed Jesus, pure, peaceful, and glorious, speaks, and even those who acknowledge Him as Lord over all, and own the goodness of His commands, can listen to such words as, "This do in remembrance of Me," and obey them not. The founder of some monkish order, again, has enjoined upon all his fraternity certain rules and austerities, and he is obeyed. Day after day, and year after year, the same tedious round of ceremonies is gone through with, as though salvation depended upon it, and the deluded ones will rise at the midnight hour to inflict stripes upon themselves or to offer prayer. But Christ may enjoin the reasonable duty of praying to our Father in spirit and in truth, and multitudes can suffer days and years to pass, and pray not. The commander of the order of Jesuits can place his inferior priests in any country of the world, and whether the mandate be to act as father confessor in some palace, or to penetrate to China or Paraguay, there is no more resistance nor apparent regard for the sacrifices to be made than in the machinery which is moved by mechanic power. Christ commands His disciples to "go preach the Gospel to every creature," but only here and there one goes forth. The heathen priest bids the worshippers of idols to cast their children into the fire or the water, and it is done. Jesus says, "Suffer little children to come to Me," and has appointed a sacrament in which they may be received, but men will admit the duty, and yet neglect the baptism of their children. The Rechabites of modern times, and Sons of Temperance, may institute a vow of temperance, and it is kept; or command one of their number to minister to the sick, and it is done; or provide well for their poor; but Christ says, that "no drunkard shall enter heaven," and enjoins charity to the sick and the destitute, while many heed Him not.

II. THE REWARDS OF OBEDIENCE. Modern travellers, moreover, state that the Rechabites are still in existence. Mr. Wolf, the famous Jewish missionary, asserts this as his belief. "And another traveller who visited a tract to the south of Judea, which has been unexplored for centuries, met there a native who claimed to be a Rechabite, and when an Arabic Bible was shown to him, turned to this chapter and read from it the description of his people, and said that it was still true of them, and that they still kept the precepts of Jonadab, their father. Over three thousand years have passed away since that family of the Kenites came with Israel into Canaan, and for two thousand years no traces of them were preserved; but now, after so long a lapse of time, recent discoveries have brought them to light, retaining their name, and glorying in their independence. Though surrounded by Mohammedan Arabs, they conform to the law of Moscs, yet maintaining that they are not Israelites; and are much hated by the Mussulman." This account was given by a traveller so late as 1832, and is confirmed by English residents at Mocha, and from other sources. No doubt every promise of God's Word is as abundantly fulfilled. We may not always be able to trace out the literal accomplishment of every one as strikingly as in this case, but we never could prove one promise in all the Bible false; and the more light we have the more abundantly do we see that all have been yea and amen. Let us rest upon God's Word. Exceeding great and precious promises are given to us in the sacred book. They are like good notes from a prompt paymaster, falling due at different times. We may sometimes question their worth, or may even forget in the multitude of cares that we have such securities treasured up, but the time of their payment will come, and we shall find all redeemed. (*W. H. Lewis, D.D.*) *The Rechabites*:—Their record was an honourable one, and reached far back into the early days of Hebrew history. When Israel was passing through the wilderness of Sinai, the tribe of the Kenites showed them kindness; and this laid the foundation of perpetual friendliness between the two peoples. They seem to have adopted the religious convictions of Israel, and to have accompanied them into the Land of Promise. Retaining their integrity as a pastoral people, the Kenites maintained these friendly relations

with Israel during the intervening centuries; and it was of this tribe that the Rechabites, for such was the name of this strange tent-loving people, had sprung (Judg. iv. 17-24; 1 Sam. xv. 6; 1 Chron. ii. 55). About the time of Elijah, and perhaps largely influenced by him, the sheikh or leader of one branch of the Kenites was Jonadab the son of Rechab. He was dismayed at the abounding corruption of the time, and especially of the northern kingdom, then under the fatal spell of Jezebel's and Ahab's influence; and resembled some rank jungle in whose steamy air, heavy with fever and poison, noisome creatures swarmed, and foul pestilences breed. In his endeavour to save his people from such a fate, this noble man, who afterwards became John's confederate in extirpating idolatry, bound his people under a solemn pledge to drink no wine for ever; neither to build houses, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyards, but to dwell in tents. **I. JEREMIAH'S TEST OF THE RECHABITES.** So soon as their arrival was noised abroad, and had come to the ears of Jeremiah, he was seized by a Divine impulse to derive from them a striking object-lesson for his own people. With an inventiveness which only passionate love could have suggested, the prophet caught at every incident, and used every method to awaken his people to realise their true position in the sight of God. Probably a little group of Jews, arrested by the prophet's association with these strange-looking men, followed them in to watch the proceedings. They were curious witnesses of the prophet's action, as he caused bowls of wine to be set before the tribesmen, and cups to be offered them, that they might dip them in and drink. They also heard the blunt unqualified refusal of those quaint old-fashioned Puritans, "We will drink no wine," followed by an explanation of the solemn obligation laid on them centuries before. The moral was obvious. Here were men loyal to the wish of their ancestor, though he was little more than a name to them, and refusing the offered sweets in which so many freely indulged. How great a contrast to the people of Jerusalem, who persistently disregarded the words of the living God perpetually remonstrating against their sins! The prohibitions of Jonadab were largely arbitrary and external; whilst those of Jehovah were corroborated by the convictions of conscience, and consonant with the deepest foundations of religion and morality. The voice of Jonadab was a cry coming faintly from far down the ages; whilst Jehovah was ever speaking with each new dawn, and in the voice of each fresh messenger whom He rose early to send. Such devotion to principle; such persistent culture of simplicity, frugality, and abstinence; such literal adherence to the will of the father of their house—not only carried within them the assurance of perpetuity to the people who practised them, but must receive the signature and countersign of the Almighty. "Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Jonadab, the son of Rechab, shall not want a man to stand before Me for ever." This phrase had a very profound significance. It suggested, of course, obviously, that the tribe should not cease to exist. The phrase is often used in Scripture of priestly service. And may we not infer that where we meet that devotion to principle, and that detachment from the world, which characterised these men, there will always be a strong religious tone, a knowledge of God, a power in prayer and intercession, which are the essential characteristics of the priests? **II. THE ELEMENTS OF A STRONGLY RELIGIOUS LIFE.** Oh, to stand always before Him, on whose face the glory of God shines as the sun in his strength! But if this is to be something more than a vague wish, an idle dream, three things should be remembered, suggested by the words of the Rechabites. 1. There must be close adhesion to great principles. Many superficial reasons might have suggested to the Rechabites compliance with the prophet's tempting suggestion. The wine was before them; there was no sin against God in taking it; the people around had no scruples about it; and the prophet himself invited them. In contrast to this, it is the general tendency amongst men to ask what is the practice of the majority; what is done by those in their rank and station; and what will be expected of them. We drift with the current. We allow our lives to be settled by our companions or our whims, our fancies or our tastes. We make a grave mistake in supposing that the main purpose of our life is something different from that which reveals itself in details. What we are in the details of our life, that we are really and essentially. The truest photographs are taken when we are unprepared for the operation. And, indeed, when we consider the characters of the early disciples of Jesus, or those of saints, martyrs, and confessors, must we not admit that they were as scrupulous in seeking the will of God about the trifles of their life, as the Rechabites were in consulting the will and pleasure of the dead

Jonadab? The thought of God was as present with the one as of Jonadab with the other. And was not this the secret of their strong and noble lives? What a revolution would come to us all if it became the one fixed aim and ambition of our lives to do always those things that are pleasing in His sight! 2. Abstinence from the spirit of the age. It was an immense gain in every way for the Rechabites to abstain from wine. Wine was closely associated with the luxury, corruption, and abominable revolvings of the time (Isa. xxviii. 1-8). Their abstinence was not only a protest against the evils which were honeycombing their age, but was a sure safeguard against participation in them. In these days the same principles apply. Surely, then, we shall do well to say with the Rechabites, whoever may ask us to drink, "We will drink no wine." But wine may stand for the spirit of the age, its restlessness, its constant thirst for novelty, for amusement, for fascination; its feverish demand for the fresh play, the exciting novel, the rush of the season, the magnificent pageant. It is easier to abstain from alcohol than from this insidious spirit of our time, which is poured so freely into the air, as from the vial of some demon sorceress. 3. We must hold lightly to the things around. The Rechabites dwelt in tents. They drove their vast flocks from place to place, and were content with the simple life of the wandering shepherd. It was thus that the great patriarchs had lived before them (Heb. xi. 9, 13). It is difficult to say what worldliness consists in. What would be worldly to some people is an ordinary part of life's circumstances to others. But all of us are sensible of ties that hold us to the earth. We may discover what they are by considering what we cling to; what we find it hard to let go; what we are always striving to augment; what we pride ourselves in. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *The Rechabites*:—I. *THEIR PRINCIPLES ARE TRIED*. Three features mark this trial. 1. They were offered wine. After a family record of three hundred years' abstinence, the evil thing is set before them, free of cost. As they fortunately had no experience of its power by reason of former habits of intemperance, they could look upon the enemy without fear or danger. 2. Wine was offered them by a good man. Jeremiah was the generous host. Surely God's prophet would not offer them an evil thing, or tempt them to do wrong! A great many well-meaning people place the tempting cup before their guests, and their guests are not the sturdy sons of Jonadab, and much evil is wrought. 3. Wine was offered in the Lord's house. They were in the chamber of good men, on "holy ground," and in strict privacy. Under such circumstances, might they not suspend their stringent rules of life? They had broken one vow in coming into Jerusalem, might they not yield another point, and adopt one of the ways of city people? Life is full of opportunities for testing principles and character. II. *THEIR PRINCIPLES ARE TRIUMPHANT*. 1. It was prompt and definite. They reasoned not "with flesh and blood," nor did they offer any compromise. 2. It was complete. Their pledge was a comprehensive one, involving dwelling in tents, and living a very unworldly life (vers. 6-10). Total abstinence was not enough. Their father's commandment was broad. Sobriety is not salvation. 3. It was general. "We, our wives, our sons, our daughters" (ver. 8). The domestic peace had not been broken by faithlessness and sin. A blessed unity in principle and in practice. 4. It was constant. Three hundred years had passed since they received these injunctions, and they still regarded them as binding and sacred. III. *THEIR ACTUATING MOTIVE*. 1. It was filial love. "For Jonadab our father commanded us" (ver. 6) was the only defence they cared to offer for their singular conduct. A pious ancestry is an invaluable blessing; but the filial spirit must turn that boon to practical account. 2. Men live after death. "He being dead, yet speaketh." Time cannot impair the power of a good life. IV. *THE EXEMPLARY MEANING OF THEIR CONDUCT*. They were not tried for their own sake, but for the good of others. 1. Conduct makes personal influence. "No man liveth unto himself." The end of our trials may concern others more than ourselves. The Jews were to be instructed by the behaviour of the Rechabites. 2. The sobriety of one condemns the drunkenness of the other. If one life can be good, other lives can too. 3. It was a contrast of privilege. In obedience to an earthly father, who had been dead three centuries, the sons of Jonadab had kept their pledges. The Jews had received Divine commands, all the prophets had spoken to them, and yet they disobeyed (vers. 14, 16). 4. It justified Divine judgment. "Therefore . . . I will bring upon Judah," &c. (ver. 17). The abstinence of Rechab condemns inebriate Judah. 5. National intemperance is a swift destroyer. 6. Personal drunkenness makes up the national sin. The units make the million. V. *THE RECHABITES' REWARD*. 1. Divine approval. Jeremiah

assured them of God's benediction. 2. Divine preservation. Jonadab promised his sons long life, "many days in the land where ye be strangers" (ver. 7), and that promise God ratified. Medical and statistical science have come to Jonadab's view. 3. Divine honour. "Jonadab, the son of Rechab, shall not want a man to stand before Me for ever" (ver. 19). Standing before God has reference to a priestly relationship and service. (*R. W. Keighley.*) *A reason for total abstinence:*

—The late Frances E. Willard once asked the greatest of inventors, Thomas A. Edison, if he were a total abstainer; and when he told her that he was, she said, "May I inquire if it was home influence that made you so?" and he replied, "No; I think it was because I always felt that I had a better use for my head." Who can measure the loss to the world if that wonderful instrument of thought that has given us so much of light and leading in the practical mechanism of life had become sodden with drink, instead of electric with original ideas! *Obedience to human authority:*—1. Premise that complications are apt to arise, unless we remember—

(1) That the authority of any particular superior is limited to its own sphere. (2) That all human authority is subordinate to God's, so that in submitting to human authority we are submitting to God's, in resisting we are resisting God's (Rom. xiii. 1, 2; Eph. vi. 5-7; Col. iii. 20; 1 Pet. ii. 13). (3) That authority, even within its own limits, is to be used with discretion, not pressed beyond reason, or vexatiously. 2. What right had Jonadab to enjoin upon his descendants the observances specified? His injunctions were those of a founder and legislator. 3. To proceed, then, we have—(1) Obedience to the laws of our country, a branch of which is obedience to magistrates. This to be rendered "for conscience' sake," and therefore even in cases in which (as the payment of taxes) evasion might be possible (Rom. xiii. 1-7; Tit. iii. 1; 1 Pet. ii. 13-15). (2) Obedience to the rules of the Church, a branch of which is obedience to ecclesiastical superiors (Heb. xiii. 17; 1 Thess. v. 12, 13; 1 Tim. v. 17). And by the rules of the Church are to be understood the rules of that branch of the Church in which God has cast our lot. (3) Obedience to authority in the family. To masters. To husbands. To parents. (*C. A. Heurtley, D.D.*)

I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye hearkened not unto Me.—*The aggravated nature of disobedience:*—I. LOOK AT THE AUTHORITY OF GOD—the right He has to be obeyed and hearkened to. "I have spoken unto you," saith God. We must lay a stress upon that "I." We must contrast it with the name of Jonadab. It is as much as to say, What is Jonadab compared with Me? What is his authority compared with Mine? II. WE MUST LAY A STRESS ALSO UPON THE MANNER IN WHICH THE LORD HATH GIVEN HIS DIRECTIONS TO US. "I have spoken unto you," saith He—how? "rising early and speaking." Oh! wonderful expression! spoken, indeed, in accommodation to man's language; but how affecting! how significant! Jonadab, perhaps, laid down his rules but once, and was readily obeyed. But again and again hath the Great Jehovah sent abroad His invitations, and renewed His offers, and repeated His commands. III. THE NATURE OF THE LORD'S DIRECTIONS. Look over Jonadab's injunctions, and assuredly you will pronounce them harsh and strict in the extreme. He laid an embargo on the very gifts of providence, and bade his family abstain from them. Now contrast with this the gentle, gracious precepts of the Gospel of Christ Jesus—surely His yoke is easy and His burthen is light! But before He gives His precepts He sends His invitations (Matt. xi. 28). Pardon and grace are first proposed before duties are required.

(*A. Roberts, M.A.*) *The reasonableness of hearkening to God's voice and submitting ourselves to Him:*—1. As we are His creatures (Mal. i. 6; Heb. xii. 9). 2. As He is our benefactor (Isa. i. 2, 3; Rom. xii. 1). 3. As He has engaged Himself to support and deliver such (Rom. viii. 28, &c.). 4. As He forbids only what is hurtful, and commands only what is good (Rom. vii. 12; Deut. x. 12, 13). 5. The wisest and best of men have acted thus (Heb. xii. 1). 6. It is its own reward (Psa. xix. 11). 7. The reward He sets before us is infinitely great (2 Cor. iv. 17, 18). 8. Disobedience exposes to His wrath (Rom. i. 18, ii. 8, 9). (*H. Foster.*)

Disobedience to God condemned:—I. LET US CONSIDER THIS COMPLAINT. There is at this day—1. The same regard for the commands of men. 2. The same disregard for the commands of God. But let us consider the complaint more minutely—II. WITH ITS ATTENDANT AGGRAVATIONS. 1. The authority from which the different commands proceeded. 2. The commands themselves. 3. The manner in which they were enforced. Address—(1) Those who regard man, and not God. (2) Those who regard God, and not man. (3) Those who feel a united regard for both. (*C. Simeon, M.A.*) **Return ye now every man from his evil way.**—

Sinners admonished to return to God.—I. WHAT THE EXHORTATION PRESUPPOSES. 1. That there has been a departure from God. 2. This departure is universal (Rom. iii. 10, 19–23). 3. This departure is flagrantly wicked. “Evil way.” Evil in its nature, in its influence, in its consequences. II. TO WHAT REFORMS THE EXHORTATION POINTS. 1. Deep conviction of the evil and dangerous nature of a wicked career. 2. Contrition of heart, and confession of sin to God. 3. The renunciation of every evil way. 4. Supreme love and loyalty to God. III. COMPLIANCE WITH THIS REQUEST IS URGENT. 1. Life is short and uncertain. 2. Sin is hardening and deceitful. 3. You will escape the greatest evils and realise the most exalted pleasures. 4. The longer you delay the less probability there is that you will ever return. 5. The present is the only time in which we are authorised to tell you you can be saved. IV. THE HAPPY RESULT OF RETURNING TO GOD. 1. The Israelites entered Canaan—a faint type of heaven to which believers are called. 2. “Ye shall dwell” there in fulness of joy, and at God’s right hand. Your “sun shall no more go down.” (*Helps for the Pulpit.*) *Amending one’s ways a great work*.—Sir Thomas Burnet, the third son of Bishop Burnet, led at one time a dissipated life. At last he took a serious turn, and one evening his father observing him to be very thoughtful, asked what he was meditating. “A greater work,” replied he, “than your lordship’s ‘History of the Reformation.’” “Ay,” said the bishop, “what is that?” “The reformation of myself,” said the young man. He fulfilled his promise, and he afterwards became one of the best lawyers of his time; and in 1741 one of the judges in the Court of Common Pleas.

Vers. 16, 17. *I will bring upon Judah and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the evil that I have pronounced against them: because I have spoken unto them, but they have not heard; and I have called unto them, but they have not answered.*—*Condemned by our virtues*.—How did the obedience of the Rechabites prove inexcusable, and therefore worthy of the severest punishment, the disobedience of the Jews? Their obedience was the obedience of children to their father, and sufficiently showed that even in a matter which crossed their natural inclinations men were capable of acting on a parental command and practising self-denial. The Jews then could not plead that they had no power of hearkening unto God. The Rechabites were witnesses against them. If Jonaðab were obeyed because he was a father, had not Jehovah a right to expect to be obeyed, seeing that He was a father unto Israel? If the Rechabites could obey, obey as children, the Israelites might have obeyed, obeyed as children. Thus the instance or example of the Rechabites rose up in the sternest condemnation of the Jews, and in the clearest vindication of the judgments with which God was about to visit their transgressions. Now let us extend the argument, and exhibit it in such shape as may make it applicable to ourselves. It is a very hard doctrine which we have to enforce, when we press on your attention the utter worthlessness, so far as our procuring favour with God is concerned, of those virtues and excellences which are so much admired in society. There is something so graceful, and beautiful, and beneficial around a man of unblemished morals, of high rectitude, of large generosity—the dutiful son, the affectionate husband and parent, the loyal subject, the staunch friend—that you seem to shrink instinctively from statements which go to the bringing him to a level with those whom you abhor as the hardened and the injurious, and to the declaring him possibly as far off from the kingdom of heaven as though he lived a dissolute life, or were dishonourable in his dealings. But the statements are not the less true because they may jar with your feelings; and the minister cannot, without the worst dishonesty, soften down facts on which Scripture is most explicit, and which even experience sufficiently establishes—the facts that there may be as thorough enmity to God beneath the aspect which is most attractive, as beneath that which is most repulsive, and that the virtues which shed a blandness over domestic life, and a dignity over commercial transactions, and a strength over political relations, may as well coexist with complete want of the religion of the heart, as those vices which break up the peace of families, and outrage all the decencies of a neighbourhood. But the principle involved in the text requires us to go even further than this, and to maintain, not only that there is no justifying power in those virtues, but that there is even a condemning power—that they may be brought up as witnesses against their possessors, and used as proofs of their being without excuse in their neglect of God and disobedience to His

Gospel. The man of great native kindness of heart has evidently even less excuse than one of worse nature for withholding from God the offerings of thankfulness. Where there is a fine generosity, a gushing sensibility, a quick appreciation of what is noble and disinterested, what shall extenuate indifference to the Gospel, with all its holy story of love and condescension and conquest? We have thus engaged you with the general argument, rather than with the particular case presented by our text. You will, probably, however, understand the argument better, if we now confine ourselves to the relation which subsists between parent and child; for it is on this that God grounds His complaint against the Jews. Now there is no more beautiful and graceful affection of our nature than that which subsists between parents and children. We cannot but admire this affection, even as exhibited amongst inferior animals; and no passage in natural history is so attractive as that which tells how tenderly the wild beast of the forest will watch over her young, or with what assiduousness the fowls of the air will tend their helpless brood. But with the inferior animals the affection is but an instinct which lasts for a time, just long enough to ensure attention to the offspring whilst yet unable to provide for themselves; when this time is past, the tie is for the most part altogether broken; there is no keeping up of the relationship; however exquisitely the beast of the field and the fowl of the air may have nourished their young during their weeks of helplessness, they become afterwards as strangers to them, and seem not to distinguish them from others of their tribe. There is for a time a great exhibition of parental affection, but comparatively little of filial; there is apparently no reciprocity, for when the offspring has reached an age at which the kindness might be returned, the connection seems at an end, and the offspring goes away from the parent, though, becoming a parent itself, it displays the very instinct of which it has been the object. But in the human race the connection goes beyond this; if not so very intense at the first, it is abiding and reciprocal; the love of a parent for a child does not terminate when the child has grown into strength and asks no further help—it continues through life, increasing, for the most part, rather than diminishing, so that though the child may have been long absent from his home, wandering in foreign lands, or domesticated among strangers, yet can he always reckon that the hearts of his father and mother are beating kindly towards him, and that he has only again to present himself at their door, to unlock a tide of rich sensibilities, and be folded in an ardent embrace, and welcomed with deep gratulations. But whilst parents are thus abidingly and profitably actuated by affection for their children, children entertain an affection towards their parents which is scarcely less graceful and scarcely less advantageous. Of course there are exceptions, but they provoke unmingled reprobation, as though all the feelings of a community rose up against that unnatural being, a thankless child, and prompted the fitness of ejecting him from its circles. It is comparatively but seldom that children show themselves void of affection towards a father and a mother, when that father and that mother have done their part as parents; on the contrary, whether it be in the highest or the lowest families of the land, there is generally a frank yielding to its heads of that respect and that gratitude which they have a right to look for from their offspring. And from this fact, illustrated in the particular case of the Rechabites, God proceeds in our text to justify His complaint against the Jews. We stay not to demonstrate to you the paternal character of God; it is the character which pervades the whole of revelation, and is outlined by the whole of providence. The question is not as to whether God acts towards us as a father—it is only whether we act towards God as children; and here comes the melancholy contrast between men as members of particular families, and men as members of the universal family. The very beings who can recognise most cordially the claims of earthly parents, who can manifest themselves a reverence and a homage which give to the domestic picture an exquisite moral beauty, and who would show themselves monstrously indignant at any tale of filial disobedience or unthankfulness, have only to be viewed as children of God, and presently they would be convicted of all that unnaturalness, all that ingratitude, and all that baseness, on which they are so ready to pour unmingled reprobation. You cannot for a moment profess to deny, that in the heart which is all alive to filial emotions, and which beats with so true an affection towards a father and a mother, that the whole strength is gathered in the showing them respect and ministering to their comfort, there may be an utter indifference towards the heavenly Parent—ay, no more practical remembrance of Him “in whom

we live, and move, and have our being," than if it were the heart of one of those blots upon our race, in which all the family charities appear to have been extinguished, or never to have grown. Then do ye not further perceive how thoroughly self-condemned must all of us stand, if we act faithfully the part of a child toward an earthly parent, but utterly fail to act that part towards a heavenly ? It will be demonstrable from our own actions that we were quite without excuse, as members of the universal family ; we shall be put to shame by our very excellence as members of individual families. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *A wilful rejection of salvation* :—Mr. Spurgeon has said, "To me it is especially appalling that a man should perish through wilfully rejecting the Divine salvation. A drowning man throwing away the life-belt, a poisoned man pouring the antidote upon the floor, a wounded man tearing open his wounds—any of these is a sad sight. But what shall we say of a soul refusing its Saviour and choosing its own destruction ?" (*R. Venting.*)

CHAPTER XXXVI.

VER. 3. It may be.—*It may be* :—I. THIS WORD SHOWS US THE HEART OF GOD. Displeased because of sin, but longing to show mercy to the sinner. All His counsels and warnings, promises and threatenings, are for good (Deut. v. 29-33, xxxii. 44-47 ; Isa. i. 18-20 ; Jer. viii. 7-11 ; Ezek. xii. 3, xviii. 31 ; Hos. xi. 1-8 ; John iii. 16, 17 ; Luke xix. 10, 41, 42). II. THIS WORD REVEALS THE GRAND POSSIBILITIES OF HUMAN LIFE. 1. Earnest attention (ver. 3). 2. Penitential prayer (ver. 7). 3. Moral reconciliation. The hindrances to peace are not with God, but with us. III. THIS WORD HOLDS OUT ENCOURAGEMENT TO ALL TRUE WORKERS FOR CHRIST. 1. Prayer. 2. Holy endeavour. 3. Missionary enterprise. (*W. Forsyth, M.A.*)

Vers. 4-7. I am shut up.—*Jeremiah in prison* :—1. Jeremiah's age was one of great political troubles. 2. It was also an age of signal religious privileges. 3. It was an age of great moral corruption. I. HIS IMPRISONMENT SUGGESTS THE SAD MORAL CHARACTER OF HIS AGE. The prisons of an age are often criteria by which to determine its character. When prisons are filled with men of signal excellence of character, force of conscience, and self-denying philanthropy, you have sad moral proofs of the deep moral corruption of the age that could tolerate such enormity. II. HIS IMPRISONMENT SUGGESTS GOD'S METHOD OF RAISING HUMANITY. Heaven's plan embraces the agency of good men. The agency is twofold, primary and secondary. There are spiritual seers and spiritual mechanics. 1. Jeremiah may be regarded as a type of the primary human agents whom God employs. They are frequently in the lowest secular condition ; yet in that condition God communes with them, and gives them a message for the world. 2. Baruch may be regarded as a type of the secondary agents. In this age the Baruchs are numerous. Men abound who will take down the thoughts of great thinkers ; but the Jeremiahs are rare. Thought power, rather than tongue power, is wanted now. III. HIS IMPRISONMENT SUGGESTS THE INABILITY OF THE EXTERNAL TO CRUSH A HOLY SOUL. 1. He is free in his communion with heaven. From the dungeon he cried, and God heard him (Lam. iii. 56, 57). 2. He was free in his sympathies with the race. He could not go out in body to the house of the Lord, but he went out in soul. Walls of granite, massive iron bars, chains of adamant, cannot confine the soul ; nor can the densest darkness throw on it a single shadow. (*Homilist.*) *God's servant imprisoned* :—When Henry Burton, two centuries ago, was persecuted for the name of Christ and put in prison, "I found," he said, "the comforts of my God in the Fleet Prison exceedingly, it being the first time of my being a prisoner." Go thou, and read in the roll.—*The prophet and the roll* :—I. THE SOLICITUDE OF JEREMIAH (vers. 4, 5). II. THE COMMAND OF JEREMIAH (ver. 6). III. THE HOPE OF JEREMIAH (ver. 7). If Divine mercy could not woo them back to righteousness, he hoped that Divine justice might drive them. Alas ! he was disappointed. The national heart, with a few rare exceptions, hardened into granite. And then they were overwhelmed with calamities. (*E. Davies, D.D.*) *The utility of Holy Scripture* :—See here the utility of the Holy Scriptures and the excellent use that

may be made of reading them. A man may be thereby doubtless converted, where preaching is wanting, as divers were in Queen Mary's days, when the Word of God was precious; as Augustine was, by reading Rom. xiii.; Fulgentius, by the prophet Jonah; Franciscus Junius, by John i., &c. (*John Trapp.*)

Ver. 6. The fasting-day.—*Symbolism of a fast*.—1. It exhibits the duty of a wise self-restraint or self-denial, in receiving the good gifts of heaven. What could more exactly typify this than the temporary withdrawing from innocent pleasure, and even from the proper nourishment of the frame? It is temporary, and not absolute; an occasion, and not a permanency; a suspension, and not a renunciation. It admonishes us by an example, and does not crush us by a law. It reminds us of the obligation of sobriety in the use of the world's offerings. It bids us reflect that it is good for us to break away at times from what is plentiful, contenting ourselves with what is scanty; and to interrupt the course of the enjoyments that only do not reproach us, in order to make room for higher satisfactions. It exhorts us to be frugal, to be watchful, to be provident. It enjoins to be temperate in all things, and to let our moderation be known to all men; to learn how to lack as well as how to abound; and to show to others and prove to ourselves how well we can resign what we would fain keep, and refrain from what we desire to do, controlling tongue and hand, wish and passion, at the call of any holy commandment. 2. It typifies our weak and subject condition. When we pause in the midst of our blessings, and put them at a distance for a while that we may see them the better, we remember how precarious is our hold upon them, and how easily what we dispense with for a day may be withdrawn from us for ever. Fulness may shrink. Strength and activity may be crippled. Resources heaped up ever so high may be scattered to the winds. Opportunity and desire may perish together. It is good to be impressed with this at intervals, though it would not be good to dwell upon it perpetually; for you make a man none the better by making him habitually sad. 3. It presents an image of the sorrows of the world. These are a part of our subjection, and a peculiar part. While it is foolish and ungrateful to anticipate trouble, every day having enough to do with its own; and it is one of the worst occupations we can engage in, to torment ourselves with unarrived calamities, and paint the white blank of the future with woe; yet it becomes thoughtful persons, and has no tendency to make them less thankful, to consider the evils of humanity. They may be thus preserved from presumption, thus guarded against surprises, thus furnished with a fellow-feeling for the sufferings of others, and thus better prepared for their own trial when God shall send it. 4. Fasting represents penitence. It does so on the principle already mentioned, since penitence is one kind of grief. It does so on another ground. When a man is thoroughly stricken with the sense of sin, and seeks to express that consciousness, he describes his unworthiness to receive the bounties of heaven by declining to partake of them. (*N. L. Frothingham.*)

Vers. 20-26. He cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth.—*The burnt roll*.—I. THE INCIDENTS CONNECTED WITH THE TEXT. II. A FEW OBSERVATIONS UPON THEM. 1. The piety of the parent is no assured guarantee for the religion of the son. The life of the Spirit can alone come from God, and it is given and withheld in a way to us past finding out. There are many instances in which we should not be justified in attributing any neglect to the parent, though the child may not by any means have walked in his steps; and, where this does occur, men not unfrequently become monsters of iniquity; for it has been well remarked that none are more abandoned than those who become wicked after a religious education: they cannot have quietness in vice till they have stupefied their consciences; and the greater the obstacles before men can fully indulge their lusts, the more depraved they are afterwards. The testimony of the Spirit, respecting Josiah, the father of Jehoiakim, is this, "that he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of his father David." 2. However men may slight and pour contempt upon the threatenings of God, they can in no way prevent their fulfilment. Jehoiakim and his princes mocked at the message of God, despised His gracious warnings, and purposed the infliction of punishment upon the prophet and scribe concerned in their delivery; but by so doing they did but provoke the wrath of the Lord till there was no remedy: God at length brought upon them the King of Babylon. And all this, we are told,

took place, that "the Word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled." The destruction of the world in the time of Noah was long delayed; but it came at length, and that when men were little expecting it. And, if men will not be prevailed upon to flee to the refuge which God hath in infinite mercy provided, this warning must be fulfilled in their destruction. 3. Those who slight God's warnings increase their condemnation. It was declared by the Lord through Huldah, the prophetess, to Josiah, the father of Jehoiakim, "Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God when thou heardest His words against this place and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before Me, and didst rend thy clothes and weep before Me, I have even heard thee also, saith the Lord: behold I will gather thee to thy fathers; and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace" (2 Chron. xxxiv. 27). III. THE APPLICABILITY OF THIS SUBJECT TO PRESENT TIMES. Are there not those in this our land who endeavour, by the keen knife of wit and sarcasm, to cut the Bible in pieces, and thus bring it into contempt, and cause it to be neglected? And why do they act thus? They hate the Bible because they perceive that its threatenings are pointed at them and their sins; they are against the Bible because they see that the Bible is against them: they know very well that, if the Bible be true, if it be indeed the Word of the living God, they are in a very awful case—in danger of feeling the wrath of God for ever in another world: this they cannot bear to think of, and therefore they first begin to wish that it may not be true; next, indulge a faint hope that it is not; and, lastly, are led on by Satan to believe that it is nothing else but a cunningly-devised fable, fitted to frighten and alarm the minds of the weak; forgetting that the very circumstance which makes it so distasteful to themselves, namely, that it forbids the indulgence of every sinful desire and the practice of every wicked act, is of itself one of the very strongest proofs that it is not the Word of man, but of God. IV. SOME LESSONS OF INSTRUCTION. 1. The duty of reverencing God's Word. 2. The duty of making it known according to our ability among others. 3. The duty of dealing faithfully with those who live in disobedience to God's commands. (*T. Grantham.*) *The burnt roll and the Scriptures*.—I. THE WORDS IN THE ROLL WERE INSPIRED BY GOD; SO ARE THE SCRIPTURES. 1. Christ appealed to and taught out of them (Matt. iv. 4; Mark xii. 10; John vii. 42; Acts i. 16; Heb. iii. 7; 2 Pet. i. 19, 21; 2 Tim. iii. 16). 2. Further proof—(1) Their harmony and agreement. (2) The perfect moral scheme they unfold. (3) Their power over men's hearts. (4) Their wonderful preservation. II. THE WORDS IN THE ROLL CONTAINED DIVINE THREATENINGS AGAINST SIN. So throughout the Scriptures. III. THE WORDS IN THE ROLL WERE INTENDED TO PRODUCE PENITENCE AND RESULT IN FORGIVENESS (ver. 3). "To the Lord our God belong mercies," &c. IV. THE WORDS IN THE ROLL ARE DESPISED BY THE HARDENED AND REBELLIOUS (vers. 22-24). Burning was merely the outward and visible sign of contempt, neglect, and disdain. V. THE WORDS IN THE ROLL ARE, NEVERTHELESS, REVERENCED BY SOME (ver. 25). (*Homiletic Magazine.*) *Rejection of God's message*.—I. DEEP AND VARIED INTEREST OF THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH. 1. Divine truth of doctrine and promise (chaps. xvii., xxx., xxxi., &c.). 2. Views of a prophet's inner life of anguish and faith (chaps. i., ix., x., xii.). 3. Passages of vivid narrative (this chapter). II. A STRANGE SCENE. III. A SEARCHING LESSON FOR THE SOUL. The possibility of complete indifference to the most urgent warnings from God, even without open rejection of religion. Let us take the case of Zedekiah thus in some few respects. 1. His act as a specimen of the soul's acts now. 2. His excuses. 3. His doom. IV. ZEDEKIAH HEARS A MESSAGE FROM ONE WHOM, ON THE WHOLE, HE OWNS AS GOD'S MESSENGER, AND, BY WAY OF REPLY, HE BURNS IT. Countless souls own the Bible, as, on the whole, God's Word. Perhaps in a time of distress, like Zedekiah (chap. xxxviii.), they will anxiously turn to it. But in their hour of security, when grief or conscience is silent, the Bible may warn them, but in vain. Church lessons, sermon texts, family portions, private reading, all bring them God's warnings. The soul, while it dares not say it is false, can yet cast the unfelt truth aside. V. ZEDEKIAH, PERHAPS, EXPLAINED HIS ACT IN SOME VAGUE WAY TO HIMSELF. "Jeremiah is a prophet; but cannot a prophet be prejudiced, and exaggerate?" So Bible readers will let sceptical depreciation of the Bible so far warp them as just to take the edge off the reality of its warnings: "Ye shall not surely die." VI. BUT MUCH MORE THAN THIS: ZEDEKIAH POSITIVELY REJECTED THE MESSAGE FROM WOUNDED PRIDE. He did not want it: he was well enough as he was. This blinded him in great measure to the question whether

it were from God or not. So self will rise against the very words of Jesus, till it has seen its need and misery as it is (Rev. iii. 17). VII. ZEDEKIAH, FOR ALL THIS SECURITY AND INDIFFERENCE, WAS ON THE VERGE OF A REAL AND DREADEFUL DOOM. Ruin, captivity, blindness, bereavement (chap. xxxix.). So now, indifference to Divine warnings is no disproof of their truth. The Judge of all the earth will act, not on our view of things, but on His own. VIII. HE WHO THREATENS IS HE WHO ATONES, SAVES, AND LOVES. He sends His real threatenings to drive us to His real mercy (Rev. iii. 19). (*H. C. G. Moule, D.D.*) *Jeremiah's roll burnt*:—The history with which our text is connected is soon told. It appears that Jeremiah the prophet, at the command of the Lord, had instructed Baruch the scribe to write, in a roll of a book, an abstract or an abridgment of all the sermons which during the last three-and-twenty years he had preached, as well as an account of the various judgments which the Lord had denounced against Judah by reason of their sins. This was done that the king and his people might be put in remembrance of what they had heard, and that they might the better understand it, when they had it all before them at one view. I. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WRITTEN WORD. Our Lord and His apostles speak to us by their written words in the New Testament; and they attest the inspiration of the written Old Testament by the numberless quotations from its various books. These Scriptures we are commanded to "talk of, when we walk by the way, and when we sit in the house." We are also especially to heed them when they are read or explained to us in the sanctuary of public worship. II. THE VALUE OF DIVINE ORDINANCES. We should come up to the house of God, my brethren, "to ask those things that be necessary as well for the body as the soul." We should come up "to set forth God's most worthy praise." We should also come up to hear "His most holy Word." III. THE LORD'S OBJECT IN THE SCRIPTURES. The object which God has in view in giving us His Word, is to save our souls. He therein tells us, first, of our danger, and then of our refuge. The Scriptures, therefore, when rightly received, issue in our salvation. This was the Lord's object in reference to Judah. Judah had sinned; and the Lord had threatened, by Jeremiah, to punish those sins. Meanwhile, however, he tried once more to bring them to repentance. He therefore commanded Jeremiah to commit to writing all the evils he had pronounced against that nation, in the hope that, when they read what was written, they might be alarmed at their danger, and seek pardon from their God before their destruction came. IV. THE REBELLION OF THE CARNAL MIND. "The carnal mind," we are told, "is enmity against God." It on this account opposes God's Word, and hates and persecutes God's faithful servants. V. THE FOLLY OF DESTROYING GOD'S WORD. Those men destroy God's Word who will not receive its sayings. It matters not, however, my brethren, whether you receive the whole Word of God, or not. By it you must be one day judged. The judgment will be set, and the books will be opened. If you could get together and burn all the Bibles in the universe, that flame would never destroy God's truth. Hell would be the same: eternity would be the same: death and judgment would be unaltered. Reject not, then, the inspired Word. Receive it most thankfully. Pray over it most earnestly. (*C. Clayton, M.A.*) *The rash penknife*:—Jehoiakim's last opportunity was now to come. The Spirit of God comes upon the prophet Jeremiah, and inspires him with a message from Heaven. Baruch, the scribe, is summoned to take it down in writing from his lips. I see him coming to the prophet's chamber with ink and pen and sheets of parchment. The people are awed and amazed. One of them, named Michaiah, instantly hastens off to the palace, and, finding a number of the princes gathered together, acquaints them with what has taken place, and gives them the substance of the prophecy. Presently one of these is commissioned to go into the monarch's presence and inform him. Jehoiakim, professing great indifference, has yet his curiosity aroused, and wishes the document itself to be brought to him. So Jehudi runs and fetches the roll, telling of the awful judgments that are about to descend upon the throne and upon the land, and proceeds to read it aloud to the king. The tragic sequel you already know. So Jehoiakim's day of grace closed. In that moment the door of mercy was shut against him for ever! His doom was sealed. The Spirit of God was quenched. The man was given up. Not, observe, that his life was ended; he lived at least four years after this; but he had sinned away his day of grace, and never more was God to ply him with the offers of mercy. His soul's ruin was now complete. I. THOSE WHO, IN THEIR EARLY DAYS, HAVE RESISTED HOLY INFLUENCES, GENERALLY TURN OUT THE MOST WICKED OF MEN. I hardly know an exception to this rule. Nor

can you much wonder that it is so. It is just what we might expect. When a man deliberately tramples on conviction, and resists the dealings of God's Spirit, he uses the most effectual means to sear his conscience and harden his heart. If, in early days, you have been hedged round with Christian influences, and loving counsels, and bright examples, and fervent prayers: and you have withstood all these things, you are just the person most likely to make a rebound to the other extreme, and plunge headlong into gross iniquity. II. IF A MAN'S RELIGION IS NOT GENUINE AND HEART-DEEP, IT OFTEN HAPPENS THAT TROUBLES AND CALAMITIES ONLY DRIVE HIM FARTHER AWAY FROM GOD. Do you remember what is written of King Ahaz? It might be written of many a one besides him. "In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord." Yes, with some men the more they suffer the more they sin. Adversity angers them against God. It is well known that times of pestilence, whilst they have brought out an unwonted religious earnestness on the one side, have brought out an unusual amount of wickedness on the other. The plague of London developed the vices of the metropolis to a frightful extent. Men patrolled the streets singing ribald songs beside the dead cart. When a ship is wrecked, and about to go to the bottom, if some fall on their knees and pray, others fly to drink and cursing. Nothing is a truer touchstone of character than the way in which a man treats the chastenings of God. III. AS THE HEART GETS HARDENED IN SIN, THERE IS A CROWING UNWILLINGNESS TO LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF GOD. As soon as a young man begins an evil course, and resolves to take his fill of sinful pleasure, he acquires a hatred of his Bible, and a disinclination to attend the house of God. If he cannot silence God's ministers, he will keep as far as possible from them, and shut his ears against all good counsel. I know a man to whom the sound of the church bells is so hateful, that in the warmest day in summer he will close all his windows, if possible, to keep it out. He was once a very different man, but now the devil has got such possession of him, that he abhors every vestige of religion; and I verily believe that were you to put a Bible into his hand, he would cut it in pieces with his penknife, and pitch it into the fire. If I want to know something of your state of heart, I ask, what value do you put on, and what use do you make of the law of God? (*J. T. Davidson, D.D.*) *The Bible disposed of, what then?*—Were the Bible proved to be quite unworthy of confidence, were it shown to be dotted everywhere with error as thick as a leper with his loathsome scales, what advantage would it be to godless men? I. GOD WOULD STILL REMAIN. The Bible does not make God; it does not even demonstrate the being of God. It assumes Him. Its opening words are, "In the beginning God created." The simplest argument in all the world is that which phrases itself thus: Design supposes a designer. Were I to say that John Milton made *Paradise Lost* by jumbling letters in a bag and tossing them forth, all reasonable men would laugh at me; but this would be no more preposterous than is the allegation that our universe is a fortuitous concourse of atoms. All men know that back of law is the Lawgiver, back of order the Arranger, back of design an Infinite Contriver. But while the world would retain its belief in God, it would, in the absence of the Scriptures, know nothing of His Providence or of His Fatherhood. II. THE SENSE OF SIN WOULD REMAIN. The Bible is not responsible for the sense of sin. If there were no Bible, our consciences would still speak to us. When Prof. Webster was lying in prison awaiting his doom he made formal complaint that he was affronted by his keepers, who shouted at him, "Oh, you bloody man!" and by his fellow-prisoners, who pounded on the walls of his cell, shouting, "Oh, you bloody man!" A watch was set, but no voice was heard; it was his guilty conscience that was crying out against him. It is not the Bible that gives us Ixion on the wheel, or Sisyphus vainly rolling the stone up the mountain-side, or Tantalus up to his lips in the ever-receding waters. No, in any case conscience would remain; but in the absence of revelation we should know no remedy for its sting. III. WERE THE BIBLE DESTROYED, OUR SENSE OF DUTY WOULD STILL REMAIN. The moral law is set forth in the Scriptures in the Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount. The Decalogue, however, was written in the human constitution long before it found expression in Scripture. It is interwoven with the nerves and sinews of the race. The Sermon on the Mount is simply a broad and glorious exposition of the Decalogue. There is nothing new or original here. We are reminded that the Golden Rule itself did not originate with Christ. The ethical system of the Bible is merely an authoritative statement of certain laws which are written in the soul of man. God here places His *imprimatur* on those otherwise anonymous precepts which

the whole world recognises as right. So, were the Bible to vanish, the moral distinctions would remain, and a man would know his duty while, alas! ever sensible of not doing it. IV. THE BIBLE GONE, DEATH WOULD STILL REMAIN; DEATH—AND JUDGMENT FOLLOWING AFTER. It needs no revelation from on high to tell us that, as Abd-el-Kader says, "the black camel kneels at our gate." That admonition is written on the grave-stones that line the journey of our life.

"The air is full of farewells to the dying
And mournings for the dead."

But without the Scriptures we should have no hope of triumph over death. V. THE DREAM OF IMMORTALITY WOULD STILL REMAIN. This is quite independent of Scripture. The Greeks put an obolus upon the tongue of the dead to pay their ferriage across the Styx because there might be a happy land beyond. The Indian chief was buried with his bows and arrows at his side, because, if there should by chance be a happy hunting-ground, he would need them there. Thus immortality has always been a fond dream—a dream only. When Cicero lighted the lamp in the grave of his daughter it was with the thought that possibly her life, though extinguished for a time, might be rekindled. When Socrates put the cup of hemlock to his lips, he said, "I go; whether to perish or to live again I know not." The old fable of the Phoenix expressed the fondest of pagan hopes. No, no, we should not lose the dream but we should lose the certainty, for in the Gospel life and immortality are brought to light. The twilight vanishes, the dream becomes a splendid reality. The Bible is our noonday sun. Its glories are far away from the multitude who will not receive it. There are mysteries, vast and incomprehensible here; but burn the Book, or what is the same, let the world lose its confidence in it, and all that makes life worth living goes from us. But the Bible is in no danger; it has come to stay; it will glorify life and illuminate the valley of death until the last penitent sinner has gone through heaven's gate. Voltaire said that he would pass through the forest of the Scriptures and girdle all its trees so that in a hundred years Christianity would be only a vanishing memory. The hundred years have expired; Voltaire is gone, and "none so poor to do him reverence," but Christianity is still here, and the trees of the Lord are full of sap. The brazier of Jehoiakim is a golden altar, the fumes of which, like frankincense, have gone through all the earth. (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*) *The mutilated Bible*:—1. Consider the object which God has in view in writing His Word and sending His written messages to mankind. This object is most pathetically set forth (ver. 3). That is why God has given us the Bible! Not to bewilder us, not to start us on courses of intellectual speculation, not to tempt our curiosity, not to found rival sects, but to bring us to Himself to obtain forgiveness of iniquity and sin. 2. Man is so unwilling to hear anything unpleasant or disagreeable about himself that he gets into a wrong temper before he actually knows what God's object is. Jehoiakim did not hear the whole roll. Did any man ever destroy the Bible who knew it wholly? The difficulty is in the "three or four leaves." There are men to-day who having heard three or four leaves of Genesis have cut it with the penknife. They cannot get over the six days and the talking serpent, so they cut the roll with the penknife. Or if they begin another book, they are offended by the extraordinary numbers of people killed in war, and the romantic ages of the patriarchs; so they cut the roll with the penknife. Or if they begin elsewhere, they are offended by the descriptions of human nature, its depravity, its helplessness, its horrible sin; and having heard three or four leaves, they cut the roll with the penknife. Now the Bible must be read in its entirety, that all its parts may assume their just proportions and their appropriate colour. 3. Though Jehoiakim cut the roll and cast it into the fire, the words were all rewritten, and the impious king fell under the severe and fatal judgment of God (ver. 30). Men have not destroyed revelation whom they have destroyed the Bible. "The Word of the Lord abideth for ever." The penknife cannot reach its spirit, the fire cannot touch its life. The history of the Bible is one of the proofs of its inspiration. 4. The desire to cut the Bible with the penknife and to cast it into the fire, is quite intelligible because in a sense profoundly natural. The Bible never lures human attention by flattering compliments. What wonder if the leper should break the mirror which shows him his loathsomeness? 5. This desire to mutilate the holy Word shows itself in various ways, some of them apparently innocent, others of them dignified with fine names and claiming attention as the last developments of human progress. (1) Look,

for example, at the use made of the sectarian penknife. (2) Look at the use of the philosophical penknife. The letter is cut down to nothing, and revelation becomes a question of consciousness, so that the inquiry is not so much, What is written? as, What do you feel? From these reflections we may well learn to hold the roll as inviolable, holy, sufficient, final. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The indestructible Book*:—There are thousands of Jehoiakims yet alive who cut the Word of God with their penknives; and my object is to designate a few of them. The first man I shall mention as thus treating the Word of God is the one who receives a part of the Bible, but cuts out portions of it with his penknife, and rejects them. Jehoiakim showed as much indignity toward the scroll when he cut one way as when he cut the other. You might as well behead Moses as to behead Jonah. Yes, I shall take all the Bible or none. No; you shall not rob me of a single word of a single verse of a single chapter of a single book of my Bible. When life, like an ocean, billows up with trouble, and death comes, and our barque is sea-smitten, with halyards cracked, and white sails flying in shreds, like a maniac's grey locks in the wind—then we will want God's Word to steer us off the rocks, and shine like lighthouses through the dark channels of death, and with hands of light beckon our storm-tossed souls into the harbour. In that last hour take from me my pillow, take away all soothing draughts, take away the faces of family and kindred, take away every helping hand and every consoling voice—alone let me die, on the mountain, on a bed of rock, covered only by a sheet of embroidered frost, under the slap of the night-wind, and breathing out my life on the bosom of the wild, wintry blast, rather than in that last hour take from me my Bible. Stand off, then, ye carping, clipping, meddling critics, with your penknives! I can think of only one right way in which the Bible may be divided. A minister went into a house, and saw a Bible on the stand and said, "What a pity that this Bible should be so torn! You do not seem to take much care of it. Half the leaves are gone." Said the man: "This was my mother's Bible; and my brother John wanted it, and I wanted it; and we could not agree about the matter, and so each took a half. My half has been blessed to my soul, and his half has been blessed to his soul." That is the only way that I can think of in which the Word of God may be rightfully cut with a penknife. The next man that I shall mention as following Jehoiakim's example is the infidel who runs his knife through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, and rejects everything. Men strike their knife through this Book, because they say that the light of nature is sufficient. Indeed! Have the fire-worshippers of India, cutting themselves with lancets, until the blood spurts at every pore, found the light of nature sufficient? Has the Borneesian cannibal, gnawing the roasted flesh from human bones, found the light of nature sufficient? No! I call upon the pagodas of superstition, the Brahminic tortures, the infanticide of the Ganges, the bloody wheels of the Juggernaut, to prove the light of nature is not sufficient. A star is beautiful, but it pours no light into the midnight of a sinful soul. The flower is sweet, but it exudes no balm for the heart's wound. All the odours that ever floated from royal conservatory, or princely hanging gardens, give not so much sweetness as is found in one waft from this scriptural mountain of myrrh and frankincense. All the waters that ever leaped in torrent, or foamed in cascade, or fell in summer shower, or hung in morning dew, gave no such coolness to the fevered soul as the smallest drop that ever flashed out from the showering fountains of this Divine Book. The light of nature is not sufficient. Infidels strike their penknife through this Book because they say that it is cruel and indecent. There are things in Ezekiel and Solomon's Song that they don't want read in the families. Ah! if the Bible is so pernicious just show me somebody that has been spoiled by it. Again, they strike their penknife through the Bible because it is full of unexplained mysteries. What, will you not believe anything you cannot explain? Have you finger-nails? You say, "Yes." Explain why, on the tip of your finger, there comes a nail. You cannot tell me. You believe in the law of gravitation; explain it, if you can. I can ask you a hundred questions about your eyes, about your ears, about your face, about your feet, that you cannot answer. And yet you find fault that I cannot answer all the questions you may ask about this Bible. I would not give a farthing for the Bible if I could understand everything in it. I would know that the heights and depths of God's truth were not very great if, with my poor, finite mind, I could reach everything. Again, the infidel strikes his penknife through this Book because he says, if it were God's Book, the whole world would have it. He says that it is not to be supposed that if God had anything

to say to the world He would say it only to the small part of the human race who actually possess the Bible. To this I reply that the fact that only a part of the race receives anything is no ground for believing that God did not bestow it. Who made oranges and bananas? You say, God. I ask, How can that be, when thousands of our race never saw an orange or a banana? If God were going to give such things why did He not give them to all? If all the human race had the same climate, the same harvests, the same health, the same advantages, then you might by analogy argue that if He had a Bible at all He would give it to the whole race at the same time. Again, the infidel strikes his penknife through the Book by saying: "You have no right to make the Bible so prominent, because there are other books that have in them great beauty and value." There are grand things in books professing no more than human intelligence. The heathen Bible of the Persians says: "The heavens are a point from the pen of God's perfection." "The world is a bud from the bower of His beauty." "The sun is a spark from the light of His wisdom." "The sky is a bubble on the sea of His power." Beautiful! Confucius taught kindness to enemies; the Shaster has great affluence of imagery; the Veda of the Brahmins has ennobling sentiment; but what have you proved by all this? Simply that the Author of the Bible was as wise as all the great men that have ever lived put together; because, after you have gone through all lands, and all ages, and all literatures, and after you have heaped everything excellent together and boiled it down, you have found in all that realm of all the ages but a portion of the wisdom that you find in this one Book. Take it into your heart! Take it into your house! Take it into your shop! Take it into your store! Though you may seem to get along quite well without this Book in your days of prosperity, there will come a time to us all when our only consolation will be this blessed Gospel. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *The written Word*.—Jeremiah continued to prophesy close up to the time of the first captivity. The days were evil, the cup of the nation's iniquity was filling rapidly, as rapidly, indeed, as the cup of its predicted desolation and sorrow, yet the people discerned not the signs of the times. I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH LED TO THE PREPARATION OF THIS ROLL. Jeremiah had now been a preacher to the people for three-and-twenty years, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and warning the nation "every one night and day with tears." The effect of these spoken addresses, however, had been utterly disappointing; under Divine guidance he must now have recourse to another expedient. He must prepare a summary of all his sermons, revive upon the minds of the people the warnings which seemed to have passed away; must enable them to read, each in the solitude of his secret chamber, words which, as heard with the outward ears, had neither moved them to repentance nor kindled in them any sense of alarm. "And the word came unto Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spake unto thee, from the days of Josiah, even unto this day." It is worthy your noting how frequently in the Old Testament the Almighty gives instructions to have His words committed to writing; to Habakkuk it is said, "Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables." The commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai must be preserved on two tables of testimony,—tables of stone, written with the finger of God; and the commission given to Ezekiel shall be contained in "the roll of a book, written within and without." Of all this, no doubt the design is to make us appreciate the value of a written revelation, of a written rule of faith, of a written charter of salvation, of a written and inspired record of the mind and will of God. In a matter so vital to man's happiness, God would not leave us at the mercy of man's memories—to the fidelity with which oral traditions might be handed down. But let us see what this history teaches us is the avowed purpose of the Most High in giving us this written revelation. "Write all these words, for it may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them"; and the same thought is repeated in the seventh verse, where Baruch is instructed to go and read the writing to the assembled people. "It may be, they will present their supplication before the Lord, and will return every one from his evil way." But how striking is this language on the part of Almighty God. "It may be" that such and such effects will follow on the use of certain means. In the infinite prescience of the everlasting mind we know there can be no such thing as a "may be"; gathering into its sweep as that mind does the issues of all being, chance, time, space, every circumstance with regard to every soul, is an inevitable must be.

While still further, with regard to this very people of whom it is said, "It may be that they will turn," we know it was a settled fact, in the order of the Divine omniscience, that they would not turn, but would "deal very treacherously." Too humble we cannot be in dealing with those apparently conflicting difficulties of moral state, nor too thankful either. They teach us that in relation to the acts and purposes of an infinite mind there are things which are too high for us; that however much two statements may seem to cross each other, if they are clearly revealed we must accept both. "An intellect to which nothing would be paradoxical," says Bishop Horsley, "would be an infinite intellect." It is a bad way of reconciling two Scripture doctrines to ignore or overlook or hide under a bushel one of them. The denial of the doctrine of the Divine predestination, of a knowledge on the part of God of how you or I shall act at any given moment of our future history, is simple atheism; the dethronement of God from the rule of the universe, and a passing of the sceptre to the hands of a thousand wild contingencies, that each may contend for it as it will. And yet with all this "must be" in the Divine purposes, room should be left for the "may be" in the human volition and acts. I bid you take a practical example. Look at the apostle Paul and his companions in the storm. All the men in that ship were to be saved; he knew that, as an absolute purpose of God, which nothing could prevent. It was "a must be"; but the sailors did not believe in this assurance. Hope was gone, the ship must be abandoned. "Down with the boats instantly, and let each for himself take his chance of deliverance." Now, how did Paul act, with his foreknowledge that all the passengers should be saved? Did he sit quietly? Just the reverse; with all the earnestness and solemnity of one who felt that on the assistance of these sailors he and all that sailed with him were dependent for their life, he cried out, "Except these abide in the ship ye cannot be saved." I have told you that there shall be no loss of any man's life among us, and I believe that it shall be even as it was told. He seems to add, God's predestinations are accomplished not by the superseding of human efforts, but by the employment of them; not by forcing our moral liberty, but in harmony therewith. The end is fixed; but for the fulfilment of it my earnestness is necessary, your submission to my directions is necessary; the labour and skill of these seamen to lighten the ship, to take up the anchor, to loose the rudder-bands, to hoist up the mainsail to the wind are necessary. There is a sense in which it "must be" that you shall be saved, and there is a sense in which it may be that you shall perish. You have to do, not with the certainty, but with the contingency, and it hangs upon this, "Except these abide in the ship." And it is under like limitations that God uses the expression, "it may be," in regard to the effect which the writings of Jeremiah might have upon the minds of those who should read them,—whether the Jews or ourselves. But, in our case, the putting of the Bible into our hands is, so to speak, a moral experiment. To us, His ministering servants, God says, "Here is a book fitted by the nature of its discoveries to commend itself to every man's conscience; calculated by its discoveries of a Saviour's love, and power, and tenderness, to win the most hardened heart to repentance, and accompanied, moreover, with such piercing and persuasive energy, through the influences of the Spirit, that only on the supposition of the most resolved obduracy and pride can any conscience remain unconvinced of its guilt, or any sinner continue in the error of his ways. I, in My infinite foresight, may know that in the case of this man, or of that, the message will fail, but I will have the experiment tried with all. 'Thou shalt speak My words unto them, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear.' You must preach upon contingencies; 'Take thee a roll of a book, 'it may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil that I purpose to do unto them.' But let us look at this 'may be'—this merciful contingency that God, in condescension to our forms of thought, is pleased to speak of. These possible results, which it is in the heart of God to do, should be produced by our taking the Book of Scripture into our hands. First, God hopes thereby to excite in us a holy fear of His just displeasure—"It may be that they will hear all the evil that I purpose to do unto them." Yes, will hear it and believe in it—will not suppose that I speak parables, will not think that I have just menaced merely to humble, or have drawn pictures of calamity only to terrify, but will be persuaded of a truth that if My message be not accepted these results will follow. I will leave men to themselves, I will withdraw from them the influences of My Holy Spirit, I will bid the great High Priest offer up no more prayers for them, I will even suffer them to delude themselves into a false peace. Oh! ye who

despise the Word, will ye hear all the evil which God purposes to do unto you? But see, God has better hope of His work. He trusts it may produce amendment of life, accompanied with earnest desires for forgiveness—"It may be that they may return every man from his evil way, that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin." Do not fail to note here the import of that expression. "That I may forgive." It touches upon another of God's deep things, namely, upon what God is able to do, what are the limits imposed upon Him by the nature of His own attributes, upon some things which cannot be done by Him, to whom, nevertheless, we are accustomed to say that "all things are possible." Sins of longest life I can forgive, and sins of the blackest dye; I can forgive infirmity, forgive years of despised grace and despised opportunity, but it is beyond the power of My holy nature, beyond the reach of the great propitiation, to forgive where there is no returning, where the heart is still in love with evil, enslaved under the uncast-off yoke of sin. "It may be that they may return, that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin." I must note one other of these contingent results which God hopes for through His written Word, put by the Spirit into the mouth of Jeremiah; namely, that it will set the people upon much earnest prayer. "It may be," he says to Baruch, in the seventh verse, "that they will present their supplications before the Lord, and will return every one from his evil way." Very beautifully does this come in, for none of the other results were to be expected without this; the sense of spiritual danger, the heart to turn from sin, the desire for experimental assurance of the Divine forgiveness, are, it is true, not things that we could ever obtain by ourselves, but are the gifts of God, promised to earnest and persevering prayer. You are told to pray, told that it is the will of God that you should pray. There you have something; use that, and then God will give more. You pray that you may know how to pray; if the heart so turned to God be not yours, yet you desire that you may have that heart, and all hinges upon your honest use of God's kind contingencies. This merciful experiment He is making with you as to the use of His written Word, "it may be they will present their supplications before the Lord." If they do, the next step will follow, "they will return every one from his evil way." Such is the design of a gracious God, in ordering Jeremiah to prepare the roll; such were His ends in restoring it after it was destroyed, and presenting it, with all its subsequent enrichments, for the use of us and of our children unto this day. II. THE ROLL DESTROYED. Jeremiah, as we learn from the narrative, was at this time under restraint; not in prison, where he was not placed until afterwards, but only forbidden by Jehoiakim to exercise his prophetic functions, or even to be present at the services of the temple. Accordingly he gives it in charge to Baruch, a man who had taken all the Lord's words in his mouth, to go up and recite all the words of the Lord in the ears of the people who would assemble in the Lord's house on the fast day. Whether there was no congregation assembled, or in obedience to some unrecorded instruction, the first reading of the roll seems to have taken place in the hearing of a single person only, in one of the side courts in the entrance of the gates of the Lord's house. This noble hearer was Michaiah, the son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, the scribe, who was so arrested by the words he had heard that he lost no time in going to tell them, as well as he could remember, to the princes at the time resident in the court of Jehoiakim. Interested in this second-hand recital, the princes thought they should like to hear for themselves, and they accordingly sent for Baruch to the palace, that they might have a private hearing of the words of this roll. And here it concerns us nearly, to watch what effect the reading of this roll had upon the princes. Well, in the first instance, it produced in the minds of these princes sentiments of deep emotion. "It came to pass, when they had heard all the words, they were afraid, both one and the other, and said unto Baruch, We will surely tell the king all these words." Easily can we conceive how encouraged Baruch would be by this first fruit of a faithful message; he had stirred up the dormant activities of conscience; the arrows of conviction were rankling sharply in the soul, a sudden fear had evidently taken hold of the men,—"they trembled." For this, as we know, is the sequel: the princes tell the matter to the king, the king sends for the book, commands one of his servants to read out of it, and is so irritated at its disclosures, that at the end of the third or fourth leaf he takes the roll from the hand of Jehudi, and having cut it up to pieces that no part of it might be recovered, waits with awful deliberation until all the roll is consumed in the fire on the hearth. The marvel of the sacred writer seems to be less at the burning than at what followed the burning, or rather

at what did not follow the blasphemous hardihood that could go so far and not tremble at the mischief itself had wrought, "yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king nor any of his servants that heard all these words." It is just here that an important practical lesson comes in for us, for it tells us what despised religious conviction may lead to; what a soul-hardening tendency there is in warnings which we have felt once, and felt keenly too, but which we resolved afterwards we would put aside and try to forget all about; and the danger is the same to this day. Show me a man who has never been the subject of one serious or solemn thought, whom the Word, whether read or preached, has never penetrated with a sense of sin or danger, and of that man, I say, I have hope. The arrow is yet on the wing, it may pierce him yet. But when we come to the case of a man who, like Judah's princes, has trembled under the power of the Word, or who, like Jehoiakim himself, has felt it to be so pointedly addressed to his own heart that he could bear its presence no longer, then I say there is room for nothing but the most distressing apprehension, and fearful standings in doubt. Ay! better had it been for Elnathan, and Delaiah, and Gemariah never to have seen that roll at which their consciences trembled, than having seen it and having trembled at it, to have relapsed into their former indifference, and even to stand by whilst its dishonoured pages were blazing on the hearth.

III. THE ROLL RESTORED AND REPLENISHED WITH MORE AWFUL JUDGMENTS. Who ever hardened his heart against God and prospered? Who ever kicked against the pricks of an accusing conscience and did not live to mourn in bitterness his folly? The anger of Jehoiakim against the roll was great, because it told him that the king of Babylon should certainly come and destroy the land. And so, like the foolish Brahmin who crushed the microscope with a stone because it showed him insects in his food, he thought to be revenged on the roll by burning it in the fire. Well, what are the consequences? Why, the new roll Jeremiah was to write contained not only the former things, but some worse, even the utter ruin of the royal house, the condemnation of Jehoiakim's posterity to captivity and shame, and the exposure of his own body to the burial of an ass, as an eternal monument of God's displeasure against all who despised the warnings of His written Word. Not only was Jeremiah to rewrite all the words of the Book which had been burned in the fire, but, says the sacred historian, "There were added besides unto them many like words." And what is the great practical lesson I wish you to derive from this part of the history? That the Word of God is imperishable. A singular and wonderful Providence, as we all know, has watched over that Word. Every jot and tittle shall have its complete fulfilment, for indeed there is something beyond the mere writing. Oh, suffer me to remind you of its double aspect, its double lesson, its double tendency, either to strengthen the mind and hopes of the righteous, or to cover with overwhelming hopelessness the prospects of the ungodly and the sinner. Let me say a word first to those who feel that they do not belong to Christ, have no part in the covenant, know well enough they are not washed, not sanctified, not justified by the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God. Must I not in all faithfulness say to them, even as Baruch would have said to Jehoiakim when he threw the strips and shreds of heavenly truth into the flame, "Be thou well assured that all the words written in this roll shall come to pass, yea, and there shall be added unto them many like words"? The neglect of the preached Word can but aggravate the condemnation. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away." More grateful, however, is it to the minister of the Gospel of love and peace to approach this imperishableness of the written Word from its other side, and see what are the promises to them that fear God. And to them I say, even to all that are in Christ Jesus, to all that have found peace, this unfailing certainty of all that God hath written in His Word is like a footing on the everlasting rock. Yes, it is yours to live in a world of change, changes in nature, changes in Providence, changes in the Church of God, changes in the rolling seasons, changes in your own frames and feelings, and desires and spiritual experiences; and what protection and refuge against your own inconsistency, your own fluctuations of purpose, and will, and power, is it to be able to fall back on the unchanging, eternal, indefeasible Word of promise of the Most High God, of Jesus "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." (*D. Moore, M.A.*)

Bible-burning.—We read in the first lesson this morning the earliest instance of Bible-burning on record, and also the uselessness of the experiment. On this page of the Bible we have two extremes brought into juxtaposition—there is the extreme of utter obedience, as illustrated by the Rechabites, in the preceding chapter, and the

extreme of disobedience, recorded here. Between these two cases lies the life conduct of the men and women of our generation. Few are so obedient as to follow out to the very letter the duties enjoined on us by God's holy Word. We like to shirk the more disagreeable, and to modify others so as to justify a partial obedience: and yet, though we may try to find loopholes through which to escape distasteful duties, I question much whether any would go to the extreme of delinquency, represented by Jehoiakim's conduct in burning the Book itself. Whether the teachings of the Book are followed out as they should be, or disregarded, people generally admit their duty to obey and yield honour and respect to the Book itself, if not from proper motives, then from a superstitious, unreasoning veneration. The holy Bible ought to be treated by us with respect at least; the Book ought not to be treated as any other book, but should occupy a place peculiarly its own, and that because it is the gift of God to man, the gift which shows us the way of salvation, which tells us of God's relationship to us as our Father, which tells the story of a Saviour's love and compassion. Jehoiakim is a beacon to us to warn us of the danger of hardening our hearts and resisting holy influences. Sins persisted in bring sorrow and reverses, and the effect of reverses is either to bring us to God or to drive us far away from Him into the outer darkness of misery and ruin. Unless the heart is illuminated by the light of true religion, man will rebel when God chastens; misfortunes will but drive him into evil excesses, and, instead of quickening within his breast the sense of sin and inciting to repentance, he will go from bad to worse, he will be unwilling to hear the voice of God, will shut his eyes to his danger, and will, in effect, dismiss those whose duty it is to recall him to his better self, with the old answer of Felix to Paul. (*M. F. Maturin, M.A.*)

Rejected blessings.—Time is the material of our lives, but do not those people cut it with a penknife, and cast it into the fire, who talk of "killing time," and put their words into practice? But if it perishes it is recorded, and an hour will come when they would give all that they possess for a moment of it. Youth is one of the precious opportunities of life—rich in blessings if we choose to make it so, but having in it the materials of undying remorse if we cut it with a penknife, and cast it into the fire. Health is another of God's most precious gifts which is too often cut with a penknife and thrown into the fire of passionate sin. "Never treat money affairs with levity—money is character." This is a wise precept, for money is a power lent to us by God, not for our own use only, but for the good of others. There is then such a thing as conscientious money-spending, and it is very sinful to cut money, so to speak, with a penknife and cast it into the fire. If we are to be saved, we must use the means of salvation which God gives to us as He gave this roll of a book to Jehoiakim. Above all, we must not treat with contempt the gracious invitations of our Saviour to come unto Him. If we despise or neglect so great salvation, we shall kill our souls. No doubt Jehoiakim fancied when he burned the roll upon which God's threatenings against his sins were written, that these would somehow be prevented from taking effect. But the truth of God is not so easily destroyed. Jeremiah caused another and a longer roll to be written. From this we may learn the often-forgotten fact that the truth of God does not depend upon men. They may believe or they may not believe, but though this matters to themselves it cannot destroy truth. It is well to remember this fact, which, when stated, seems so obvious, for many men have a contemptuous, patronising way of talking about religion as if it would perish if they ceased to believe it. And as it is with truth, so is it with our responsibilities. We do not get rid of them by simply ignoring them and treating them with contempt. (*E. J. Hardy, M.A.*)

Jehoiakim's penknife.—A homely writer says, "Jehoiakim's patent has expired, and a whole army of followers of his are fond of cutting at God's Word." God gives very sharp, earnest, forcible warnings. He gives them in Scripture; He gives them in our daily lives. Do not let us handle Jehoiakim's penknife to pare down the long dark columns of warning against sin and heedlessness and godlessness, which are written in His book. Shall I tell you how this absurd childish folly comes about? It comes of small pieces of heedlessness, gentle warnings not heeded, then stronger ones are sent, and they too are soon tossed aside. I cannot believe that Jehoiakim became such a downright fighter against God by any sudden visitation; he probably went on from smaller neglects to greater; from neglects to rejections; from rejections to defiance, till at last he thought as little of cutting God's Word into fragments, as he once would have thought of putting off a serious thought to a more convenient season. (*J. Kempthorne, M.A.*)

Burning the roll.—I remember, when on a mission, coming down

from a pulpit where I had been pleading with souls, and going up to a respectably dressed man, one on whom my eye had rested more than once while preaching. I saw the tear was in his eye; I knew that the Word had gone home to his heart. I entreated him then and there to give himself up to the Lord. I daresay I talked with him for a quarter of an hour, till at last I found he too seemed to burn the roll. He began by listening to me politely and civilly, but as I went on earnestly pleading with him, pressing him to surrender himself to God, I saw he was resisting and hardening his heart, till at last he said something to the effect that he wished I would not talk to him any more. So after offering a short prayer I had to withdraw. A few weeks after, that man was struck on the head in a drunken broil, and never had time to say, "God save my soul." His day of grace ended in that church, he too had burned the roll. (*W. Hay Aitken, M.A.*) *Unbelief does not alter facts*:—Jehoiakim made the other mistake of thinking that he had removed the danger when he had destroyed the roll that told of it. He could burn the parchment, but did that arrest the tramp of Nebuchadnezzar's army? Putting out the lighthouse lamps does not blow up the reef. Its merciless fangs are as sharp as ever, and all the more surely fatal because they are hid in the darkness. We do not alter facts by refusing to believe them, or to attend to the statement of them. As Bishop Butler says, "Things are as they are," and burning Jeremiah's roll changed nothing. Only it was the throwing away of one more possibility of escape, and made the king a more hopeless victim of the fierce conqueror. (*A. Macdaren.*) *Jehoiakim's wickedness*:—We have before us one of the most tragic acts of wickedness recorded in the history of the kings of Judah. It is in striking contrast with the act of the good King Josiah (2 Chron. xxxiv. 15-33), who, when the lost book of the law was found, humbled himself and gave instant heed to its warnings and precepts; all the more so because the good king was father of this wicked and defiant one. Truly grace does not run in the blood. The chapter before us relates how Jeremiah had written out a summary of the prophecies concerning the impending captivity, and caused it to be read to the people assembled at a great and special fast in the Temple, and afterward to the princes in private, and finally to the king (vers. 1-19). The object of the special message was one of compassion and pity on the part of Jehovah (vers. 3, 7). It is wonderful how, in the midst of His wrath, God always remembers mercy. The reading of the prophecy to the people evidently made a deep impression, for the news of it was carried to the princes, who sent for Baruch and had him read it to them. They in turn were deeply affected, and said it must be brought before the king. They, however, knew his tyrannical temper, and took two precautions. First, after hearing from Baruch's lips how he came to write this prophecy of woe, they warned him to go with Jeremiah, and both to secrete themselves from the wrath of the king; then they laid the writing up in the house of the scribe (vers. 15-19), and lastly went in to report the matter to the king. These princes seemed favourable to the prophet and to the Word of God, but they feared the king. An evil king can suppress the good that is in his people and prevent a whole nation from repentance or reformation. Men in authority have great privilege, but also great responsibility. I. THE WORD OF GOD DESTROYED. The burden of the word of Jeremiah, which was a summary of all his prophecies on this point, was that Judah should be carried away captive by the King of Babylon (ver. 29). This was not the first warning, but the gathering up of all past threats; it was God's final word to the king and the people. As it was read, he ordered it bit by bit to be cut away and thrown into the fire until all was consumed. In this action the following points may be noted—1. The contempt of the king. The princes had put the writing away in the house of the scribe (ver. 20) before they went in to the king. This was a testimony of their respect for a message sent by a prophet of the Lord, and of their fear for its safety. The king, however, had no such feelings of reverence for God's Word. He did not even dignify the document by sending a proper official to bring it; but showed his contempt by telling a page or under-secretary to fetch it. This act was a suggestive prelude to what followed afterward. The Bible, of all books, is entitled to the place of highest honour, and it is a bad sign when this due respect ceases to be manifest. 2. The rage of the king. As the book was being read, the king overlooked the message, which undoubtedly was incorporated, that God hoped that the reading of it might induce them to turn from their sins and claim His promised mercy. Many people, who declaim against what they call the hard and bitter denunciation of sin and of the judgments

of God, seem persistently to forget that the Book which condemns sinners to death and hell is mostly taken up with earnest and loving entreaties to repentance, with promises of life and salvation. God was beyond his reach, but His Word being within his grasp, he poured out his wrath against that. He ordered it to be cut to pieces and burned with fire. This was not a hasty and impulsive action on the part of the king, but deliberate and premeditated. He persevered in his evil work, notwithstanding the remonstrances of his princes. He was a "proud and haughty scorner, who dealt in proud wrath" (Prov. xxi. 24). There are times when remonstrance ceases to be wise, and a wilful sinner must be given up to his chosen way. The reason for his wrath was the evil tidings which the prophet's words brought him. Yet how foolish was his wrath—how impotent his rage! For what did he destroy? Only the parchment on which the Word of God was written; not the Word of God itself. It is related of a heathen princess of hideous countenance, that on looking into a mirror which a missionary had, and seeing her ugliness, she destroyed the glass in rage, and ordered that no more mirrors should be brought into her kingdom. I once saw a man in a railway carriage to whom a leaf of the New Testament had been given, crumple it up in his hand, fling it on the floor, spit on it, and grind it under his heel. This action was as ridiculous as it was impotent. The rage of the hater of God's Word was evoked, but the Word of God was not destroyed. 3. The attitude of the witnesses. There were two classes of witnesses present. (1) The king's servants; his pages and immediate attendants. "Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king nor any of his servants that heard all these words." This implies that the message not only failed to bring about any repentance or desire that the evils threatened might be averted (compare 2 Chron. xxxiv. 19), but that the servants were not even horrified at the action of the king in ordering the writing to be destroyed. They became parties to the act of the king in his wilful unbelief, in his contempt and deliberate defiance of Jehovah. When we join ourselves either in service or companionship with unbelieving men, we must be prepared either to go with them or break from them, when a crisis comes by reason of God's Word. We may serve an ungodly king, like Daniel, if we have the courage to take God's part when occasion comes, or we may have social and business relations with unbelievers, if we are prepared to act in a like loyal manner. But how often a timid Christian finds himself overborne by his wicked companions when they warm themselves at their fire, as with Peter in the High Priest's palace. (2) On the other hand, there were three princes present who "made intercession to the king, that he would not burn the roll; but he would not hear them." They had, however, cleared their skirts and washed their souls from the iniquity. Are we as faithful in all such like emergencies? 4. The baffled king. Having destroyed the writing, the king began to reflect that he had not avoided God's Word or put himself beyond the further reach of it, so long as the scribe and the prophet were at large. He therefore sent to have them arrested. Probably he contemplated their murder, thinking thus he would get rid of the Word. This is an old method with the haters of God. "But the Lord hid them." Let us suppose he had succeeded in getting hold of the prophet and had killed him; would he next seek to destroy God too? This would be the logical course. How men forget that when they have destroyed the outward revelation they have not destroyed the Word of God; and when they have killed the prophets they have not baffled the Spirit by whom the prophets speak. God hid His prophet and His scribe. Man is immortal till God has no further need of him. Let all God's witnesses know of a truth that God can deliver His servants from any manifestation of the wrath of man, if it is best for them and for His cause; and let them know when He does not deliver, it is neither for want of love, faithfulness, nor power, but because all round it is best that they should seal their testimony with suffering or death. II. THE INDESTRUCTIBLE WORD. The facts in this incident bring out clearly the truth, that man's hatred and rage against God's Word are as impotent as is the broken wave that falls back in spray from the rock against which it has spent itself. In this conflict of man against God's message, we see that it is neither a book nor a man against which the enemies of Christ fight. God can reproduce His Word, either by the same prophet, as He did in this case, or by another. Before the world can get rid of the Gospel it must kill all the believers in the world, and then they must not be too sure that God has not hidden His Word as He hid His prophet, to come forth unexpectedly, as the

law came forth in the time of Josiah. Millions of Bibles may be destroyed, and the preachers and witnesses of the Word burned and put to the sword, but it only serves to both increase the Word of God and multiply the witnesses. When will the world learn that they cannot fight against God? Look only at the impotence of men in this conflict in the past. One Herod destroyed the little children, but God hid His Christ; another Herod beheaded John the Baptist, but failed utterly to destroy his testimony. The world crucified Christ; but God raised Him from the dead. The world imprisoned the apostles, stoned Stephen, put James to the sword, persecuted the young Church, but this only served to increase the number of believers and multiply the revelation. Paul wrote more Epistles while in prison than he would have if he had been free. John wrote the Revelation while he was exiled for the Word of God. "The Word of God cannot be broken," or defeated,—as this foolish and wicked king found out. Several points more may be noted in connection with this latter half of our study.

1. God takes note of our treatment of His Word. It is evident that the eyes of the Lord were upon the king while he was burning the roll, from the fact that, immediately afterward, He commissioned Jeremiah to rewrite it.
2. The Word rewritten. "Not one jot or tittle" of God's Word shall pass away till all be fulfilled. What was the king advantaged by his work? What are any of us advantaged by our unbelief? Suppose we say, "I do not believe God's Word," will that alter the fact that it will be carried out to the letter? Suppose, instead of destroying God's Word, we keep it closed, never look into it and never go where it is preached, or, reading and hearing, do not heed it; will that prevent it from being fulfilled? Shall our unbelief make God's Word to a lie? Did the unbelief of the antediluvians prevent the flood? 3. More words added. In the first message God had simply told the king that he and the people would be carried away captive, but now He adds more, saying that for this act of wickedness he himself should be deprived of a direct heir, and his body should be cast out and exposed to the heat of the day and the frost of the night. He would not only bring upon the men of Judah all that He had first declared, but would add an especial punishment to the king. Cumulative unbelief brings cumulative punishment. "With the burial of an ass shall he be buried; dragged and cast out far from the gates of Jerusalem," and none shall mourn for him, either as brother, or kindred, or king (xxii. 19). To mutilate the Word of God, either by adding to it or destroying it, is to bring special additional plagues and sufferings upon the transgressor (Rev. xxii. 18, 19). Let us learn this solemn lesson in connection with the Word of God. His Word is eternal; it can neither be bound nor broken; that it will not cease in the world until all that is written therein be fulfilled. All the unbelief, neglect, and rage against it are utterly futile (Isa. xl. 6-8). (*G. F. Pentecost.*)

The story of a penknife.—I. JEHOIAKIM'S USE OR MISUSE OF THE PENKNIFE. Let us talk a little about this famous penknife. In itself it was a very insignificant article. Very unlike was it to its namesakes of to-day, which contain so many other things beside the knife blades that one feels as if one were carrying about an engineer's tool bag and a portable carpenter's shop. The knife Jehoiakim used was a rough specimen of workmanship, doubtless, even though, as it belonged to the king's confidential secretary, it is likely to have been the very best of its kind. Probably it was a straight bit of metal thickened at one end for a handle, flattened and sharpened for a blade at the other end. A pocket-knife it was not, being carried in the oblong writing-case or box along with the ink horn and reed pen. That rough bit of bladed iron was the instrument of the king's spiritual suicide.

II. THE MEANING OF JEHOIAKIM'S CONDUCT. 1. He had formed a resolution against God. The message of the roll asserts the Divine authority over Jehoiakim and his kingdom. He would not permit such interference. He would manage his own affairs. How bright a day was it for some of us when we resolved that we would serve God! But what a black day it must be when the decision is taken that God shall *not* be served. That was what Jehoiakim meant. He doomed himself henceforward to follow his own will. 2. This resolution was avowed by a public act. Among our red-letter days, if the day of decision for Christ comes first, the day of professing Christ comes next in importance. As days are reckoned in heaven, that would be the exact order. But what a terrible thing to express the opposite decision! It may be quickly and easily done—by the tone of a laugh. Jehoiakim's courtiers would all know, as well as if he had said the words, punctuating each word with a slash of the penknife at the

manuscript. "I will not serve God." 3. The decision and profession were impatient and hasty. The entire roll was God's message to the king. Only three or four columns—a very small portion comparatively, was read before the whole was destroyed. To decide against God without hearing Him out, is a madman's act. "Let our minds be open a while longer." Jehoiakim had committed himself, and all the greater part of his people. 4. This hasty action was an insult to God. To tear up a letter unread or in public—and Jehoiakim did both—can have but one meaning. "This letter ought never to have been written." But fancy acting like this towards God, and saying to your Maker, "You have no business to interfere with me!"

III. THE USE OF THE PENKNIFE BY IMITATORS OF JEHOIAKIM IN OTHER TIMES. In many ways it is possible to insult Almighty God by professing a hasty, half-conscious decision that we will let Him manage our life. The penknife is still at work in various ways.

I. One favourite kind of penknife is an insult or injury to God's messenger. God's message is often represented by the man who brings it, and pulling the servant to pieces, in one way or another, is a common expression of revolt against God. Herod's penknife was the sharp sword of his executioner, putting an end to the life of the prophet who had become an incarnate rebuke. Cruelty is not always necessary. A passing slight is quite enough. 2. Similar results may be effected by staying away from a meeting, or severing oneself from a society or class, breaking off an acquaintance with an earnest Christian, and so on. The Bible class is getting rather "warm," as you call it. Conversions are frequent, and it will be your turn soon. So you absent yourself. 3. A more or less sincere profession of scepticism will serve the purpose well. Are there some here ready to decide hastily against God and heaven? Have you listened to the entire message which, in various ways, God has spoken? Have some of us used the penknife in days gone by? Has the message of the Saviour no power to affect us now, because of certain action of ours in the past, which has torn up, as it were, the communication between God and ourselves? Are we on this account conscious of no desire or inclination to be better than we are? Let us humbly entreat the Lord we have insulted to speak again. Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth. No, I am not Thy servant; but I fain would be; nor am I sure that I can hear. I destroyed my hearing by my own act; but oh, for the sake of the dear Saviour, who bade the Gospel be preached to every creature, speak again, Lord, and make me listen. (*W. Carey Sage, M.A.*)

A fool and his penknife:—All things were hastening to a general clash and ruin unless they speedily mended their ways; and the king and his flatterers were living, as such gentry do, in a fools' paradise. Jeremiah saw it with the seer's illumined eyes. It came to him as the Word of the Lord, and as the Word of the Lord he wrote it down on a roll of parchment. The roll was brought to the king, as he sat enthroned in one of his palaces, with his courtly parasites and sycophants around him. It contained no flattery. It was a black picture of the king's misdoings, and the terrible consequences which some near morrow would bring. The royal sinner did not like it. What sinner does, whether he be king or beggar? He did not want to think about to-morrow. No man on the highway to destruction does.

I. NOW THAT PICTURE OF THE KING WITH THE PENKNIFE IS OFTEN REPEATED IN VARIOUS WAYS. The Bible has been so often attacked by that instrument that if it were not the indestructible Word and work of God it would long since have disappeared. People have always been so busy cutting out what they did not believe, or what they did not like, that really it is only by a perpetual miracle that there is any of it left. I thank God that I have still my Bible, and believe in it in spite of all the cutting and paring down that has been done. Somehow it stands the fire and comes out unharmed, no matter what furnace you pass it through. Critics have their day, and Jehoiakims do their fooling and die, but the Word of the Lord endureth for ever.

II. I AM AFRAID WE ALL KEEP THAT INSTRUMENT FOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS, AND USE IT WHEN WE DO NOT WISH TO FACE AN INCONVENIENT OR UNWELCOME TRUTH. Men who profess the greatest reverence for the Bible sometimes manage to put out parts which do not harmonise with their conduct and views. There are our good friends who admire, honour, revere, and love Christ as the highest man, but stop short of worshipping Him as Divine. It must surely be a difficult thing for them to read the New Testament without the penknife.

III. I FEAR WE ARE ALL SINNERS, EITHER WITH PENKNIFE OR THE PASTE. We often cut out moral precepts and commandments if they do not quite accord with our conduct.

Most of us use the knife on those many words of Jesus and His apostles which warn us against Mammon worship and covetousness and the love of money, and tell us not to pay all our devotions to the people who have it. It makes our conscience easier if we can somehow get these texts put out. Some people do not always like the Fourth Commandment and kindred injunctions which speak to us about honouring father and mother and reverencing the hoary head. "That is quite antiquated prejudice, and out of date," they say; "let the penknife deal with it." There are people who talk far too freely, and not always too truthfully, discussing the faults of friends, and passing on mischievous scandal. I read them what Jesus said: "For every idle word you shall give account." "Oh! is that there?" they say. "I do not believe it; lend me a penknife." And there are Christian people who find it desperately hard to forgive; it is as hard as to get a camel through the eye of a needle. They will keep a grudge and maintain a silent quarrel with a fellow-Christian for years. I open the book for them and read: "If thy brother offend thee seventy times, and seventy times repent, thou shalt forgive him," &c. "Be ye kind, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any." And they stop me and say, "These things are not in my Bible; I have cut them all out." And there are all those sayings of the Master and His apostles about cheerfulness, gladness, thankfulness—"Be of good cheer; in all things give thanks; be content with such things as ye have; rejoice always, and again I say rejoice." They are the brightest and pleasantest sunshine in the Bible; but some of us use the penknife on them every day. We should all be better Christians if we could just take the Book as it is, and not be always forgetting or putting out the parts we least like. But let me not forget to say that the penknife is used far more constantly, and more in Jehoiakim's fashion, by those who are not Christians at all, by those who are living wholly irreligious lives. Away with all the warnings, threatenings, counsels, and invitations which stand in the way of our desires. "The soul that sinneth it shall die." "The wages of sin is death." "For all these things God will surely bring thee into judgment." "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." Cut away the roll; burn it; let us forget the words; out of mind is out of existence; the day of reckoning will never come. But it does come, nevertheless! The inevitable hour creeps on; the debt stands though you tear the bill in two and burn both halves. You cannot burn God's ledger in which all the accounts are kept. You will have to pay that bill unless, through faith and repentance and the merits of Jesus, it is all forgiven. (*J. G. Greenough, M.A.*) *The indestructible Word*.—I. EYES OPENED TO SEE. There was a vast difference between Baruch, whose heart was in perfect sympathy with Jeremiah, and Jehudi or the princes. But there was almost as much between the faithful scribe and the heaven-illuminated prophet. The one could only write as the words streamed from those burning lips; he saw nothing, he realised nothing; to him the walls of the chamber were the utmost bound of vision; whilst the other beheld the whole landscape of truth outspread before him, the rocks and shoals on the margin of the ocean, the inrolling storm-billows tipped with angry foam, the gathering clouds, the ship straining in every timber and driving sheer on the shore. This was the work of the Spirit who inspired him, and whose special function it was to open the eye of the seers of the old time to the great facts of the unseen and eternal world, which were shortly to be reduplicated in the world of the temporal and visible. To speak what he knew, and to testify what he had seen—such was the mission of the prophet. In our case there is no likelihood of this. Yet men may be seers still. Two men may sit together side by side. The veil of sense may hang darkly before the one, whilst for the other it is rent in twain from the top to the bottom. Happy are they the eyes of whose heart are opened, to know what is the hope of His calling, what the riches of His inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of His power toward them that believe. It is very important that all Christians should be alive to and possess this power of vision. It is deeper than intellectual, since it is spiritual; it is not the result of reasoning or learning, but of intuition; it cannot be acquired in the school of earthly science, but is the gift of Him who alone can open the eyes of the blind, and remove the films of earthliness that shut out the eternal and unseen. It is a thousand pities to be blind, and not able to see afar off, when all around stand the mountains of God in solemn majesty; as the Alps around the Swiss hostelry, where the traveller arrives after nightfall, to eat and drink and sleep, unconscious of the proximity of so

much loveliness. If, on the other hand, you have the opened eye, you will not need books of evidences to establish to your satisfaction the truth of our holy religion: the glory of the risen Lord; the world of the unseen. With the woman of Samaria you will say, "We have seen it for ourselves." They who see these things are indifferent to the privations of the tent-life, or, as in Jeremiah's case, rise superior to the hatred of man and the terrors of a siege. II. **THE USE OF THE PENKNIFE.** It is probable that no one is free from the almost unconscious habit of evading or toning down certain passages which conflict with the doctrinal or ecclesiastical position in which we were reared, or which we have assumed. In our private reading of the Scripture we must beware of using the penknife. Whole books and tracts of truth are practically cut out of the Bible of some earnest Christians. But we can only eliminate these things at our peril. The Bible is like good wheaten bread, which contains all the properties necessary to support life. And we cannot eliminate its starch or sugar, its nitrates or phosphates, without becoming enfeebled and unhealthy. It is a golden rule to read the Bible as a whole. III. **THE INDESTRUCTIBLE WORD.** Jeremiah wrote another roll. And the facts to which Jeremiah bore witness all came to pass. Neither knife nor fire could arrest the inevitable doom of king, city, and people. The drunken captain may cut in pieces the chart that tells of the rocks in the vessel's course, and put in irons the sailor who calls his attention to it; but neither will avert the crash that must ensue unless the helm is turned. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

Ver. 24. Yet they were not afraid.—*The hardening power of sin:*—Is it conceivable that men who believed Jeremiah to be a prophet of God should despise his words? Is it credible that, after preaching for twenty years, those who listened to him should think him a prophet, and yet throw his sermons in the fire? I am afraid this is very conceivable and very credible: I see nothing in it a whit more incredible than in this, that men who dare not deny the Bible to be the Word of God, should know what is right and not do it, that they should have warning of a far more fearful captivity than that which was coming on the Jews, and yet should never tremble. The king of Judah and his people were not in the condition of men who had been sinning in ignorance, and to whom a sudden message had come from God to warn them to repent; they had no excuse of this kind, they had been deliberately disobeying God in spite of the warnings of Jeremiah, they had sinned against light, as we say, and so they had become blinded and hardened. At first probably, when they heard the prophet, they felt that they were living wickedly and made resolutions to amend, but by and by temptation came again and they gave way; then once more they would hear the warning voice, but somehow it would not this time be so terrible. Is it difficult to find examples of the like thing now? of men who by little and little fall from one sin to another, who have been taught as children the way of God and have been told of heaven and hell, and so are scared at first when they think that "the wages of sin is death"; but by and by this truth seems to lose its edge, sin has gained more hold, and Satan has said as he did to Eve, "Ye shall not surely die"; one sin leads to another, and each seems easier than the one before it; things which once appeared frightful now seem simple and familiar, and thus after a time the man becomes hardened. This is what the confession of many criminals confirms, they trace their wretchedness back to some much smaller sin committed when young: a boy disobeys his parents, and perhaps would not believe you if you told him that he had taken one step towards the gallows; and yet this may be true. This I understand by the deceitfulness of sin, to which the apostle refers its hardening power (Heb. iii. 13); it is deceitful, because what we call a small sin appears trifling, because we judge of sins merely in themselves, without considering to what they lead. If in a war a general were to see a few of the enemy's soldiers straggling over the hills, he might say that they were so few that they were not worth considering, but would he say so? or would he not rather look upon them as the forerunners of a great army, would he not prepare at once to resist the host of enemies which he must know lurked behind? In like manner the sins of childhood are the forerunners of the great army of the world, the flesh, and the devil, which comes up in maturer years, and the only safe course is to look upon no sin as trifling, but to root out every enemy whether small or great, lest perhaps we allow our enemy to gain such strength as shall end in our overthrow. We will consider first the case of a man who seldom or never goes to church. Now I suppose the reason such a man would give is, that he does not

see the use of it. Did he always think so? Most probably he had been taught differently when a child, he had been taught that God is with His people gathered together in His Name, that our Lord Jesus Christ is there; he was taught this, and he once believed it, but now he thinks he is as well at home: how has this change come about? has he reasoned about it? probably not at all: has any one for whom he has any respect told him so? certainly not: then what has changed him? it is the effect of habit; he has been "hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." What I have just said will apply almost without change to the case of a man who never prays. He was taught to pray as a child, and perhaps he continues the practice, till at length, because he does not act up to his prayers, he finds the practice tiresome, and so he finds an excuse to omit prayer occasionally; then he grows more careless and more irregular, and yet the omission costs him less and less pain, till at last the time comes when he forgets God altogether, and so starves his soul to death. Or again, what shall we say of those who continually hear of their duty, and do not do it, or at all events do it in a very stunted degree? One man is just and kind and liberal, being scarcely aware of it himself, and another is niggardly and churlish, not because he thinks it right to be so, but because he has become hardened. It is a thing for every one of us to think over and pray over, whether we are in all things following God without reserve, and whether there may not be some point in which we are falling very grievously short, but to which habit has hardened us. (*Bishop Harvey Goodwin.*) *Afraid of the Bible*:—A celebrated infidel once said, "There is one thing which mars all the pleasure of my life." "Indeed," replied his friend; "what is that?" "I am afraid the Bible is true," was the answer. "If I could know for certain that death is an eternal sleep, I should be happy—my joy would be complete. But here is the thorn that stings me—this is the sword that pierces my very soul: if the Bible is true, I am lost for ever." This is the Bible upon the truths of which many have lived, and in the belief of which many have died. Oh, how terribly afraid would they have been if anyone had been able to show that it was untrue! For upon its truths all their hopes are built. An untrue Bible would mean an untrue Christ; and a Christless death would be a death of doom to them. (*Quiver.*) *A foolish bravery*:—I. IT IS A FOOLISH BRAVERY TO IGNORE FACTS. Just that did Jehoiakim. It was a fact that he had sinned. It was a fact that Jeremiah was God's prophet. It was a fact that God, by the mouth of Jeremiah, had spoken doom for the sin of Jehoiakim unless he should repent. But Jehoiakim would have nothing of these facts. He cut the roll to pieces and threw it in the fire, &c. This did not change the facts. 1. It is a fact that good is what ought to be. 2. It is a fact that God is the good. 3. It is a fact that evil is what ought not to be. 4. It is a fact that the good which ought to be must be against the evil which ought not to be. 5. It is therefore a fact that God, who is the good which ought to be, must be Himself against the evil which ought not to be. 6. It is, therefore, a further fact that if I choose the evil which ought not to be, the good God, who must be against the evil which ought not to be, must be against me. II. IT IS A FOOLISH BRAVERY TO IMAGINE YOURSELF AN EXCEPTION FROM THE WORKING OF THE DIVINE LAW. Have you never been subdued into a vast awe, as the absolute irreversibleness of natural law has been pressed upon you? It is because natural law is so unchanging that we may build our cities, and send our ships, and plough our fields, and reap our harvests. But there is another and a fearful side to this irreversibleness of natural law. When, for any reason, man stands athwart one of these great natural laws, the penalty for violation is sure to smite. And this is as true in the moral realm. It is a foolish bravery to think yourself an exception to God's law. He said it—there are many who think it who do not so plainly say it—that young man, whom I was seeking to dissuade from courses of dissipation. "Oh," he answered, "it may hurt other fellows, but it won't me; I am an exception." How crammed with folly such temerity! III. IT IS A FOOLISH BRAVERY TO REFUSE TRUTH WHICH YOU DISLIKE. IV. IT IS A FOOLISH BRAVERY TO GO ON HEEDLESSLY, SAYING, "I DON'T CARE." V. IT IS A FOOLISH BRAVERY TO REFUSE REPENTANCE. (*W. Hoyt, D.D.*) *The guilt of indifference to Divine threatenings*:—1. The man who hears God's threatenings without being afraid, and His kind invitations and promises without being melted, does in effect say to His face, I consider nothing which Thou canst utter as of sufficient importance to excite the smallest emotion; neither Thy favour nor Thy displeasure is of the least consequence to me; I dread not Thy threatenings, I regard not Thy promises; after Thou hast said all that Thou canst say, I remain perfectly unmoved, and pre-

pared to execute, not Thy pleasure, but my own. And if this does not express the utmost contempt of God, what can express it? 2. This sin also involves and indicates the highest degree of unbelief, of that unbelief which makes God a liar. When a man brings us intelligence of most important events, of events in which, if true, we are deeply interested, we cannot tell him more plainly that we disbelieve everything which he has said, than by remaining perfectly unaffected. He then who is but in a small degree affected by God's Word, has but little faith in it, and he who is not at all affected by it has no faith in it at all. He is as completely an infidel as anyone who ever gloried in the name. 3. Those who hear or read the Word of God without being affected, display extreme hardness of heart. They show that their hearts are absolutely unimpressible by any motives or considerations which infinite wisdom itself can suggest; that they are of so much more than flinty hardness, as to resist that Word which God Himself declares to be like a fire, and a hammer, that breaketh the rock in pieces. (*E. Payson, D.D.*)

Vers. 26. But the Lord hid him.—*Hidden, but radiant!*—"The Lord hid him." What that precisely means it is impossible to say. Was there a John of Gaunt for this Wycliff, an Elector of Saxony for this Luther? Did Ahikam, who had before interposed on his behalf, or his sons—Gemariah, who lent Jeremiah his room in the Temple for the reading of his roll, and Gedaliah, who became Governor of Judah after Zedekiah's deportation—take the prophet under their care? Or was this hiding something more Divine and blessed still? These Divine hidings are needed by us all. We must obey the voice that cries to us, as it did to Elijah, "Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself." We are too prominent, too self-important, too conscious of ourselves. And God must sometimes hide us in the sick-chamber, the valley of shadow, the cleft of the rock. He calls us to Zarephath, or Carmel, to the privacy of obscurity, or of solitude. It is stated that on one occasion when the dragoons of Claverhouse were scouring the mountains of Scotland in search of the Covenanters, a little party of these godly folk, gathered on the hillside for prayer, must have fallen into their hands had not a cloud suddenly settled down, effectually concealing them from their pursuers. Thus the Son of God still interposes for His own. **II. HE RE-EDITED HIS PROPHECIES.** To this period we may refer the Divine injunction: "Thus speaketh the Lord, the God of Israel, saying, Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book" (xxxvi. 2). It may be that throughout this period Baruch continued to act as his faithful amanuensis and scribe. He, at least, was certainly included in the Divine hidings (xxxvi. 26-32). It was at great cost to his earthly prospects. He came of a good family, his brother being Seraiah, who held high office under King Zedekiah, and he cherished the ambition of distinguishing himself amongst his compeers. "He sought great things for himself." But he was reconciled to the lot of suffering and sorrow to which his close identification with Jeremiah led him, by a special revelation assuring him of the speedy overthrow of the State; and that, in the general chaos, he would escape with his life (xlv.). By the aid of this faithful friend, Jeremiah gathered together the prophecies which he had uttered on various occasions, and put them in order, specially elaborating the predictions given in the fourth year of Jehoiakim against the surrounding nations. The word of the Lord came to him concerning the Philistines, and Moab, and the children of Ammon and Edom, Damascus and Kedar. This time of Jeremiah's seclusion was therefore not lost to the world. It was fruitful as Bunyan's in Bedford Gaol; Luther's in the Wartburg; Madame Guyon's in the Bastille. Unseen, the prophet busied himself, as the night settled down on his country, in kindling the sure light of prophecy, that should cast its radiant beams over the dark waters of time, until the day should dawn, and the day-star glimmer out in the eastern sky. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

Vers. 27-32. Take thee again another roll, and write in it all the former words.—*The Word of God cannot be burnt.*—I. THE WORD OF GOD IS IMPERISHABLE. The truth is not pen and ink, parchment and words, but a force of an unchangeable character. It borrows material forms for garments, and uses outward methods for expression; these change, but truth never. Changes are observable in nature, but its laws remain firm. The process of destruction and restitution is ever on the march. The lily will fade, and the rose will perish, but the law of their life will say to the elements, "Take thee another roll," and write another lily and another rose. The pattern is never destroyed. Truth,

law, symmetry, beauty, and life are emanations from the Eternal Mind, abiding immutable in the midst of change. Revelation has assumed aspects, many of which have passed away. The centre of all religious truth is the Saviour—"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." Whatever talents we possess, or whatever circumstances affect us, if there is a straight line from the heart to Jesus—if we are bound to Him by the radius of love—our lives will express the old truths, and present the old faith which animated patriarch, prophet, priest, apostle, and martyr.

II. **OPPOSITION TO THE WORD OF GOD WILL NOT AVERT THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN.** Why did the king precipitate the destruction of the Book before its contents were examined? If the moral condition of the people was wrongly described, facts would have disproved the fiction; if the threatened invasion by the King of Babylon was a myth, time would have revealed it. Evidently Jehoiakim found that the entrance of God's Word brought with it light, and that the spectacle it discovered was too frightful to contemplate. Either he must burn the roll, or the roll would burn him. Sin prevailed, and the roll was burnt. Was it a victory? Three months before the destruction of the city, Jehoiakim died a miserable death. The Florentine philosopher declined to look through Galileo's telescope, fearing he might see in the heavens some movement which would contradict his old view that the sun revolved, and the earth stood still. Sinners fear to look at themselves through the Word of God. Dr. South wrote many years ago these words, "Truth is so connatural to the mind of man, that it would certainly be entertained by all men, did it not by accident contradict some beloved interest or other. The thief hates the break of day; not but that he naturally loves the light as well as other men, but his condition makes him dread and abhor that which, of all things, he knows to be the likeliest means of his discovery." God is not in all the thoughts of the wicked, but there is another roll, and God is there. Impressions of sin, of death, and of a judgment to come have suffered violence, and have been wiped off human recollection, at least for a time, but they are written in the other roll. The last vision which terrified the soul of Jehoiakim was the other roll. The authority of truth is inviolable, which no penknife can cut, and no fire burn. Let the Word of God shine into our heart, expose its follies and impurities, and the blush on the cheek will be the dawn of a better day.

III. **THERE IS A GRACIOUS PURPOSE IN THE REITERATION OF THE WORD OF GOD.** Jeremiah and Baruch retired to re-commit to writing the contents of the first roll. This was done to give Judah another chance of escape from the impending storm. Although the roll was full of denunciation and warning, yet the terms of peace are included in the declaration of war. Prophet after prophet brought to Israel the re-written message. This is set forth in the parable of the barren fig-tree; the end of all God's dealings is fruit unto life everlasting. What have we done with the second roll? Nature has re-written her message. Providence speaks again in terms of mercy. Gospel truths come up afresh, like the flowers in the garden. True, we have turned a deaf ear; but is it so still? Do we persist in unbelief?

IV. **ALL ATTEMPTS TO FRUSTRATE THE WORD OF THE LORD MUST IGNOMINIOUSLY FAIL.** The Word of God has been assailed by every conceivable opposition. The learned, with the sharp penknife of criticism, and the unlearned, with the fire of raillery, have made the attempt to destroy the authority of God's written Word, but they no more succeeded than if they had dug a grave in which to bury the law of gravitation. Julian the apostate, and Gibbon the historian, cut and burnt the roll, but they were as grass, "The grass withereth," &c. There was once a printing-press used solely to manufacture penknives to cut the roll; that press was afterwards used to print Bibles. The house in which Hume wrote against miracles was converted into a committee-room for the promotion of religious truth. Conviction of sin is the voice of God in the soul. Drown it you never can. Close the covers of the Bible, and fasten them with a clasp, but its very silence is louder than thunder. Messages and messengers come anew to remind us of our duty towards God and man. Let us bear in mind that the Word of the Lord is a hammer to break the rock: a fire to consume the stubble. Its wisdom is unbounded, backed by infinite power. Heaven and earth will dissolve before one iota of the Word will fail. Let us surrender our hearts to its power. (*T. Davies, M.A.*) *The sacred oracles:—*

I. **THE COMMITTING OF THE MIND AND WILL OF GOD TO WRITING.** This is important. 1. Because the knowledge of them must be preserved and extended. 2. Because there was no way of preserving and extending this knowledge to be compared to this.

II. **WHAT THINK YOU OF THOSE WHO WOULD DESTROY THE SCRIPTURES?**

1. The enemies who deny its authenticity. Surely those precious pieces of antiquity which are found in the Book of Genesis—who would not wish to admire and preserve them? But the Vandalism of infidelity would sling them all into the fire, and fix our eyes on the darkness and dreariness of two thousand years ago. 2. View these men as to their patriotism, or their regard to public good. What benevolence was seen in the pagan world? Produce one instance in which the philosophy of Greece or Rome ever established an infirmary or an hospital. 3. View the enemies of the Bible, with regard to their charity and compassion. What do you think of the human being that would take away the Bible, dash this only cup of consolation from the parched lip—that would pull down the only refuge to which the polluted sinner can escape from the storms of life—that would deprive him of a resource to which, by and by, there will be an entire enjoyment, and that gives him the consciousness of present support? What can you think of a man that would do this, while he knows that he has nothing to substitute in the room of it, and that if the thing be a delusion, it is a solace which can be obtained in no other way? 4. View these men once more as to their guilt. This may be fairly determined from their doom. “Oh,” say some, “we are not accountable for our belief!” To which we answer that if we are not accountable for our belief we are accountable for nothing; for all our actions spring from belief; and infidelity does not arise from want of evidence, but from want of inclination.

III. SOME THINGS WHICH SEEM LIKELY TO INJURE REVELATION, AND WHICH YET PROVE ITS ADVANTAGE. 1. The attacks of the infidel on its divinity. What has been the consequence of all his opposition? Why zeal in its diffusion; and able articles brought forth in its favour; for inquiry is always friendly to truth, as darkness and concealment are friendly to error. 2. The sufferings of its followers by persecution. The periods of suffering have been always the most glorious for Christianity; the brethren have been united and endeared the more to each other; the Spirit of glory and of God has rested upon them; their sufferings have arrested attention and induced sympathy; the witness of their sufferings has been found to be impressed, and they have been led to inspire the principles that would produce such effects. 3. The divisions and parties that have sprung up among its professors. The differences which subsist amongst all those who hold the Head do not affect the oneness of the Church; they are only so many branches which form one tree—so many members which form one body. By these they have always proved stimulations to each other: they have awakened and increased emulation and zeal; and religion has always been upon the whole a gainer by them. 4. The failings of its members. It would seem impossible any good should arise from these to the cause of the Gospel. And yet what is the fact? No thanks to themselves—even these scandals have been overruled for good. These scandals were foretold by the Scriptures; and, therefore, they are pledges of their truth; these have shown that the Gospel is Divine and almighty—because it can bear to be betrayed from within as well as assaulted from without. The excommunication of these persons has always strikingly shown the purity of the Church, and that they cannot bear those that are evil; while the true professors have been led, by these instances, to fear, and tremble, and pray. IV. ADMONITIONS. 1. Be persuaded of the stability of the cause of revelation. 2. Apply Scripture to your own use, and apply it to the purposes for which it has been given. 3. Be concerned for the spread and diffusion of it. (IV. Jay.) *Cutting up and burning his Bible*:—True, those were very anxious times. Party feeling ran high, and we may find this much excuse for the foolish king, that party feeling carried him away. The last days of the kingdom of Judah had come. Two rival nations were seeking her alliance, each as a protection against the other. The good Josiah had favoured Babylon, and even fought against Pharaoh Necho, king of Egypt. In the great battle of Carchemish, Josiah lost his life, but the party favouring alliance with Babylon was strong enough to secure the election of his son Shallum as king, rather than the elder son, Jehoiakim, who seems to have favoured the Egyptians. Shallum, however, only held the throne for three months, and then Jehoiakim succeeded. Now Jeremiah, as the prophet of God, had distinctly, and over and over again, advised alliance with Babylon. He was consequently in disgrace when Jehoiakim came to the throne, and the Egyptian party gained the upper hand. He was no longer able to declare the Divine message freely in the streets, and at the court. But what is to be done with the roll? It was a great fast day; a national humiliation on account of the national peril. The people were crowding in from the district round, and were assembling for solemn

services in the Temple courts. There the roll must be read. Baruch knew the peril, and shrank from the task, until comforted by an assurance of personal protection. They felt the news of all this must be taken to the king. They know his impulsive wilfulness so well that they feared to take the roll into his presence. Jehudi began to read, and the king began to grow angry at the Divine disapproval of his plans, and presently he seized the scribe's knife, as it lay on the ground, stripped a piece of the skin off, and threw it on the fire; and then, emboldened by his wilful act, proceeded to cut strip after strip, until the entire roll was consumed. What a daring act! And what a foolish act! More foolish than wicked, for he could not silence God's Word, or alter God's will in that way. It is very important that we should recognise the distinction between the revelation of God's will to a man, and the particular form in which that will may be made known to him. It is not the mere wording of the message that is our chief concern, it is the message itself. Men nowadays are finding so much to complain of in the more form and wording of the Bible, that there is grave danger of their failing to heed that Bible as it comes closely up to each one of them, saying, "I have a message from God unto thee." And is our message to be refused because the form of its setting is unpleasing to fastidious tastes? I. GOD'S MESSAGE TO US MAY BE AN OFFENCE TO US. It is when it opposes our inclinations. It is a wholly wrong attitude in which to stand towards God's Word, if we think to judge it by our inclinations and preferences, approving it only if it accords with them. God's will and Word are the standard by which we must test our inclinations, and they are stamped as wrong if we cannot gain the Divine approval. But so often our condition of approving the Bible is, that it shall comfortably allow us to "follow the devices and desires of our own hearts." We shut it up, we put it on the upper shelf, out of reach, when we have a half fear that it will speak with an arresting voice, and say, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" And the Bible is an offence when it convicts us of our sins. The sin of our day is this—we are attempting to judge God's Word instead of to receive it. We conceitedly criticise it, instead of reverently listening to it. We are making ourselves the standard for ourselves; and are determined that we will have nothing in the Bible that we do not like.

II. OUR OFFENCE MAY FIND EXPRESSION IN INJURY TO THE WORD. That injury is not always coarse and vulgar like the injury done to the roll by Jehoiakim. 1. In subtle ways we injure it, nowadays, by making it out to mean what it suits us to think it means, and by picking out bits here and there which are of doubtful authority; and so creating a general suspicion of the authority of the whole. (1) Generally undermining its authority. Men begin at the Old Testament. They cut strips out here and there. They would persuade us that the early chapters of Genesis are only legends, and the history of the patriarchs only uncertain traditions. Oh, poor Bible of our fathers! (2) Evaporating or changing its meaning. If anything strikes hard against sin, explain it away. If any dark shadows are thrown on the eternal future of impenitent sinners, exaggerate your representations of the love of God, be quite unqualified in your statements, and boldly declare that you would not punish sinners so vigorously, and therefore you are sure God will not. If you hardly dare cut a piece out of the Word, use the knife to scratch out what you do not like, and write over what you think would be suitable. (3) Refusing to admit the applications of the Word to ourselves. 2. How utterly foolish all this is! We cannot change one declaration of Holy Scripture. We cannot prevent the execution of one threatening. We cannot, by any of our devices, secure a comfortable arrangement for impenitent sinners in the next life. III. GOD'S WILL CAN NEVER BE FRUSTRATED BY ANY INJURY WE MAY DO TO HIS MESSENGERS, OR TO HIS MESSAGE. Because though it is in a message, it exists apart from the message. Jeremiah can soon write it all over again. Moreover, the attempted injury cannot fail to rouse further vindications of God's outraged majesty. Kings never pass lightly by the insults that are offered to their ambassadors. And the Word of God does but tell of providential workings that go on, in spite of anything that may happen to the message that reports them to us. To destroy the Word is as foolish and as useless as for the ostrich to hide her head in the sand, and convince herself that there is no danger, when the hunters are every moment nearing her. (*The Weekly Pulpit.*) *Burning the Scriptures*:—The 98th annual report (1902) of "The British and Foreign Bible Society" contains the following experience of Colporteur Galibert: "Calling at a handsome house, he explained his object to madame. 'How much do you ask for your whole load of books?' she inquired. 'Nine francs,' he answered, supposing that the

lady wished to make a free distribution of the Scriptures. She paid the price and then called the servant, 'Take all these books and throw them into the fire.' 'Madame' said Galibert, 'here is your money; give me back my books.' 'No!' said the lady. 'I have paid you, and you may go. But when you pass this way again, don't forget to call; I'll buy your books again.' 'Madame,' says Galibert, 'I will go; but let me tell you that the very Word of God which you have destroyed will rise up to judge you at the last day.'"
Hatred of the truth teller:—Macaulay tells of a rich Brahman who saw a drop of sacred Ganges water under the microscope, and bought the instrument and dashed it to atoms that it might not by its revelations rebuke his superstitious practices. In a similar way did Jehoiakim treat God's Word because it revealed his character in its true light, and set in array the judgments for sin which were gathering about him. (*C. Deal*.)
The indestructible power of God's Word:—It was burned, but Jeremiah lived, and Jeremiah's God lived. Therefore to burn it was not to destroy it. Another spell of work for Baruch, and the loss was repaired. Like the fabled blood-stains on some palace floor where murder has been done, and all the planing in the world will not remove the dark spots, God's threatenings are destroyed, as men think, and presently there they are again, as plain as ever. It is true of the written Word, which men have tried to make away with many a time in many a way, but it "liveth and abideth for ever." It is true of the echoes of that Word in conscience, which may be neglected, sophisticated, drugged, and stifled, but still sometimes wakes and solemnly reiterates its message. And all that Jehiakiim made by his foolish attempt was that the new roll had added to it "many like words." The indestructible Word of God grows by every attempt to silence it. Each warning neglected increases guilt, and therefore punishment. The fabled sibyl came back, after each rejection of her offered books, with fewer volumes at a higher price. God's Word comes back after each rejection with additions of heavier penalties for darker sins. We but draw down surer and more terrible destruction on our own heads by refusing to listen to the merciful voice which warns us that the floods are out, and the ruin of the house impending, and bids us flee from it before the crash comes. (*A. MacLaren*.)
Efforts to destroy the Christian books in Madagascar:—The purpose to extinguish Christianity was firmly determined on. The week after the Queen Ranavalona's message had been delivered, every person who had received books was ordered to deliver them up, without retaining even a single leaf, on pain of death. This order was severely felt; few obeyed it literally, and in the distant provinces scarcely any obeyed it at all. (*Jacox*.)

CHAPTER XXXVII

VERB. 9, 10. Thus saith the Lord, Deceive not yourselves, saying, The Chaldeans shall surely depart from us: for they shall not depart.—*The punishment of evil*:—The great teaching of the text is that we must not allow appearances to mislead us respecting the fact and certainty of the law of retribution. God has threatened the transgressor with severe penalties, and we may be sure that these penalties will be inflicted, however unlikely such retribution may sometimes seem, and however long it may be delayed. By wonderful ways God brings His judgments to pass. I. WE MARK SOME ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE LAW OF RETRIBUTION FURNISHED BY THE HISTORY OF THE NATIONS. Very memorable was the retribution that Israel brought on Egypt. At the other end of their national history, Israel itself furnishes a most striking illustration of the working of the law of retribution through all improbabilities. When the Christ was crucified through weakness, the people cried, "His blood be upon us, and upon our children." How unlikely did it seem that the Victim of Calvary could ever be avenged upon an unjust nation! And yet that "wounded Man" rose up invested with strange powers, and burned their city with fire. And let us not think that these instances of retribution are to be placed in the category of the miraculous; they were the natural consequences of great denials of truth and justice. Men unjustly "pierced through" are terrible avengers in all ages and nations. For centuries did the kings and nobles of France oppress the peasantry; it is impossible for us to think adequately of the vast hopeless wretchedness of the people

from the cradle to the grave. When Louis XVI. came to the throne it seemed incredible that the long-suffering people would ever avenge themselves upon the powerful classes by whom they were ground to the dust, and yet by a marvellous series of events the "wounded men" arose in awful wrath, burning palaces with fire and trampling greatness underfoot. "Pierced through" were those hungry hopeless millions; but the day of doom came, and every bleeding wretch arose invincible with torch and sword. For generations the African was wronged by the American; the negro had no military, political, or literary power; he was bought and sold as are the dumb driven cattle, and it seemed as if the fetters of a shameful degradation were riveted upon him for ever. "Was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?" As late as 1854 Wendell Phillips wrote despairingly, "Indeed, the Government has fallen into the hands of the slave power completely. So far as national politics are concerned, we are beaten—there's no hope. . . . The future seems to unfold a vast slave empire united with Brazil, and darkening the whole West. I hope I may be a false prophet, but the sky was never so dark." And yet immediately after this the "wounded men" arose, deluging the land with blood, and burning the cities of the great Republic with fire. Some of our writers argue that retribution does not follow on national wrong-doing, because territory gained by cruelty, treachery, bloodshed, is not as a matter of fact torn away from its guilty conquerors, but such ill-acquired territory remains a permanent portion of their splendid empire. But there are other ways of inflicting retribution upon a nation than by immediately depriving it of provinces. There is something very like irony in the government of God, and He sometimes punishes the victors through the spoil. Our Indian Empire is said to have been ill-gotten, and yet we retain it, that country being to Britain what the tail is to the peacock—our glory and pride. But the gilded train, it will be remembered, has been already splashed with blood, and the end is not yet. Retribution may not come in the form of specially inflicted judgments, but it will come. No pestilence, war, earthquake, or famine marks the Divine displeasure, but the retribution arises out of the iniquity. With great injustice and cruelty the French drove out the Huguenots, but in expelling these sons of faith, genius, industry, virtue, the French fatally impoverished their national life, and they are suffering to-day from these missing elements which none may restore. Retribution may not be revealed in material disaster, but it will come. As Mommsen, one of the greatest of historians, declares, "History has a Nemesis for every sin!" It may seem that all might and majesty are with an unjust nation, and that "wounded men" only are on the other side; but at God's call wounded men are Michaels wielding flaming swords. "The foolishness of God is wiser than men." Sometimes we are greatly amazed and perplexed at the way in which history unfolds itself—it would seem as if the diplomacy of evil were too much for the Ruler of the world, as if Providence made hesitating moves, weak moves, fatal moves; but we have only to wait a while to know that God's foolishness is wiser than men. "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness"; "The Lord shall have them in derision." "The weakness of God is stronger than men." The sun is sometimes weak, but its earliest ray in the dawn is more than all our electric lights, the first faint beam of the spring is infinitely more than all the sparks of our kindling; the sea is sometimes weak—it is a mill-pond, we say—but in its softest ripple is a suggestion of power that fills us with awe; the wind is sometimes weak, but in the gentlest zephyr is hinted the majesty of infinite strength. Nature shows how the weakness of God is immeasurably stronger than men; so does history with equal clearness. The oft-quoted saying, "Providence is always on the side of the big battalions," is one with an imposing sound, but it is disproved by history over and over again. The world's Ruler defeated Pharaoh with frogs and flies; He humbled Israel with the grasshopper; He smeared the splendour of Herod with worms; on the plains of Russia He broke the power of Napoleon with a snowflake. God has no need to despatch an archangel; when once He is angry, a microbe will do. II. WE NOTE THE LAW OF RETRIBUTION AS EXEMPLIFIED IN THE INDIVIDUAL LIFE. The great law works infallibly in the personal history as it does in the national life. God has wonderful ways of confounding us, and we may be sure that our sins will find us out. 1. Let us not permit ourselves to be deceived by flattering prophets. Loudly does revelation declare the obligation of righteousness, and grievous are the judgments that it pronounces against transgressors, but all this in our age has been accepted in quite a modified sense. Men will now hardly allow

such a word as "wrath"; they will not permit a man to suffer simply as a punishment for his sin; the violation of laws human and divine must be condoned and passed over with the least reprobation and vengeance. Let us rejoice in the growth of the sentiment of humanity, but we must shut our ears to the effeminate and sentimental teaching which will inevitably relax and destroy a noble morality. God is merciful, but fire does not forget to burn, teeth to tear, water to drown, and no transgression of the law can pass without detection and punishment. "And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazeel shall Jehu slay." God's complex system of retribution permits not the cleverest sinner to slip through. 2. Let us not deceive ourselves because appearances seem to promise immunity. Our modern knowledge of science, of the unity and interdependence of all things, of the continuity and persistence of force and motion, of the inviolable integrity of all organisms, ought to make it easy to us to believe that whatsoever a man soweth that shall he reap, however appearances may promise otherwise. Let us not be beguiled by the immediate aspects of life and circumstance. God's blind men watch us; His lame men run us down; His deaf men filch our secrets; His dumb men impeach us; His wounded men arise, every man a messenger of revenge. 3. Let us not deceive ourselves because judgment is delayed. In contending with God we are plotting against a Wisdom that seems sometimes to hesitate and fail; but never is that Wisdom more profound than in the moments of seeming perplexity, and if we yield to flattering hopes of victory, our final overthrow will only be the more complete and irreparable for these protractions of the conflict. In contending with God we are warring with a Power that ever and anon seems baffled and beaten; it seems to retreat, it allows us to win skirmishes here and there—only the more conspicuously to crush us in the decisive battle, if we persist to fight it out to the bitter end. In contending with God we are provoking a Justice which sometimes seems incapable of asserting itself; but inveterate perversity discovers in the event that all such hesitations and delays were the whettings of a sword which needs not to smite twice. Slowly it may be, but surely, do we ripen for judgment; and when once ripe, how little a thing is necessary to precipitate the calamity! As the Hindoos say, "When men are ripe for slaughter, even straws turn into thunderbolts." 4. Let us improve the gracious respite. Many rebel altogether against the doctrine of grace, sternly insisting on inexorable law, justice, retribution; they utterly reprobate the ideas of repentance, forgiveness, and salvation. But mercy is a fact as much as justice is. Within that great system of severities we call nature there are ameliorative arrangements softening the rigours of broken law; in human life and government, too, which is nature still, only on a higher plane, mercy and forgiveness assert themselves, and society greatly prizes the gracious quality; and it is therefore a mistake, judged by the light of nature, to make an antithesis of equity and grace, as if these qualities were mutually antagonistic and eternally irreconcilable—they both exist side by side in this tangible human world with which we are so familiar. Now, the grand burden of the Gospel is to bring into fullest light that doctrine of mercy hinted by nature, and to show us that grace is not arbitrariness, the negation of law, the neglect of justice, but that the fullest and most splendid revelation of grace may take place on the basis of eternal truth and justice. (*W. L. Watkinson.*)

Vers. 11-21. And it came to pass, that when the army of the Chaldeans was broken up from Jerusalem.—*Jeremiah persecuted*:—After the captivity and death of Jehoiakim, his brother Zedekiah, another son of Josiah, sat upon the throne. He seems to have been of weak and superstitious rather than of vicious character, though it is said that neither he nor his servants, nor the people of the land, hearkened unto the words of Jeremiah. They seemed to be infatuated with the idea that Jerusalem had, with the help of their Egyptian allies, strength to resist the assaults and siege of the Chaldeans. False prophets had persuaded the king that he would break the Chaldean yoke, and as this event was more favourable to his own wishes than were the stern words of Jeremiah, they had been accepted as truthful, while the true prophet was discredited. Jeremiah seems to have been at liberty in the meantime. The king had sent a message to him to pray for the deliverance of the city from the besieging Chaldeans. Jeremiah had again told the king plainly that the city was doomed. The Egyptian army had in the meantime come up, and the Chaldeans had withdrawn. Yet the Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah to tell the king that this was but a temporary withdrawal of the

enemy; that they would return again; and, moreover, that even though the Chaldeans should be reduced to a few wounded men, even they should rise up and burn the city. When God was for Jerusalem, He could make them victorious over their foes, though they were but a handful, and without weapons; but when He was against them, He could make their foes, however small a company of wounded men, to have complete victory over them. 1. JEREMIAH IMPRISONED. The advent of the Egyptian allies had compelled the Chaldeans to raise the siege; and the gates of the city were opened so that the people could go in and out again at will. This opportunity was seized on by Jeremiah to leave the city for the country, which action led to his arrest and imprisonment. 1. Jeremiah goes forth. The question of what was the object for which the prophet left the city, has given rise to much discussion. The reading of the authorised version simply is that "he went" (or purposed) "to go into the land of Benjamin, to separate himself thence in the midst of the people." This is not very intelligible. It has been supposed that there was a new allotment of land in the tribe of Benjamin, and that Jeremiah had gone up to secure his portion. The simple fact is that, having left the city or been observed in the act of so doing, suspicions as to his purpose were aroused in the mind of the keeper of the gate, and so he was arrested. Jeremiah was perfectly free and within his rights as a citizen to depart from the city if he chose, and to go up into the land of Benjamin, where he belonged; but whether he was wise under the existing circumstances is a question. 2. Accused and arrested. As the prophet was departing from the city by the gate of Benjamin, a captain of the guard being there and recognising him, either suspected him of desertion to the enemy, or hating him for his prophecies against Jerusalem, feigned suspicion, charged him with the treason of intending to desert the city and go over to the Chaldeans, and arrested him. The times were critical, and suspicions were rife on every hand. Jeremiah had persistently declared that the city would fall into the hand of the Chaldeans; had advised the king and the people quietly to accept the situation and surrender; had warned them again and again that resistance was not only useless, but would bring worse calamities upon them. All this, of course, irritated the people, and made Jeremiah very unpopular. Though he was free in the city, he was the object of universal execration and hatred. Under these circumstances it would have been wiser for Jeremiah to have remained in the city and taken his part with the inhabitants; certainly it was unwise to lay himself open to a suspicion of desertion by leaving the city at such a time, just after the delivery of his last message to the king. Possibly he did not think that his visit to the country would be misconstrued. Innocent men are not always men of prudence. Jeremiah's visit to the country may have been perfectly justifiable and harmless, yet it had the appearance of evil to those who were of suspicious inclinations. It is not always wise to do the lawful things which lie before us, even though there be no actual harm in the action. The prophet's business to the country seems to have been entirely of a private character. Perhaps he was disgusted with the king and people, and just left the city in that state of mind. In any case he should have taken counsel of God and considered the circumstances before exposing himself to the suspicions and malice of his enemies. In times of excitement and contention between God and an evil-thinking generation, His servants have need to walk with the greatest circumspection. On the other hand, the action of the captain of the guard was most reprehensible, and illustrates the injustice with which unbelieving and wicked men are commonly disposed to treat God's people. He had no real ground for suspecting Jeremiah of treachery and desertion to the enemy. But enemies who wish to find an occasion against God's people can readily do so. Unbelievers are apt to judge the actions of God's people by their own method of procedure. I heard an officer in the English army say last autumn that all missionaries in India were the merest mercenaries; that their only motive in coming out here was salary. I asked him why, and on what ground he made such a charge. His reply was that he could conceive of no other motive, and admitted that nothing would induce him to devote his life to trying to convert heathen but a good round salary. I immediately denounced him as a mere mercenary soldier and not a patriot. 3. Jeremiah's denial. Upon being charged with treasonable intentions in leaving the city, Jeremiah indignantly denied that he had any such purpose. He met the charge with a simple sharp word. "It is false"; or, as the margin has it: "A lie; I fall not away to the Chaldeans." He was both indignant at his arrest, and, perhaps, from the heat of his denial, more so still at the charge of treachery. To defame a man's good name is often more intolerable than the

prospect of endurance of any amount of physical suffering. Joseph in Egypt thus suffered, being innocent; Moses suffered in like manner; David seemed to care more that Saul could think him capable of conspiring against his life than for the persecution with which he was pursued, and sought more earnestly to clear his name than to save his life. The first question that arises out of this part of the story is: How should we meet such false charges as this, under which Jeremiah was arrested? That must depend on circumstances. Paul defended himself by an elaborate argument. Jesus adopted more than one method. Oftentimes He refuted the charges which the Jews brought against Him, by showing them how absurd their statements were, as in the case when they charged Him with being the agent of the devil. Again, when He was under the cruel and awful charge of blasphemy, when death was hanging over Him, He met the judge and false witnesses with perfect silence. Silence does not always give consent. There are circumstances when it is better to suffer both in reputation and body rather than attempt a defence. There may be higher interests involved even than the preservation of a good name and life itself. While it is perfectly right to assert innocence if one be innocent, sometimes silence is a more effectual answer than denial. Time often proves the best vindicator. I once heard Mr. Spurgeon say that he never attempted to brush off mud that was thrown at him, for he was sure that to attempt to do so would only result in smearing himself with the filth; but that he always waited till it was dry, and then he could deal with it as dust, and get rid of it without a stain being left behind. It has been truly said that if we only take care of our characters, God will in the end vindicate our reputations (Matt. v. 11, 12). Though Jeremiah indignantly denied the charge, the denial did him no good. It was not the truth which his enemies were seeking, but only an occasion to persecute him. So we are told that the captain "hearkened not to him," but carried him to the princes. 4. He is imprisoned. Irijah took the prophet to the princes. These were not the same who befriended him in the previous reign and took measures to conceal him from the wrath of Jehoiakim, but another cabinet who were in authority under Zedekiah. They were as willing to believe the charge of treason against Jeremiah as was the captain to prefer it. We have, however, learned that to suffer for Christ's sake is a part of the privilege which is accorded to every disciple. There seems to be a double necessity for this. First we must ourselves, even as did Jesus Himself, learn obedience by the things which we suffer, and so to be "perfected through suffering" (Heb. v. 8, ii. 10; comp. 1. Pet. ii. 21, 23, v. 10). Besides, it is a matter of clear demonstration that suffering for the truth has always been the most powerful testimony thereto. II. THE KING AND JEREMIAH. After the prophet had been many days in prison, the weak king sent for him secretly, and brought him out of prison to make inquiry of him. This was a triumph for Jeremiah and a humiliation for the king. In the long-run, the highest and haughtiest enemies of God will have to bow to the lowliest of His friends. There are many instances where men who have scoffed at religion and mocked at His messengers have, in moments of great fear and extremity, sought out the very people whom they have despised and persecuted to beg for intercession with God on their behalf. The city was apparently re-invested by the Chaldeans, and in great straits for food (ver. 21), and the king hoped that at last the prophet would relent and secure some favourable word from the Lord. He seems, like all unbelievers, to have had the curious idea of God, that He might be brought round to favour if only the prophets could be won over first (Num. xxii. xxiii.). 1. Is there any word from the Lord? This was the king's question put to Jeremiah. The Lord had previously given to the king a very sure word (ver. 10), but he still vainly clung to the hope that the word of God would be altered, though there was not the least evidence that the king or the people had altered their lives. There are many persons in our day expecting that in the end, notwithstanding that the word of God, finally communicated to us in the Bible, is God's last word to this world, the Almighty will change His mind and not punish persistent sinners. Yet there was a word from the Lord. It was very brief, and exactly to the point. "And Jeremiah said, There is: for, said He, thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon." Now this was a very brave and courageous action on the part of Jeremiah. If ever a man might have been tempted to temporise and prophesy smooth things, this was the time. There is nothing more sublime in this world than a clear and undisguised declaration of the truth under any and all circumstances. 2. Jeremiah pleads his own cause. Having first delivered the message from the Lord, wholly regardless of what might be the effect upon the

mind and disposition of the king, he now ventures to plead for his own release from prison. It is a great testimony to Jeremiah's loyalty to God that he suffered his own private and personal interests to be in the background until he had delivered the Lord's message. He put his plea on two grounds: First, his absolute innocence of any wrong done to either the king or the people. Why had he been cast into prison? The only thing that could be said against him was that he had delivered the Lord's word as he had received it. Could he do less than that? (Acts iv. 19.) Would the king have had him speak lies to please the princes and the people, which must ultimately have brought them much damage? Secondly, he appeals to the truth of his predictions, and asks the king to produce the false prophets who had flattered him and the people with pleasant lies (xxviii. 1, &c., xxix. 27-32). Had their false prophecies done the king any good? Was it not now manifest that they were false friends as well as false prophets? He therefore pleaded with the king not to add to his already heavy account of iniquity by keeping him unjustly in prison. 3. The prophet's sufferings mitigated. The king was evidently moved by the prophet's plea; but he was afraid of his princes, and did not dare to grant the full petition of the prophet, but he so far ordered a mitigation of his imprisonment, that he was taken out of the stocks and the dungeon and simply confined in the gaol court. Jeremiah was, as we have said, a shrinking and retiring man by nature, and keenly sensitive to physical pain. His imprisonment was very severe, though there was worse in store for him (see the next chapter). He felt that to stay in that dungeon and in the "cabins" would end in his death. The king softened his imprisonment and ordered the prophet to be fed with a piece of bread from the baker's street as long as there was bread to be had in the besieged city. In this incident we see how God tempers the severity of suffering even when He does not entirely deliver us from it. (*G. F. Pentecost, D.D.*)

Ver. 17. *Is there any word from the Lord? . . . There is.—Is there any word from the Lord?*—The man who asked this momentous question belonged to the class of solemn triflers. He came with the right question in his mouth, and sometimes to get a right question is to be half-way on to the answer. To get the question rightly stated is oftentimes already the answer half-given. And he came with his question to the right quarter. He had come to the man that had a living connection with God. Yet we know from the way he treated the answer to the question that he came in the wrong spirit. Not that there was any gaiety or carelessness about his manner. He was as solemn as solemn could be when he asked this question of the prophet of God, "Is there any word from the Lord?" But he went away to show that he had been merely trifling with the question. And what was possible for Zedekiah is possible for you and for me. We may come to the Word of God with the right question in our mouth, we may come with a solemn reverent manner about us, we may pride ourselves that we are not of those who make jokes about the Word of God, or treat the ordinances of God's house with any levity, we may pride ourselves that we are not of those who turn the house of God into a theatre or place of amusement, we have the conviction that the institution of God's house is meant to get us into a closer connection with God, we believe that the Word of God which lies before us is a very message from God to man, and we come to the open Bible Sunday after Sunday with this question professedly, "Is there any word from Jehovah?" any word from Jehovah about my duty for to-day, about my duty for to-morrow—is there any word from Jehovah? We have got the right question, and we come in a reverent manner. God forbid that we should be triflers as Zedekiah was, and mistake solemnity of manner for obedience to the Word of God. By his sword on the field of battle the King of Babylon had won this right—the right to put on the head of whomsoever he would the crown of Judah. He offered it to Mattaniah; he offered it, accompanied by one condition. The King of Babylon could not afford that Judah should form an alliance with Egypt, that great rival power to him. He was in a gracious mood, and though he had conquered Israel, he was willing that an Israelite—one of the seed royal should yet hold the throne of David. And in that gracious mood he offered to Mattaniah the throne of Judah, accompanying his offer with this simple condition: he asked him to swear loyalty to the King of Babylon, and take an oath of allegiance to the King of Babylon. It was meant to keep the King of Judah from forming an alliance with a hostile power, from forming an alliance with Egypt. And

Mattaniah had sense to see it was a grand offer that was made him. He knew that this king had power to take him away in chains to Babylon, and to take his people with him. He knew that human nature was frail, he knew that this new-made king had much reason to keep him walking in the path of gratitude. But knowing that human nature was frail, he wanted to fence him in by the continual remembrance of that oath, and he changed his name from Mattaniah, "the gift of Jehovah," to Zedekiah, "the justice of Jehovah." And ever afterwards when that king's name was mentioned, it would take his mind back to that oath when he swore by the justice of Jehovah that he would be loyal to the king who had so befriended him. At first he felt no inconvenience from his vow, but as the years passed on his gratitude seemed to melt away. The King of Egypt made overtures to him, and his people were inclined to listen. He had prophets in great number, and they urged him to accept the overtures of the King of Egypt. There was one prophet in his city that warned him that he could not do a dishonourable thing and prosper. There was one prophet who reminded him that the man of God was a man who, though he swore to his hurt, would keep his oath. We may suppose that Jeremiah pleaded with Zedekiah even with tears. "Do the righteous thing. What will the heathen nations say, what will outsiders say, if the people of God break their bargain and lightly hold their oaths? Will not they blaspheme the God of Israel? An honourable heathen man will keep his oath." So spoke Jeremiah, as he pleaded with his king, but his warning voice fell unheeded on that deaf ear. By and by came the army of the Chaldeans and besieged Jerusalem. They were closely shut up for a while, and still the prophet of God was allowed to remain in the prison. The king had secret hopes that the King of Egypt would come to his help, and so long as he had hope from another quarter he would not trouble the messenger of God. By and by the army of the Chaldeans removed from the city. They went away to fight the army that was coming from Egypt to help the besieged. The general that was at the head of these forces knew well how to conduct a campaign. He had no desire that the army that was coming to help Israel should get the length of Jerusalem. He would rather deal with them separately. He went and met the army and turned it aside the way that it came, and then he came back to the city and closely invested it on every side. Then, when all hope of Egypt was shut off; then, when Zedekiah had proved that they who lean on Egypt lean on a broken reed which enters into the heart of man and pierces him; then it was that the old, old story was told. When death is thundering at the door the scoffer takes down the Bible from the shelf. So was it with Zedekiah. So long as he had one single hope from men, of being himself able to overcome, or of getting help from Egypt—so long he left the prophet of God to pine in the prison cell, and did not feel it necessary to go and seek help from him. But when at last all hope of being saved in any other way was taken away, then he secretly came to the messenger of Jehovah as the scoffer secretly takes out the Bible and tries to find out what the Word of the Lord is. Then he came and asked this question, "Is there any word from the Lord?" Zedekiah had made God the last shift, and God had a good excuse for withholding any light from the king who had acted so dishonourably. But He is long-suffering, He is patient, even though we make Him the last shift. Even from the bed of death oftentimes He hears the cry for mercy and reveals His will. "There is," said Jeremiah, "there is word from the Lord to thee. Thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the King of Babylon." An honest, kindly, blunt, definite statement. "Thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the King of Babylon." Ah, sometimes we have seen it in the individual, that deceitful disease consumption has laid hold on him, and the prophets of smooth things say, "You will get better"; and they feed his hopes upon this; and the prophet of God comes his way and tells him he is a dying man, that there is no escape for him. It is felt to be unkind. The prophets of smooth things would not have plainly said, "Thou shalt be delivered into the hands of the King of Babylon." They would have hid that. But this is the kinder way of the two. Yet Zedekiah did not act upon the light that he had received. Somehow he had a hope that he would escape. Even though the walls had a breach in them there was that private way of escape. That was his last resource, and so long as he thought there was the least possibility of escape he was scarcely prepared to receive the Word of the Lord, this message that God had sent to him, so that he did not act upon it. He bore no grudge to the prophet for speaking so plainly. He had no unkindly feelings towards him, but the opposite,

he had very kindly feelings towards him, and was willing to run a serious risk of difficulty with his cabinet rather than not do kindness to the prophet of Jehovah, the faithful servant of king and country. And thus it came to pass that they were again brought together in friendly conference. He had done an act of kindness to the prophet of the Lord. The cup of cold water that is given to a disciple never loses its reward. After that deed of kindness done there was a fuller revelation of the will of God. At first it had only been, "Thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the King of Babylon," and the second time Jeremiah pointed to the way of salvation. "Escape there is none if you are to trust to your own power to fight or to trust to Egypt. There is no escape; thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the King of Babylon. The simple question is whether you are going just now to give yourself into his hands or are going to wait until you are dragged by force by his servants into his presence." "Go forth now," he says, "and surrender to him, and though thy sin has been great he will pardon thee. Surrender to him, lay down thine arms, yield to him, and thou shalt live, and thy city shall be saved." It was a double-sided message this. The first part of it was, "Thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the King of Babylon." That was certain. The second part was, "If thou surrender now thou shalt find salvation." This is a message for us to-day. Have not we acted as that ungrateful king acted? Although rebellion was in our blood, has not God treated us with grace and given us this fair earth, and life on such an earth as this is a blessing not to be lightly esteemed. And our King, when this race rebelled, might easily have swept it off. Instead, He gave us another chance also. And though He treated us so kindly, allowed us with rebellion in our very hands to love and enjoy the benefits of life on this fair earth, have not we done just what Zedekiah did, forgotten allegiance to our gracious King and listened to the overtures of His enemy, and gone and done what Satan wanted us to do? And our city, what is it but the city of destruction? We see that death is coming nearer, escape there is none, and we come to the Prophet of God, not to Jeremiah, but to Jesus, who is the Mediator of the new covenant, and we say to Him, "Is there any word from Jehovah?" And He says, "There is." "Thou shalt surely die, thou shalt surely be delivered into the hands of God." We cannot escape. We will be delivered into the hands of the King against whom we have rebelled. That is one fact there is no blinking of. And we say, "Is that all the message?" Thank God it is not all. Jesus says, "There is a way of salvation." Don't wait until you are taken and dropped by force into His presence by that servant of His that is called Death. But go forth now and yield to Him, surrender to Him, and all will be well. Let us mark well the penalty that followed Zedekiah for his disobedience to the Word of Jehovah. He went away clinging to that hope that he would yet escape. He did not act upon the light that he had been given. He still had the hope that he would escape by that private path, by the way of the king's garden, and so he had not courage to go out and put himself into the hands of the princes and the King of Babylon, the princes that were at the head of the army. He did not act upon the light he had received when Jeremiah pleaded with him to do it. "Obey," said he, "the voice of the Lord, and it shall be well with thee and thy house." All that Zedekiah could say was, "I am afraid the Jews will mock me if I do—mock me, they will mock me." He had not a doubt that Nebuchadnezzar would pardon. He knew there was pardon awaiting him out there, he knew there was life awaiting him out there, but he knew that he would be mocked if he did it. Many a one has been laughed into hell; I never knew of any one being laughed out of it. Ofttimes the young seeker feels that it has come to a point, and, just when he is taking the step, it is the jeer of the companion that comes in. "I am afraid my companion will mock me." A godless companion will mock you. What of that? Are you not manly enough to be laughed at? "They will mock me," said poor Zedekiah, and he had not courage to be mocked. That cursed pride had scared him past the gate that led to salvation. And by and by there was a breach in the walls, and the princes of the King of Babylon's army were in the breach, and when Zedekiah saw that, he took the secret way of escape; and by night he made for the hills away down through the ravine that led to Jericho, escaping away to the hills of Palestine. But the army of the Chaldeans pursued after him and overtook him on the plains of Jericho, and brought him before the king. Then he saw his two sons put to death before his eyes; then they came to him and put his eyes out—he was only thirty-two years of age; then they loaded him with

fetters, and condemned him to this awful imprisonment for life. And the bitterest pang in the torment of all, he had this knowledge, that he might have escaped it if he had only done what the Lord had wanted him to do. "Had I only obeyed the voice of Jeremiah I might have had my two sons yet; I would have had my eyesight; I would not have had these chains." It was the sting of the scorpion in his torment, this memory of what might have been, had he only taken the step—a single step of surrender. (*Jas. Paterson, M.A.*)

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

VERS. 1-4. The words that Jeremiah had spoken unto all the people.—Unpatriotic in appearance:—Rays of hope had arisen in the clouded sky of the nation. An Egyptian army was on its way to the city. Thus, it was believed, the Chaldeans would be compelled to raise the siege, which had been growing ever closer, so that first hunger and then starvation stared its inhabitants in the face. An escape from their horrible position seemed possible through an alliance with the Egyptian king. These hopes were dashed to the ground by the emphatic word of the prophet: "This city shall assuredly be given into the hand of the army of the King of Babylon." He even went beyond this, and urged desertion to the enemy: "He that abideth in the city shall die by the sword, the famine, and the pestilence; but he that goeth forth to the Chaldeans shall live." All this seemed, not only unpatriotic, but treasonable. It has been well said, "No government conducting the defence of a besieged fortress could have tolerated Jeremiah for a moment. What would have been the fate of the French politician who should have urged the Parisians to desert to the Germans during the siege of 1870?" Jeremiah seemed a veritable Cassandra, and Cassandras, even if, as in this case, their warnings are but utterances of the inevitable, can only expect to be met with resentment and persecution. (*W. Garret Horder.*) **Patriotism:**—True patriotism is love of one's native land. A good deal of modern "patriotism" is love of some one else's land, coupled with an unchristian hatred of other countries. Sometimes people ask whether Christianity and genuine patriotism can go together. For a sincere Christian will love all mankind. Racial hatred is a crime in the eyes of Christ, who teaches us that "One is our master, and all of us are brethren," and that we are to love our neighbour as ourself. A Christian can be a most sincere patriot, indeed the only true patriot. Christians are to love the whole world, as Jesus did. Yet, by natural association the soil of our fatherland is endeared to us by a thousand hallowed memories, which the soil of another land cannot recall. I think the limestone hills of Galilee, and the lap of the waters on the shores of Gennesaret were dearer to Christ than the seven hills of Rome, or the flow of the golden Tiber. Our Lord broke His heart over Jerusalem, the city of His love, as He saw "the doom from its worn sandals shake the dust against that land." Christ was a patriot, and the thing that cut His heart most painfully was not so much the coming destruction of Jerusalem, as the national sin which caused that national ruin. So, too, a Christian patriot will love his country's honour even more than its wealth and material greatness. He will value the good name of his fatherland, and the moral and intellectual elevation of his countrymen, far more than mere additions to its territory or additions to its wealth. And a true patriot will love his own land without hating other countries. The Christian must love other lands too, and seek their highest welfare. Charity begins at home: but it is a poor charity that ends at home. Love for other lands prompted the founders of missionary societies, which have been of such incalculable blessing to the civilisation of mankind. A true patriot will stand up for his fatherland; if others seek to enslave it he will make sacrifices for the home of his birth, as England did when the Spanish Armada threatened our liberty and our religion. But a Christian patriot will not do anything to cause hatred of another country. He will aim at making all the nations love one another. If he finds others trying to sow the seed of wicked hate, or if he sees his own land doing wrong, the Christian patriot will dare to speak the truth. When Lord Chatham urged England not to make war on the United States he was howled down by the bastard patriots of the day. But history stamps him as the true

patriot, his opponents as the false ones. When John Bright spoke against the folly of the Crimean War he was made the butt of newspaper gibes, and nine-tenths of his countrymen laughed at him or sneered at him. But history shows that John Bright was right. He was the true patriot. The false patriot holds that you must never criticise your country's dealings with other lands. Perhaps the hardest duty that ever falls on a man who loves his fatherland is to point out that his country is doing wrong. That heavy duty fell often to the lot of Jeremiah. The Jews had so long persisted in idolatry that God's marvellous patience could bear with them no longer. After repeated warnings, all in vain, God told the people, by His prophet, that they would go into the land of bondage as a punishment for their sin. God also told Jeremiah to inform his fellow-countrymen that it was useless to struggle against the troops of Nebuchadnezzar. God had sent that monarch to chastise the rebellious Jews, to take them into captivity, and to bring ruin to the nation, because of its sin. This painful duty of urging the Jews not to resist, not to persist in a hopeless struggle, was heart-breaking to a true patriot like Jeremiah. The princes, who had no real faith in God, naturally thought Jeremiah's action most unpatriotic. Disbelieving in God, disbelieving in religion, disbelieving in Jeremiah's prophecies, no wonder they said, "This man seeketh not the welfare of the people, but their hurt." Poor Jeremiah! The bastard patriots of Jerusalem sneered at him, called him a Little Palestiner, said he was in the pay of the Chaldeans. Poor Jeremiah! He had no love for the Chaldeans in preference to his own nation. Nay, he loved the Jews with all their sins more than the heathen Chaldeans, who were only instruments in God's hands for punishing the guilty Jews. But he knew it was no use to resist. He knew that he had received a message from God. He knew he must deliver that message, though at the risk of his life. Like a brave hero and a true patriot he told his people of their folly, of their sins, and of their approaching doom. He met with the usual brickbat argument, brute force; he was put into a well, put into captivity, and ill-treated in various ways. But every word he spoke came true. And when the Chaldeans had utterly destroyed the city and crushed its inhabitants, the captain of the guard set Jeremiah free and said, "Will you return with me and find a comfortable home in Babylon?" Jeremiah was a true patriot, therefore he chose to share the sufferings of his people, though they had so grievously wronged him. The comfort and luxury of Babylon were rejected by the simple, honest patriot, who preferred to dwell in poverty among the people of the land. If those false patriots, who cried him down, had had a chance of the ease and comfort offered to Jeremiah, how they would have jumped at it! They would have preferred Babylon's fleshpots to Palestine's poverty and want. But Jeremiah chose to share his people's abject poverty and utter wretchedness. The intense, broken-hearted patriotism of Jeremiah stands out for all time in the magnificent Lamentations that he wrote, with his pen dipped into his heart's own blood. They are the saddest writings in the world. And what made the Jews' ruin so intensely sorrowful to Jeremiah was the fact that it was so richly deserved. Therein was the sting. And he knew that there could be no improvement in their lot till their lives became better. He is the ideal of a patriot. Some false teachers have been and are trying to breathe into England a spirit of defiance to other lands, and an unbounded lust for territorial extension of our Empire. These teachers are attempting to stir up racial hatred. A very recent author declares that Germany must be blotted out by England, because she is our great rival in trade. As readers of history we know the curse of the racial hatred that existed between England and France in the time of the first Napoleon. And as Christians we know how fiendish is the advice to cut the throat of a neighbouring nation because she is a commercial rival. Christians do not advocate doing away at once with all soldiers and sailors. Like policemen, they are necessary at present. And we know that our sailors and soldiers will always do their duty bravely. The Christian Church protests against this modern bastard patriotism, which is much the same as piracy, against this glorification of brute force, against this reversion to savagism, against this contempt for all that is gentle, spiritual, Christ-like. Such principles work—

1. Mischief in the social and political world;
2. Mischief in the realm of literature, and all that leads to the higher development of man;
3. Mischief to religion.

These principles work mischief in the social and political world. At the end of last century and the beginning of this, how deplorable was the condition of the workers of this land. Why? Because of our incessant and unnecessary

Wars with France. These principles of false patriotism work much evil in the realm of literature, and all that leads to the higher development of man. The "patriotism" which means lust for other people's land, and hatred of other nations, may produce a "Soldiers' Chorus," but it will produce no Tennyson, no Shakespeare. Since the German Empire became cursed with militarism it has produced no great writers. The essence of the highest literature is to be cosmopolitan for all the world. The Republic of Athens was a commercial, a scientific, an artistic city. The kingdom of Sparta was military to the highest degree. Military Sparta has left us no literature. Civic Athens has left us a literature which even to-day is a wonder of the world. That is natural. The habitual practice of blind obedience, necessary for the soldier, is the greatest foe to thought, and prevents men from learning how to form judgments and pass opinions. Militarism must be for the masses of the soldiery unintellectual. Our literature during the last few years has in some respects deteriorated sadly. One of the aspects of its decadence is its excessive glorifying of the military spirit. Swarms of books for boys have been published the last twenty years, and they are very largely glorifications of physical force. That is a reversion to the savage. The principles of this false patriotism work deadly mischief to religion. This spurious patriotism is not love of one's country so much as love of more country. It is hatred of other men's patriotism. It cannot understand that foreigners may and ought to love their fatherland even as we do ours. Such teachings lead to bitter hatred instead of love. Racial hatred is as ungodly as it is idiotic. Nelson used to say to his sailors, "Fear God, honour the king, and hate a Frenchman as you hate the devil." How could they fear God if they hated God's children? Every Frenchman was as much loved by God as every Englishman was loved. The business of the Christian Church is to spread love and not hate, to tone down animosities, not to stimulate them. Though the student of history sees how insane and utterly unnecessary most wars have been, war may sometimes be a stern necessity. But the glorification of war is earthly and unchristian. The only argument for militarism worth anything is that it develops pluck. Well, so did gladiator fights. Shall we reintroduce them? Pluck may be learned on the football-field as well as on the field of slaughter, where the animal passions of savageism are let loose. If we are Christians we will turn away from this bastard patriotism which ends in hate of other lands. We will love our country dearly. If occasion comes, we must make great sacrifices for her. But we will ever preach the gospel of love against the badspell of hate. We will preach the superiority of intellectual pursuits to the pursuit of war. We will preach the blessedness of elevating mankind to the spiritual rather than drag humanity down to the animal. (*F. W. Aveling, M.A.*)

Ver. 5. For the king is not he that can do anything against you.—*Zedekiah weakened and ruined through fear of man*:—Zedekiah was one of those unfortunate characters, frequent in history, like our own Charles I. and Louis XVI. of France, who find themselves at the head of affairs during a great crisis, without having the strength of character to enable them to do what they know to be right, and whose infirmity becomes moral guilt. The princes of his court had him completely under their influence (*Jer. xxxviii. 5*). "The king is not he that can do anything against you." This view of his character is the key to verse 17. The king had some sympathy with the imprisoned prophet. He had also a desire to hear the Word of the Lord; but he was afraid of the princes. He did not dare openly to show his sympathy, openly to declare his reverence for the Divine message; so he had a secret interview with him. Jeremiah's address to the king may be divided into three parts—(1) A prophecy, (2) A personal defence, (3) A request. He declared that the King of Babylon should be victorious; he also declared his own innocence of any design against king or people, and compared his own conduct with that of the prophets who, to please the people, had spoken smooth things unto them; and he asked for some alleviation of his treatment.

Vers. 7-13. Ebed-melech the Ethiopian.—*Ebed-melech the Ethiopian*:—A slave from the Soudan, an eunuch in the household of Zedekiah, King of Judah, is by the side of the great Jeremiah, a humble servant yet an efficient protector. The slave and the prophet in our thought abide together. I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH BROUGHT THE TWO TOGETHER AND CAUSED THE STRANGE CONJUNCTION. The prophet is cast into a dungeon, deep and loath-

somo. Into the slime of its unfloored depths he sinks, and there he lies. Left to die and rot in the dungeon's mud! No. One man's voice is raised, one man's hand works. But no son of Israel is he; only a slave of the royal household, a heathen from a far-off land, with a black skin but a pure heart. II. THE DELIVERER. What his own name was we know not, for among the royal servants he was known only as Ebed-melech, "the king's slave." Whether he was of the original Hamitic or of the invading Semitic stock we cannot conjecture, save that, from his position, there is an inherent probability that he was of the former. We are at liberty, then, to conceive of him as a black, though probably not a negro, torn from his home, either as a boy or youth, to meet the demands of the market at Meroë; and then, in the way of traffic, passed on through Egypt, till at last he passed into the palace of the King of Judah. We can next conceive of him, by the exercise of the qualities of intelligence, fidelity, and prudence, promoted to the important post of superintendent of the royal harem. He would thus come into contact with Jeremiah, who, as "the last of the prophet statesmen of Judah" (as he has been called), had for many years compelled for himself a place in the councils of the nation. The simple nature of the Ethiopian, uncorrupted by the vices of palace life, would recognise the moral and spiritual elevation of the prophet, and would yield a homage and a love of which the heartless courtiers who despised him were incapable. His position brought him into frequent intercourse with the king; perhaps gave him a free access to his presence. None could know better than he his weaknesses and his vices; but he would also know, as most could not, that in his debased mind were certain possibilities of justice and generosity to which an appeal might be made. Hopeful or hopeless, the brave heathen resolves that appeal there shall be. And after a right honest and straightforward fashion he sets him to his task. Well done, slave! Bravely spoken, Soudance! Was there another man in all Jerusalem man enough to have done thy work? I trow not. But it is an ill turn thou hast done for thyself! Where is thy prudence, man? Who is this Jeremiah for whom thou art pleading? The lost and almost the last advocate of a lost cause. Who are "these men" whom thou art arraigning? The magnates of the realm, in whose hands the king is but a feeble, though it may be a well-meaning puppet. What supports canst thou expect to secure? None, unless it be the secret friendship of a few frightened men, whose favour is sought. What enemies canst thou not fail to make? The princes of Judah, whose frown may be death. But "fear not, thou king's slave! Chariots and horsemen are upon the hills round about thee. There is an unseen Friend whose favour is life; and there is an immortal Church to call thee blessed." The king's better nature is roused by the appeal. Rising for the moment above the unkingly fear of his nobles, he exercises his royal prerogative, and commissions Ebed-melech to take a sufficient force and release the prophet from the dungeon. Speedily, tenderly, and joyfully it is done. The forethought displayed, the various precautions to secure the exhausted victim from further danger or discomfort, are minutely and gratefully detailed. III. THOUGHTS WHICH SUCH AN INCIDENT AROUSES IN THE MIND. It would be easy to descant upon the moral lessons which the incident teaches, to make Ebed-melech the peg on which to hang edifying reflections. He might easily be made into a lay figure to do duty for the showing off of such thoughts as these: that God uses instruments selected from among the lowly as well as the lofty; that the faithful discharge of the offices of commonest humanity is noted, approved of, and will finally be owned by the God of providence; that in most unlikely places, among most unlikely classes, God's servants, His because servants of righteousness and humanity, are to be found; that He has His "hidden ones" where the eye of man suspects not; and that the faith that God desires to see in men is that trust in Him and that supreme homage to the claims of charity and truth which will cause them to do right, and leave the issues to work themselves out as they may in subjection to His will. But I do not desire the man to be lost in the meditations. I want us to see men under the influence of motives that may be ours, to enter into the human feeling, to sympathise with the human surrender, and to behold in these that which God loves to behold in His creature-children. Jehovah says, "Thy life shall be for a prey unto thee, because thou hast put thy trust in Me." A thought of comfort, quickening, and strength is here suggested; those who do right, follow charity, work humanely—not because these things will pay, but because they are what they are, leaving consequences to come as come they may—these are trusting God, these are His worshippers, even though they have never learned His name.

(G. M. Grant, B.D.) *Deliverance from an unwonted quarter*:—Strange, too, was the quarter from which deliverance came to the prophet. Not from the company of priests to which he belonged; not from that of the prophets of which he was the greatest member of that age; not even from his "brethren according to the flesh," but from an alien to the commonwealth of Israel—an Ethiopian, a son of the despised Ham. It is very curious and beautiful to find these Scriptures—Jewish though they be—studded over with bright examples of goodness from the nations around. One of its noblest prophecies is from the mouth of Balaam the Midianite. Deliverance came to its greatest prophet (so far as action goes) from "Zarephath, which belongeth to Sidon," from "a woman that was a widow." What Thomas Carlyle called the grandest thing in all literature is from Job, who probably was not of the seed of Abraham. And when we come to the New Testament, in a Roman soldier Christ found faith nobler than that of any in Israel, and in a Samaritan woman He found His first missionary. The Jew might stand aloof in proud isolation, but the Book he revered called "nothing common or unclean." (*The Quiver*.) *Ebed-melech, the model of kindness*:—I. IT IS EASY TO SHOW KINDNESS. Some things are very hard to do. We know for how many years the Government of England, of our own country, and of other nations, have been trying to find the way to the North Pole. How much money has been spent, and how many valuable lives have been lost in these attempts! And yet they have never succeeded. Getting to the North Pole is a very hard thing to do. Some things can only be done by those who have plenty of money. But it is very different with the work of showing kindness. There is nothing hard about this. We do not need much money to do it. The poor can show kindness, as well as the rich. Ebed-melech was a poor coloured man—the slave of King Zedekiah; yet he managed to show real kindness to the prophet Jeremiah. He was the means of saving his life. II. KINDNESS IS USEFUL. Ebed-melech's kindness was useful to Jeremiah, because it saved his life. He lived for years after this, and was the means of doing a great deal of good to the people of Israel who were living then. Jeremiah has been useful to the Church of God, ever since that day, by the prophecies which he wrote. And a large portion of those prophecies was written after the day in which Ebed-melech saved his life. And this shows us how great the usefulness was of Ebed-melech's kindness. And in learning to show kindness to others, there is no telling how much good we may do. III. KINDNESS IS PROFITABLE. God sent word to Ebed-melech, by Jeremiah, that when Jerusalem should be taken by the Assyrians, He would put it into their hearts to show kindness to him by sparing his life. And so it came to pass. (*R. Newton, D.D.*) *Put now these old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine arm-holes under the cords.*—*Gentleness in doing good*:—I. THE EXAMPLE OF EBED-MELECH SHOULD BE FOLLOWED BY THOSE WHO WISH TO SHOW REAL KINDNESS TO THE POOR. When "poverty cometh as an armed man" (Prov. vi. 11), blighting hope, and bringing wretchedness in his train, a heart must be harder than stone, which is not moved with compassion. To show kindness to the needy, at the right time, and in the best way, should be the study of those who would be followers of Jesus. Experience has shown that it is generally far better to put people in the way of getting employment, than to make them feel their dependence by directly relieving their wants. II. A LESSON FOR THOSE WHO ARE ANXIOUS TO RESCUE PERISHING SINNERS FROM GOING DOWN TO THE PIT. Harsh words are quite out of place, even to the most depraved; and we can hardly claim to be disciples of Him who will not "break the bruised reed," nor "quench the smoking flax" (Isa. xlii. 3), if we venture to speak them. It is far better to lower the silken cords of Divine love, and the soft cushions of the promises, and to address words of encouragement to those who are groping in darkness. "He that winneth souls is wise" (Prov. xi. 30). The word "winneth" is the important one. It suggests something besides labour and painstaking. Winning implies gentleness, and a sincere interest in the souls of others. No one will be made better by scolding, or sarcasm; but he who will imitate Ebed-melech, in his thoughtful tenderness, will be successful in his work. III. THE EXAMPLE OF EBED-MELECH DESERVES TO BE REMEMBERED BY THOSE WHO WOULD BRING OTHERS INTO THE FOLD OF CHRIST'S CHURCH. Very little is ever accomplished for the Master by harsh and uncharitable controversy. (*J. N. Norton, D.D.*) *The captive rescued*:—Here we see tenderness and compassion. There is much in doing a kind action in a kind way. A charity may be so given as to wound the recipient; and a good deed, accompanied by kind words, is like a gem set in pure gold. Let us ever be careful that when we try to help others,

we do our task with tenderness to the feelings and prejudices of those we would aid. But the events of old times were full of foreshadowings of the great central fact of the world's redemption. 1. In Ebed-melech, therefore, we may behold a type of One who comes forth from the palace of the Great King to loose the captive's chains. Our Saviour stoops down to help us. The cords of His love and compassion lift us up, and restore us to that "service which is perfect liberty." 2. But again, in this narrative there is a very good illustration of the too often forgotten truth that in man's redemption he has his own part to do. If it was Ebed-melech who let down the cords, yet Jeremiah had to fix them under his arms to such a position that he might safely be drawn up. "Work out your own salvation" is the plain direction of the apostle. 3. Again, there seems to be a lesson of instruction in this point—that the rags and castaway fragments of garments were made useful in the way of making easier the deliverance of Jeremiah, things which were worthless in themselves used for a good and excellent purpose. So many things, at which men scoff, saying, "How can they save souls?" are, by God's blessing, made of use. 4. Lastly, let us take Ebed-melech for an example. Can we not strive to rescue some soul? Cannot we, like the thirty servants of the king, aid in letting down the cords, or protect those who are doing so? We may at least lower down the cords of prayer and entreaty. (*W. Hardman, LL.D.*)

Ropes and rags :—The story is an illustration of the way God saves men. Jeremiah's danger and deliverance were very real. In that dungeon he is, indeed, in "an horrible pit." No hope of escape. No light, no firm standing, every prospect of death, and in no long time either. Would to God that we preachers could see the real danger to which sinners are exposed! Jeremiah was delivered, brought up out of the miry clay. But the prophet's salvation was only a feeble picture of what God's grace does for those who take hold on Jesus. He remained in the courts of the prison. "Whom the Son makes free are free indeed." We who rest in Jesus may walk about the courts of the King's palace. I. MARK YOU, HELP ALWAYS COMES FROM ABOVE. Jeremiah found it so. It was useless to try to climb out of the dungeon, it was only to fall deeper into the mire. "Salvation is of the Lord." You cannot save yourself. The effort will only exhaust you. Cry unto the Lord. Say, "O Lord, deliver my soul." He is sure to hear your cry. Ebed-melech is only a very poor picture of Jesus. The Saviour does more than send down a rope. He comes Himself and lifts us up. Although Ebed-melech may be a very poor type of Jesus Christ, he is a very good picture of the style in which one man may help another. II. HE HAD SYMPATHY. Now, sympathy is the mother of help. III. EBED-MELECH DID NOT ALLOW DIFFICULTY TO DETERMINE HIM. Some men can work hard so long as there are no difficulties; opposition to them is like a hill on a jibbing horse; they must stop now: they "did not look for this sort of thing, you know." Just so, the eunuch found it was not easy—it never is—to undo wrong. "A stout heart to a stiff braid," is common sense as well as right. If you mean to help others, you will have to pull hard against the stream. IV. EBED-MELECH TEACHES US TO SPARE THE FEELINGS OF THOSE WE HELP. He lowered down the old rags and clouts he had gathered, and bade the prophet put them under his armpits, so as not to have them cut by the ropes. The rope of deliverance should not cut the flesh of those we save. This is not always thought of. We may wound men in helping them, and they may like the remedy less than the disease. We should think of the feelings, as well as the wants of those we help. Shall we not imitate Him of whom it is said, "He will not break the bruised reed"? When we take the rope, let us not forget the old rags as well. V. Among the practical lessons of this story, there is the great truth that ONE MAN MAY SET OTHERS GOING. Ebed-melech went to the king for help, and he gave him thirty helpers. In the thirteenth verse, we read, "So they drew up Jeremiah." How many times this happens! Robert Raikes had no idea how many wheels his would set in motion. Müller of Bristol has many imitators, and thousands of orphans are fed and clothed that he will never know of. If you will only begin, others will follow you. Do not wait for others to start with you; be content to go alone. It was David Livingstone that set Stanley and Cameron to work, and the end of that lonely traveller's work will be seen when "a highway shall be there, and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away"; but if Livingstone had waited for others, he would have died, in comfort, it may be, but could not have had a grave in Westminster Abbey, nor have set in motion the plans which are sure to issue in Africa's deliverance. VI. Let

us learn THE VALUE OF DESPISED AND CAST-OFF THINGS. The prudent chamberlain had seen "under the treasury the old cast clouts, and old rotten rags." No one else saw any value in them, but he put them to a good use. What a number of things are cast aside, like these old rags! Do you see yonder woman in such dismay? She has been upstairs looking at some old dresses, and finds that the moth has been there before her, and they are useless. Would it not have been better to have given them to her poor relations, or to that widow who has such difficulty to find clothes for her little ones? Have you not old magazines that would gladden the heart of some of those intelligent paupers who never get any lively reading, or save from ennui some convalescent in the hospital? Look and see what you have "under the treasury." (*T. Champness.*) *The tenderness of Ebed-melech* :—Negro though he was, Ebed-melech was a gentleman. He is not so bent on delivering the prophet that he cares not how it is done. He will not bruise the prophet's skin in saving the prophet's life. These old cast clouts and rotten rags do not present a very savoury picture; but the feeling that prompted their use is both pleasant and thoughtful. Many a good deed is spoilt by the manner of its doing. Some people pride themselves upon their roughness; they think it a sign of manliness. Their idea of manliness wants revision. Do such ever think of the meaning of the very name they claim—gentleman? Do such realise that it is not only manlike, but Godlike, to be gentle? Did not one of the psalmists exclaim, "Thy gentleness hath made me great"? Ebed-melech's deliverance of the prophet from the mire was a great deed, but the tenderness with which it was done makes it many times greater. (*The Quiver.*)

Vers. 19, 20. *I am afraid of the Jews.*—*Fatal timidity* :—I remember very well, when I first went out to Australia, that one fine evening a little bird was seen to be following the ship, evidently a land-bird driven out to sea. When the little thing got tired it tried to alight on some portion of the rigging, though it seemed afraid to do so. On one occasion the captain stretched forth his hand and tried to take hold of the little bird, but it eluded his grasp and went back far away into the darkness of the night, falling upon the waves without the hope of rescue. (*T. Spurgeon.*) *Obey, I beseech thee, the voice of the Lord.*—*Obedience* :—I remember, years ago, entering the bed-chamber of an eminent saint, one autumn morning, whose diminishing candles told how long he had been feeding on the Word of God. I asked him what had been the subject of his study. He said he had been engaged since four o'clock in discovering all the Lord's positive commandments, that he might be sure that he was not wittingly neglecting any one of them. It is very sad to find how many in the present day are neglecting to observe to do the Lord's precepts—concerning His ordinances, concerning the laying-up of money, the evangelisation of the world, and the manifestation of perfect love. They know the Lord's will, and do it not. They appear to think that they are absolved from that "observing to do," which was so characteristic of Deuteronomy. As though love were not more inexorable than law! (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

CHAPTER XXXIX.

VERS. 1-10.—In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, came Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon.—*The downfall of Judah* :—The siege and sacking of Jerusalem under Nebuchadrezzar is the most tragic story in history. The second destruction of the city under Titus, the Roman general, was analogous, but did not equal the first in horror of detail. The siege was more prolonged under the king of Babylon, the resistance by the Jews more desperate, and the determination with which the people held out more stubborn, preferring starvation to surrender. During those eighteen months the city presented an awful spectacle; delicately reared princesses were seen clawing over dung-heaps and street refuse to find a morsel of food; the once snow-clad Nazarites walked the streets in filthy garments; the fairest and best-looking of the people were reduced to the merest skeletons; desperation of hunger forced fond mothers to boil and eat their own children. The horrors depicted even in outline by the sacred writers almost beggar the imagination. The king of Judah was the

vassal of the king of Babylon, but being deceived by false prophets he rebelled against his foreign sovereign, and sought, through an alliance with the king of Egypt, to throw off the Chaldean yoke. Hearing of this attempt at rebellion, the Chaldeans had sent a strong detachment of their army to reduce Zedekiah to obedience, when an Egyptian army making its appearance forced them to raise the siege. Subsequently the Egyptian army was defeated, and then, with his entire army, Nebuchadrezzar came up and besieged Jerusalem for eighteen months, and took it. Jeremiah had persistently warned the king that it was folly to contend with Babylon, for the Lord had determined upon their captivity. So the king and the princes not only rebelled against the king of Babylon, but set themselves in defiance against God Himself. I. JERUSALEM TAKEN AND SACKED. The prophet does not dwell on the details of the siege, as it was no part of his plan to detail the military processes by which the holy city was at last put into the hands of the Chaldeans. His purpose was simply to record the fact, and thus mark the fulfilment of God's word. After eighteen months, in which the city had been completely invested, a breach in the walls was effected, and the Babylonian army was in full possession. The princes of the Chaldean king entered the city and took up their headquarters in the middle gate. This was probably the gate through an inner wall within the city which surrounded the citadel. At any rate, the presence of these Babylonian princes in that place showed that the city was entirely in their hands. For further details, compare 2 Kings xxv. with our present text, and Jeremiah lii. These three accounts are substantially the same. For details of the horrors and sufferings of the inhabitants of Jerusalem during the siege, compare Lamentations (especially chap. iv.), in which the heart-broken prophet pours forth his sorrow over the downfall of the city, and especially over the woes which had come upon his people. See also Ezekiel, *iv.* 5, xii., xxi., where minute prophecies of the downfall of the city are recorded. After the subjugation of the city, and the flight, capture, judgment, and imprisonment of the king, under the command of Nebuzar-adan, the captain of the guard, the Babylonian soldiers burned the city, including the Temple, king's palace, and all the houses of the princes and chief men; the walls were razed; the whole city was turned into a waste and ruinous heap (*ver.* 8; *lii.* 13, 14). Jeremiah laments the destruction of the glorious city of God in these sad and pathetic words: "How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people; how is she become a widow, she that was great among the nations. . . . She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks; among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they are become her enemies. . . . And from the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed. . . . How is the gold become dim; how is the most fine gold changed; the stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of every street. The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter" (*Lam.* i. 1, 2, 6, *iv.* 1, 2). The great lesson to be deeply pondered from this awful judgment upon Jerusalem is the certain retribution of God upon persistent sin. No honest and thoughtful man can read these prophetic and historic records without being profoundly impressed with the longsuffering mercy of God toward sinners, and the certainty of retribution following upon unrepented and persistent sin. God's judgment may be slow in coming, but it is as sure as it is slow. How long He had borne with Judah and Jerusalem before He began to pour out His fury upon them! Long as God postpones His judgment, when once it sets in, it goes on to the end; "though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small." What a culmination of calamities at the last! There is no stopping or turning them back. All the skill, the courage, and the endurance which Jerusalem brought to bear in order to avert this awful judgment, availed nothing. When the time for judgment comes it is too late for prayer and entreaty. When will men learn this lesson? We have not to do with the judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem, but with that which is coming upon all men who, like this apostate people, despise God's Word, and believe not His prophets. No amount of theory or argument will prevent the doom of the persistent sinner. Men may say that death ends all; but the resurrection of Jesus proves that it does not; men may say that God is too merciful to punish sinners according to the declaration of the Scriptures; but is He? Let the story of the flood; the overwhelming fate of Pharaoh; the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; the terrible calamities that came upon Israel and Judah, be our answer. After God's mercy has been ruthlessly

trampled under foot, then His righteous retribution comes, and proceeds to the bitter end. II. THE FLIGHT AND CAPTURE OF THE KING. When the king saw the city in the possession of the enemy, he hastily gathered his army and family, and by night fled from the city by a secret way through his garden, and between two walls which concealed his movements (ver. 4, lii. 7; 2 Kings xxv. 4). His flight, however, was of no avail; for though he nearly effected his escape, having reached the borders of the Jordan, his absence was discovered, and the Chaldeans pursued after him; and, while his army was scattered abroad, probably on a foraging expedition, the king and his family and the princes that were with him were captured. Too late the king sought safety in flight. It was not to be. God had decreed his capture, and no precaution could prevent it. Had he heeded the warning of Jeremiah, who brought him the word of God, and surrendered to the king of Babylon, his own life would have been spared, his children's lives would have been spared, his princes' lives would have been spared, and the glorious City of God would have been spared (Jer. xxviii. 17-20). The king was a weak man, and hesitated to do the word of God because he was afraid of being taunted with cowardice by his nobles and the people. How many men are cowards before their fellow-men, and yet brave before God! They fear the reproach of weak, feeble, and sinful men, but fear not the Word of God. Surely the sorry flight of the wretched king from his ruined city, a fugitive from God and the king of Babylon, was infinitely more humiliating than an honourable surrender to Nebuchadrezzar. How many will seek salvation wildly when it is too late! Let it be remembered again that, when once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut the door, then flight or petition is of none avail. When once Jesus ceases to be the Advocate of sinners, and becomes their Judge, then repentance is too late, and no man may flee the judgment. What unutterable miseries are added to the main consequences of our sins, when we think of what "might have been," had we not been too late! 1. Prophecy and its fulfilment. In connection with the flight, arrest, condemnation, and punishment of the king, we have a most remarkable series of prophetic fulfilments. Ezekiel, under the command of God, had before this final calamity, by means of pantomime, as well as by clear and unmistakable words, depicted every detail of the king's flight, capture, and punishment. Read Ezekiel xii. 1-13. Thus have we seen the king laden with his valuables, fleeing at night, digging through a wall to escape the Chaldeans; we have seen God spreading His net, catching and delivering him over, to be first blinded, then loaded with chains, carried to Babylon and thrust into prison; there we have seen him die. How impossible to have understood Ezekiel's prophecy until it was fulfilled; how then does it appear to have been the very letter of subsequent fact! 2. Arrested, condemned, and punished. The details are briefly but graphically told. When the soldiers arrested the flying king, they brought him to the king of Babylon, who (1) "gave judgment upon him." Zedekiah was, according to the law of nations, a traitor to the king of Babylon, who had set him upon the throne of Judah as his vassal, and against whom Zedekiah had rebelled. So while the Chaldean king was carrying out God's decree against Zedekiah for his persistent sin and equity, he was also executing his own law upon him as a rebel. God's providence ever fits in with the ordinary workings of human history. (2) The first part of the judgment was that the sons of the king should be butchered before his eyes. What a horrible thing this was! Alas for that poor king! He had brought this upon them. What may be the agonies of a sinful father who, through precept and example, has encouraged his own sons to infidelity, and the final loss of their souls! Then followed the slaughter of the nobles before his face; this too was in part his doing; for, though the king's action in holding out against the king of Babylon, contrary to the counsel and entreaty of Jeremiah, was due to his fear of the nobles, yet as king it was his duty to have asserted his authority and saved them and the city in spite of their mockeries of God's word. (3) Finally the king of Babylon ordered Zedekiah's eyes to be put out, then loaded him with chains, sent him to Babylon, and there cast him into prison, until death released him into the other world. Let us hope that a gate of repentance was opened for him before he passed thither. But what an awful punishment for a king and a father! The last impression on his brain from this world was the awful sight of his butchered sons and nobles. Who can tell the horrors of his lonely confinement, shut up with these memories for ever haunting his dark soul? Men choose the ways of sin in this life, counting

them to be "good things," but they forgot that in the hereafter the "evil things" which they contemptuously denied will be their portion, soured with memory's poisoned sting. III. THE BLESSED POOR. Only one ray of light penetrated the dark cloud of doom that hung over and burst on Jerusalem. The city burned with fire, the Temple destroyed, her fair stones scattered, the king and his family, the princes and nobles, and all the city's inhabitants carried away, slain, or held in a wretched captivity, which brought them nought but sighs and tears; what exception was there in all this misery? Just this; and it is not unsuggestive. The wretchedly and miserably poor were left behind; and more; for the captain of the guard, acting for the king of Babylon, gave them fields and vineyards. In the general judgment that overwhelmed Jerusalem, the sparing of these poor people and the gift to them of fields and vineyards suggest to us the blessings that are in reserve for those on earth who, though "poor in this world, are rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He has promised to them that love Him" (James ii. 5). It also suggests the beatitude of Jesus: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. v. 3, 5). God will not forget such. Here is seen God's reversal. The rich and great of Jerusalem, who had grown so by grinding oppression of the poor, are carried away captive, slain with the sword and cast into prison, while those whom they oppressed are now inheriting their lands and vineyards (Isa. lvii. 15, lxvi. 2). Till the captivity the poor were only a portion of the people, but now they were the whole. This event, therefore, would seem to indicate that the poor, meek, and contrite in spirit are the whole sum of those who shall constitute the people of God in the day of judgment. (*G. F. Pentecost, D.D.*) He put out Zedekiah's eyes.—*Non-acceptance of chastisement*.—We sometimes act as though we thought that dispensations of light and joy were made to draw us to God; those of darkness and sorrow the reverse; but that is our mistake; our thought must be "God in all." And here God makes the announcement of the chastisement in a manner worthy of Himself—in the midst of judgment He remembers mercy. He commissions Jeremiah to promise circumstances of alleviation and gracious dealing; even though the trouble remain. The trouble and its alleviations were to exist side by side. But now, what are the speakings of this "moreover" to us? 1. It says to us, Reject not bounded chastisement or trial, for you know not how wide God may remove those bounds, when it comes upon you as something rejected by you, but inflicted, whether you will or no, by Him. 2. It says, Be sure that God will carry His own way. Look upon all resistance of His will as madness, as full of mischief for yourself. 3. If we reject what God thus ordains, we may rest assured that we are laying up for ourselves a long period of sad thought, peopled with sad memories. 4. Though the chastisement or the trial God announces be heavy, still let us be assured that it is the lightest possible under the circumstances. 5. Let us believe that God has terrible reserves of chastening dealings. We think that each trial, as it comes, is the worst that can be; sometimes a man in folly and desperation feels as though God could do no more to him; but the reserves of the Lord in this way, as in blessing, are illimitable—take care, "lest a worse thing come upon thee." 6. We may, and must leave it to God to take care of us, when leading us into either discipline or chastisement. 7. Instead of fretting and troubling ourselves unduly, and setting our minds upon finding out fresh and fresh elements in our trial, let us count up some of the "moreovers" of what might have come upon us; some of the "moreovers" of the mercies which are bestowed. 8. Let us be careful to keep ourselves well within the line of God's action with us, and not to subject ourselves to man's. It is not God's purpose to make a full end of us; He means to deal wisely and admeasuredly with us; He means us to taste that He is gracious; to have reason to believe that He is so. (*P. B. Power, M.A.*)

Vers. 15-18. I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee.—*Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, one of the Lord's hidden ones*.—It is strange that, amongst all the tracts and biographies and scriptural stories which the press sends forth, one never meets the name of Ebed-melech the Ethiopian. It shows that Scripture history is either little read or little understood. It makes one doubt whether those whom either the world or the Church is admiring be those whom He that looketh not on the outward appearance, and seeth not as man seeth, will delight to honour in the day when He maketh

up His jewels. Although, for aught we know, he never was a member of any church upon earth, being a poor heathen, brought from a land that the light of God's revelation had never reached, he is held up in the Book of God to our admiration and imitation, in contrast with the whole Church and nation that was in covenant with God in ancient times; and even under the New Testament, if we honoured saints at all, his name should hold a conspicuous place in our calendar of worthies and illustrious confessors of the faith, for he was, like ourselves, a Gentile man, and it was by faith he obtained a good report from God Himself. Jerusalem was to fall, but Ebed-melech the Ethiopian would stand in the evil day. As he had delivered the prophet from his dungeon, and from the cruelty of the princes his persecutors, and the danger of a horrible death, he himself would be delivered in the day of danger, and the men of whom he was afraid would not have it in their power to take his life, or injure a hair of his head. God would be his saviour, and shows him beforehand the certainty of his salvation. I. WHAT A BLESSED PROVIDENCE IS THAT OF GOD, OVER THE LEAST AS WELL AS THE GREATEST MEN AND THINGS, ESPECIALLY OVER THE GOOD WITHOUT RESPECT OF PERSONS. 1. No one is forgotten before God, and nothing that concerns the least left out of the regard of the Father of all. The one who was the object of special care to the God of Israel, the Lord of hosts, in the day of Israel's final overthrow, was one of those who were least regarded by men upon earth, a slave, a eunuch, an Ethiopian, an uncircumcised heathen, an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, a stranger to the covenant of promise. Who then is forgotten by the God of Israel? 2. God is far from confounding the righteous with the wicked in His judgments. 3. So far from confounding the righteous with the wicked, God contrasts them with one another. What brighter display of Divine righteousness can there be than the salvation of the least of saints in the midst of the destruction of a whole nation, or church of sinners, like the Jews here, or like Christendom, to whose doom we are to look forward? II. WHAT ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE LOWLIEST TO WORK OUT THEIR SALVATION WITH CHEERFULNESS AND PATIENCE, AS WELL AS WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING, AFTER THE EXAMPLE OF EBED-MELECH THE ETHIOPIAN! 1. Why are such actions as this of Ebed-melech those which in the sight of God are of great account? Because they are acts of self-denying love and self-sacrifice; because they are thus, God Himself in the text expressly says, the fruits of a living faith in God. 2. It is not his circumstances that prevent any man from becoming great before God, great as Ebed-melech, for it is not his circumstances that prevent any from becoming good, from having the same character, and manifesting in his place the same heroic and holy spirit. 3. Woe to us if we are not like Ebed-melech in unselfishness, or in self-denying love, the fruit of faith! Church membership, Church privileges, Church knowledge and advantages of whatever kind, what will they prove but the condemnation of those who are not like Ebed-melech in character? III. WHAT BLESSED HOPE FOR THE FUTURE DOES EBED-MELECH BRING TO MANY OF WHOM THE WORLD IS NOT WORTHY, AND WHO ARE BY THE WORLD AND BY THE CHURCH UNKNOWN! 1. Kindness to those whom the world despises, or the worldly and ungodly church reprobates or persecutes, is not the least part of the duty of Christians, or those who would be saved in the day of wrath, like Ebed-melech. 2. How different is public opinion in a corrupt church or age from the judgment or truth of God! (*R. Paisley.*)

CHAPTER XL

VER. 1. *Being bound in chains.*—*Jeremiah in chains*:—There is sadness in a shackle and bitterness in bonds. Many men part with life rather than liberty. Speaking humanly, Paul's lot in chains would have been intolerably irksome; but his soul was free! They could not chain his spirit. It is melancholy to watch the attitude of a caged eagle; its eye is dull, its plumage droops. The chain is round the spirit of the creature of the skies. Not so with the Christian soul. "It is not the shackle on the wrist that constitutes the slave," said Robertson of Brighton, "but the loss of self-respect." In Christian service we learn to reverence self. Our only bonds are the bonds of love. Our manhood is exalted, our service is liberty. (*Christian Commonwealth.*)

Ver. 3. **And have not obeyed His voice.**—*Unheeding warnings lead to ruin*:—If I were in a boat on the river in the rapids, it would not be necessary to insure my destruction that I should enter into violent controversy with those who would urge me from the shore to take heed and come to land. All I should have to do would be to shut my ears to their entreaty, and leave myself alone; the current would do the rest. Neglect of the Gospel is thus just as perilous as the open rejection of it. Indeed half the evils of our daily life in temporal things are caused by neglect, and countless are the souls who put off the seeking of the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof. (*W. Bates.*)

CHAPTER XLL

VERS. 1-10. **Then arose Ishmael.**—*Devils incarnate*:—1. If ever there was such a one, this Ishmael was of whom these verses tell. His atrocities remind us of the Indian Mutiny, its leader, and the well at Cawnpore (cf. ver. 9). Treachery, ingratitude, murder, massacre, greed, cowardice,—all are gathered in this detestable character (cf. Mr. Grove's article "Ishmael," *Smith's Dictionary of the Bible*). 2. And such men are permitted to be. So clearly seen is this, that every drama has its villain; they are recognised as having definite place and function in this poor life of ours. 3. Can we explain this permission? Wherefore are such men created and preserved? It is a part of the great question of moral evil, for the full solution of which we must wait. But the existence of such men as this Ishmael is but one out of the many terrible facts in God's providence, such as plague, famine, earthquake, &c. In regard to such men, we can see some purposes that they subserve. 1. They make evident the hideous capacities of evil which are in our nature, and the need, therefore, for God's restraining grace. 2. They are warnings to increased watchfulness on the part of those in whom the tendencies to like evil exist. 3. They are God's scourges for men's sin (cf. Attila, the Scourge of God). 4. They weld together the people they oppress in one common league against them, and thus out of scattered tribes a nation is formed. 5. They clear out much that is evil (cf. French Revolution; Napoleon). But, sometimes as here, we cannot see what good they do; and then we can only wait. (*W. Clarkson, B.A.*)

Ver. 8. **So he forbore, and slew them not among their brethren.**—*Sin hindered by sin*:—Ishmael would have killed these men but for his greed of the wealth they had. It is satisfactory to think he never gained possession of it. Nevertheless, his greed made him guilty of one sin less. This story suggests that—I. **GOD HAS MANY WAYS OF HINDERING SIN.** There is—1. The best way of all. By granting a true repentance and His Holy Spirit, creating the clean heart and renewing the right spirit. 2. But there are other ways. By keeping the opportunity and the will apart. How much of our freedom from sin do we owe to this blessed providential severance! By fear of present evil consequences of our sin. 3. And sometimes, as here, by one sin getting in the way of another. Thus pride holds back not a few; not love of God, gratitude to Christ, love of holiness, but pride. And covetousness checks the sinner in many sins he would be guilty of but for this. Anger, breaking up the alliances of transgressors; as when, in the days of Jehoshaphat, the Ammonites who were coming against him fell out one with the other (2 Chron. xx. 22). "When thieves fall out, honest men come by their rights." (*W. Clarkson, B.A.*) *Sensual self-indulgence*:—The vilest Roman emperors were those who least persecuted the Church—Tiberius, Commodus, &c. They were too absorbed in their own indulgences to trouble about the Christians. II. **BUT THESE OTHER WAYS LEAVE MEN AS GREAT SINNERS AS BEFORE.** The question is not as to your freedom from transgression so much, but—what kept you free? Only the first and best way is accepted of God. III. **NEVERTHELESS, LET US BE THANKFUL THAT SIN IS SELF-DESTRUCTIVE IN ITS VERY NATURE.** It is a blessed anarchy, for it protects many who would otherwise suffer. IV. **BUT FOR OURSELVES LET US SEEK THAT SIN MAY BE DESTROYED BY CHRIST.** (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 17. **And dwelt in the habitation of Chimham.**—*Too near the edge*:—This is one of the reflections that come to us as we read of the place whither Johanan led his followers, and as we see the events that happened immediately after. This chapter is a record of disappointments. First the hopeful prospects of Gedaliah's governorship, which seemed starting so fairly and happily for all, these are shattered and overthrown by the villainous conduct of Ishmael. Then it is a grievous disappointment that we do not hear of Ishmael's death, only of his escape. That such a wretch should escape with his life seems a reflection upon that justice which generally follows on the track of wrong-doers such as he was, and metes out to them their due. Escape seems too lenient a dealing with them. And now here is another disappointment that Johanan, instead of seeking to follow in Gedaliah's footsteps, should be for leading the people down into Egypt. "At the caravanserai of Chimham, in Bethlehem—the natural halting-place on the way to Egypt—Johanan held a council of war, and then, against the prophet's advice, finally determined to abandon their homes, and to make for the refuge, to which the worldly Israelite always had recourse, across the Egyptian border." It was a bad place to halt at; it was too near that beguiling land, the witchery of which not a few of them had long been feeling and would now feel more than ever. Whenever Israel went thither, it was always a "going down into Egypt." This was more true morally and spiritually than even geographically, to which the word "down," of course, refers. And the present was no exception. Looking at them there at Chimham, we note—I. **THE RESEMBLANCE THEY OFFER.** Are they not like all those who tamper with temptation? They know, as Israel knew, that they are in a forbidden path, and yet they do not keep clear of it. Like moths fluttering around the flame, so men will dally with sin. They know that to yield would be both most wrong and ruinous, and yet they go close to the border. II. **THE REASONS WHICH GOVERNED THEM.** The Jews came to Chimham because their will had already consented to go further—on and down into Egypt. For like reasons men come to such places. There has been already the secret yielding of the will. There was no need of the Jews being at Chimham. It was not the way back from Gibeon. It was a deliberate going into temptation. So those who act like them have, as they, already consented in heart. And the causes of that consent are akin. They falsely feared what the Chaldeans might do, though there was no ground for such fear; and they falsely hoped for good—freedom from war and want—which they never realised. And such persons will ever magnify both the difficulties of the right path and the looked-for pleasures and advantages of the wrong. Thus would they persuade themselves that the right is wrong and the wrong is right. III. **THE RESISTANCE THEY SEEMED TO MAKE.** The Jews did not yield all at once. They appeal to the prophet. They ask his prayers. They make repeated and loud—much too loud: "Methinks he doth protest too much"—professions. They wait patiently the prophet's message. And yet all the while (ver. 20) they were dissembling in their hearts, "regarding iniquity" there (history of Balaam). They would have God on their side, not themselves on God's side. All this is most melancholy matter of fact with those who, of their own accord, go too near the edge. IV. **THE RESULTS THAT FOLLOWED.** Of course they went over the edge; such people always do. They showed the insincerity of their prayers by their anger when they were denied (chap. xliii. 2, &c.). They escaped none of the evil they dreaded; they gained none of the good they expected. "So disastrous did this step appear to the next and to all subsequent generations of Israel, that the day of Gedaliah's murder, which led to it, has been from that time forth and to this day observed as a national fast. It seemed to be the final revocation of the advantages of the Exodus. By this breach in their local continuity a chasm was made in the history, which for good or evil was never filled up." Yes; they who will go so near temptation will go into it, and be borne down by it to their sore hurt and harm. V. **THE REMEDY RECOMMENDED.** Jeremiah urged them to return to their own land and stay there (chap. xlii. 8, &c.), promising them the blessing of God if they obeyed, and threatening His sore anger if they did not. This counsel ever wise. Get away from the border-land back into safety. Think of what will follow on your conduct—the blessing or the curse. "Stay not in all the plain, but escape for thy life." As "the angels hastened Lot" so would we hasten all those who have foolishly and wrongly chosen to go too near temptation's edge. (*W. Clarkson, B.A.*)

CHAPTER XLII.

VERS. 1-6. All the people . . . came near, and said unto Jeremiah the prophet.—*The people and the prophet*.—I. **PRAYERFULNESS.** "Pray for us." The prophet was implored to intercede with God on behalf of his countrymen. That which prosperity had failed to teach, was quickly learned in the day of adversity. God is honoured when His people cast themselves on His all-sufficiency; and He will repay their confidence by revelations of enlarged, and ever-enlarging, favour. II. **TEACHABLENESS.** "That the Lord thy God may show," &c. Matthew Henry well says, "In every difficult and doubtful case our eye must be up to God for direction: we cannot be guided by a spirit of prophecy, which has ceased; but we may pray to be guided in our movements by a spirit of wisdom, and the hints of providence." 1. A teachable spirit is not a credulous spirit. It does not believe, except on evidence; as the preacher is to persuade men, so is he ever to re-echo the first words God addresses to His rebellious creatures, "Come, now, and let us reason together." 2. A teachable spirit is not a captious spirit. 3. A teachable spirit is not a reluctant spirit. (*W. G. Barrett.*) **The Lord shall answer you, I will declare it unto you.—Portrait of a true preacher:**—I. **THE TRUE PREACHER SEEKS HIS MESSAGE FOR THE PEOPLE FROM HEAVEN.** "I will pray," &c. There are preachers who seek their message from the theories of philosophy, from the works of literature, from the conclusions of their own reasoning. But a true teacher looks to Heaven. In his studies his great question is, "What saith the Lord"; in his ministration his language is, "Thus saith the Lord." We cannot render the spiritual service to humanity, of which it is in urgent need, by endeavouring to instruct it with human ideas, even though they come from the highest intellects of the world. The ideas of God can alone renovate, spiritually enlighten, purify, ennoble, and save the human soul. II. **THE TRUE PREACHER DELIVERS HIS MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE FULL AND FAITHFULLY.** "I will keep nothing back from you." (1) Though it strike against your prejudices. (2) Though it enkindle your indignation. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 20. For ye dissembled in your hearts, when ye sent me unto the Lord your God, saying, Pray for us.—*The hypocrisy of desiring the prayers of others without a suitable conduct*.—I. **CONSIDER ON WHAT PRINCIPLES DESIRING THE PRAYERS OF OTHERS IS GROUNDED.** They are these; that it is our duty to pray for one another; that God hath often shown a gracious regard to the intercessions of His servants for others; and that it is very desirable, especially in some particular cases, to have an interest in them. II. **WHEN THEY WHO DESIRE THE PRAYERS OF OTHERS MAY BE SAID TO DISSEMBLE IN THEIR HEARTS.** They do so when they desire them without sincerity; when they will not pray for themselves; when they will not use proper means to obtain the blessings they desire; and especially when they will not do what God by His Word and ministers requireth. III. **THE HYPOCRISY AND EVIL OF THIS CONDUCT.** It is an affront to the all-seeing and holy God; it is likewise deceiving their friends; and prayers offered for such persons are not likely to be of much avail. Application.—1. We may hence learn, with what dispositions of mind we should desire the prayers of others. Whenever we ask the intercessions of others, let it be in sincerity; with a firm persuasion of the power of prayer; that it is not in vain to seek God; and that it is our duty to engage the assistance of our friends, by their application to the throne of grace. Be solicitous that you concur with them by praying yourselves without ceasing in the best manner you are able; and with your chief dependence for acceptance, not on your own prayers, nor those of your friends, but the mediation of Jesus Christ. 2. That we should be ready to pray one for another. Whenever we think of an absent relation or friend, or hear of him, or receive a letter from him, let us lift up our hearts to God for him in a short petition, as his circumstances may require. But we should be particularly mindful of those who desire our prayers. 3. It is peculiarly wicked to dissemble in our hearts, when we profess dependence on the intercession of Christ. (*Job Orton, D.D.*) *Dissembling with God*.—I. **CONSIDER, WHAT WAS THAT GREAT AND GENERAL DUTY, AGAINST WHICH THE JEWS, ON THE OCCASION BEFORE US, REBELLED.** "Ye dissembled," said Jeremiah, "in your hearts." Dissimulation, like other sins, admits of degrees. The heart may dissemble radically and entirely, so as to be wholly hypocritical; so as not to feel any portion of that love to God, of that faith, of

that gratitude, of that sense of duty, of that purpose of obedience which the tongue expresses. Or it may dissemble partially; feeling weakly and insufficiently those sentiments towards Him, which dwell with parade and seeming warmth upon the lips. The doom which awaits the complete hypocrite, cannot be doubted. Let the partial hypocrite beware, lest he at last come to the same place of torment.

II. CONSIDER, EACH FOR HIMSELF, HOW STRONG IS THE PROBABILITY THAT YOU MAY BE GUILTY, IN A GREATER OR A LESS DEGREE, OF DISSEMBLING IN YOUR HEART BEFORE GOD. We have in our hands the Word of God, which describes the character of a true Christian. We have before our eyes the practice of the world. When we compare them, we cannot but perceive how vast is the number of professed Christians who evince little of the spirit of true Christianity in their principles and conduct: and therefore stand self-convicted as dissemblers in their hearts before the Most High. When you call to remembrance the multitudes even among those who styled themselves the followers of God, which in ancient times the sinfulness and deceitfulness of the heart betrayed into hypocrisy: when you survey the multitudes of His professed followers, which in this your day the same sinfulness and deceitfulness render hypocritical before Him: have you not reason for serious dread that you may yourself be found a dissembler in His sight? III. A SCRIPTURAL RULE, WHICH MAY ASSIST YOU IN DISCOVERING WHETHER, IF THE SON OF GOD WERE NOW TO CALL YOU TO JUDGMENT, YOU WOULD BE FOUND DISSEMBLERS IN YOUR HEARTS. "Where your treasure is," saith our Lord, "there will your heart be also." In other words, Whatever be the object which you judge and feel to be the most valuable; concerning that object will your heart show itself to be the most steadily and the most deeply interested. Apply this rule to yourself. Thus you may discover with absolute certainty whether your heart is fixed upon God, or whether it dissembles before Him. 1. Compare the pains which you employ, the vigilance which you exercise, the anxiety which you feel, concerning worldly objects, on the one hand; on the other, concerning religion. 2. When you receive a kindness from a friend, you feel, I presume, warm and durable emotions of gratitude, and an earnest desire to render to your benefactor such a return, in proportion to your ability, as may be acceptable to him. You are receiving every day from God blessings infinitely superior to all the kindnesses which can be conferred upon you by any of your fellow-creatures. Do you feel then still more lively and durable emotions of gratitude to Him? 3. Your worldly prosperity is an object which you pursue with industry and solicitude. Are you still more diligent, more anxious, in pursuing the welfare of your soul? 4. You have various occupations to which you resort, as opportunities offer themselves, from inclination and choice. Among these is religion to be found? Does religion stand at the head of them? 5. When you are informed of the events which befall another person, you rejoice, if they are such as promote his worldly advantage; you lament, if they impair it. Do you experience greater joy when you are assured of his advancement in religion? Do you experience greater sorrow if you learn that he has gone backward in the ways of righteousness? (*T. Gisborne, M.A.*) *Insincerity in prayer*:—Rarely do men come to Christ, says Leighton, "as blank paper—*ut tabula rasa*—to receive His doctrine; but, on the contrary, all scribbled and blurred with such base habits as malice, hypocrisy, and envy."

CHAPTER XLIII.

VERS. 8-13. Take great stones in thine hand, and hide them in the clay in the brick kiln.—*Jeremiah hides the stones in the brick kiln*.—I. THEY PREACHED OF THE HISTORIC PAST. 1. From the soil in which they were found. They were stones of Egypt. 2. The place where they were buried—the brick kiln—must have carried their thoughts back to the hard labour of their ancestors under the lash of the taskmasters (Ex. ix. 8). 3. The burial of the stones beneath the ground might have suggested the past condition of Israel in this same land; they were buried under the oppressive tyranny of the heathen monarch and his people, and had been raised, as it were, from a grave of degradation and lifted into a new life as a free people by the mighty hand of God. II. THEY PROPHESIED OF THE FUTURE. 1. The only refuge from the displeasure of God is to be found in

God Himself. 2. Unbelief in the Divine Word will not prevent the fulfilment of it. 3. The true minister of God will not be deterred by opposition from declaring the judgments, as well as the mercies, of God. (*A London Minister.*)

CHAPTER XLIV.

VER. 4. *Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate.—The thing which God hates:—*I. WHAT SIN ITSELF IS. II. GOD HATES IT. 1. Because it is contrary to His own nature. 2. Because it is unnatural in His creatures. 3. Because it transgresses holy, just, and good laws. 4. Because it defiles and injures the entire human nature. It brings a withering curse upon every stage of life, and upon every development of life, and upon every phase of life, and upon every department of life. 5. Because it makes men curses to each other. 6. Because it ignores or it rejects the Divine government. 7. Because wherever sin exists, except as it is checked by God's mercy, it has the dominion. 8. Because wherever it is introduced, it spreads. 9. Sin requires God to inflict upon men of every class and kind, that which He assures us, upon His oath, He has no pleasure in. 10. Their continuing in sin tramples under foot the blood of Jesus. (*S. Martin.*) *The popular estimate of sin:—*I. WHAT IS SIN? Theology is determined by the answer. "Sin is only negation—as cold is the negation of heat; darkness, of light; disease, of health." So we are told. Well, I know that I shiver to-night under the "negation" of heat. I grope under the negation of light, and feel a very positive discomfort under the negation of health, as did Paul with a very positive "thorn in the flesh." Away with this juggling of words! Sin is a fact and must be dealt with. II. WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THE NEW LIFE? If sin be easy to control, no helplessness is felt, no great change of being is accepted, no outside help is needed. If you fancy that one bad deed is cancelled by another good one, and that you are "all right at heart," although often wrong in action, you will not seek salvation. III. WHAT DISCLOSURE DOES SCRIPTURE MAKE? "An abominable thing." What does sin propose to do? It defies God and would usurp His throne were it possible. The smallest infringement of the principle of honesty in social life breaks up the confidence of man in man and introduces destructive tendencies. The greater the transgression, the more destructive are the results. IV. WHAT ABOUT THE REMEDY OF SIN? We know not all the counsels of God, but we know enough of the covenant He made with His Son Jesus Christ to say that by His vicarious atonement we are freed from the penalty of sin, and by the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Ghost we are made pure—the past and future are covered by His meritorious work. (*C. S. Robinson, D.D.*) *God's expostulation with sinners:—*I. THE DESCRIPTION OF SIN HERE GIVEN BY GOD. 1. We call those objects abominable which excite in us the sensations of loathing and abhorrence. That such is the nature of sin, even in its most agreeable forms, may be learned from the various figures under which it is represented in the Word of God. Whatever is revolting in corruption, loathsome in uncleanness, or hideous in deformity, is there brought forward, in order to give us some idea of its abominable nature. 2. It must be considered not only as loathsome to God, but as exciting in Him the desire of its destruction, and an inclination to execute vengeance upon all to whom it is an object of delight. From an abominable object we naturally turn away; but what we hate we seek to destroy. (1) Sin is hateful to God, as it is the very reverse of His nature. (2) Sin is hateful to God, as it is a transgression of His law. (3) Sin is hateful to God, as it opposes His designs. (4) Sin is hateful to God, as it is an expression of enmity in the heart against His very being. II. THE MANNER IN WHICH GOD BESEECHES US TO ABSTAIN FROM SIN. 1. We are naturally prone to wickedness. 2. God hath designs of mercy towards our guilty race. 3. The salvation of sinners is accomplished in a way perfectly consistent with their freedom as moral agents. 4. God is deeply concerned for the salvation of sinners. III. SOME CONSIDERATIONS THAT OUGHT TO INDUCE US TO HEARKEN TO THE VOICE OF GOD, AND DO WHAT HE REQUIRES. 1. It is God who expostulates with you, and beseeches you to abstain from sin. 2. The extreme folly of sin is another consideration, that may induce you to abstain from it. 3. The fatal consequences of continuing in sin, especially after we have

been called to repentance, is a consideration that ought to induce you to hear, and do what the Lord requires. (*G. Campbell.*) *Argument against sinning:—*

I. GOD DENOUNCES SIN WITH ABHORRENCE. He calls it "an abominable thing." Sin is represented in the Bible as a loathsome, odious, revolting, execrable thing. All kinds of sin are an abomination. "Lying lips" (Prov. xii. 22). "Pride" (Prov. xvi. 5). "Wicked thoughts" (Prov. xv. 28). "Wickedness in all its forms" (Prov. xv. 9). Sin is essentially an abomination. Three things show this:—1. The misrepresenting conduct of the sinner. Sin has a self-hiding, self-dissimulating instinct. 2. The universal conscience of mankind. Injustice, falsehood, self-seeking impiety, with all their kindred sins, the conscience of the world abhors. 3. The history of the Divine conduct towards our world. (1) Look at the judicial inflictions recorded in the Bible: expulsion from Eden, the deluge, the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, the destruction of Jerusalem, &c. (2) Merciful interpositions. How has mercy wrought, through all past ages, to sweep abominations from the world! through patriarchs, prophets, apostles, holy ministers, and Christ Himself. He came to "put away sin." II. GOD HATES SIN WITH INTENSITY. He says, "I hate it." The Infinite heart revolts from it with ineffable detestation. 1. He hates it, for it is deformity, and He is the God of beauty. How offensive to the artist of high æsthetic taste and culture, are figures introduced into the realm of art, unscientific in their proportions, and unrefined in their touch! 2. He hates it, for it is confusion, and He is the God of order. "Order," says the poet, "is Heaven's first law." 3. He hates it, for it is misery, and He is the God of love. Every sin has in it the sting of the serpent, which, if not extracted, will rankle with fiery anguish in the soul for ever. God hates this evil, for He desires the happiness of His creatures. III. GOD PROHIBITS SIN WITH EARNESTNESS. "Oh, do not this abominable thing." What depths of fervid loving solicitude are in this "Oh!" 1. Do it not; you are warring against your own highest interest. 2. Do it not; you are warring against the well-being of the creation. 3. Do it not; you are warring against ME. Every sin is a war against My ideas, My feelings, My plans, My institutions. (*Homilist.*) *Life's lameness: the character of sin:—*The church bells were ringing out a merry peal of welcome as a bride and bridegroom left the church after the marriage service. The bride was given some flowers as she passed to her carriage, and a small drop of water fell from a flower on to the bride's light dress. Soon after, a slight stain was noticed there, and the remark was made: "A spot of sin as small as this would shut either of us out of heaven." That remark was perfectly true. A little speck of dust on the lens of a telescope will mar its powers of vision. A tiny hair in the mainspring of a watch will suffice to stop the machinery. So one little sin, secretly cherished and wilfully indulged, will choke up our soul's communion with God and destroy our spiritual comfort. What, then, is sin? Sin is rebellion against God. Self-love is the secret of sin. The hidden principle of all sin is rejection of the will of God. None of God's commands are grievous, and therefore the question of our obedience is made to turn precisely on the will of God. God alone is independent. He has made us for Himself; and the more we seek to bring our wills into subjection to His, and our lives into complete dependence upon Him, the happier and the holier shall we become. As a train was speeding along the railroad in the north of England the other day, a spark from the engine set fire to a shrub in a plantation near the line, and then the fire spread to a forest, where it raged for two days, doing immense damage. Who would have thought that such a result would arise from a little spark? Yet so it is in the world of life—great results spring from the most trivial causes. Our hearts are, like those dry trees, ready to burst into a blaze when touched by the spark of sin. Therefore we must beware of sin. When Canova, the great Italian sculptor, was about to commence his famous statue of the great Napoleon, his keenly observant eye detected a tiny red line running through the upper portion of the splendid block of marble which had been brought from Paros at enormous cost. Others saw no flaw, but the great sculptor detected it, and he refused to lay chisel upon it. The very perfection he aimed at compelled him to reject the marble block. Now if there is a flaw in your life, others may not see it, but God most assuredly will. And that there is such a flaw God declares. His Word asserts, "All have sinned" (Rom. iii. 23). "There is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Psa. xiv. 3). During a naval engagement off Copenhagen, Admiral Parker signalled the ships to cease action. Nelson did not wish to retire his ship. When informed of the Admiral's signal, he looked through the telescope with his blind eye, and exclaimed, "I see no such signal." He persistently

decoyed himself in order that he might continue the fight. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John i. 8). But we deceive no one else. It is no excuse for a man to say he does not steal, does not lie, does not swear, does not covet. Neglect of known duty is sin. Man has a duty to God (Matt. xxii. 37). Not to love God is sin. And the Bible not only charges man with not loving God, but it speaks of man as being in a state of "enmity against God" (Rom. viii. 7). Therefore he cannot restore himself. It is a stormy night by the sea-shore. The wind is howling and moaning, and ever and anon with boisterous gusts threatening violence to the shipping in the harbour. The sea is lashed into a scething foam. On the beach are scattered groups of people—men hurrying to and fro with excited determination, and women wringing their hands in mute agony and mingled prayer. You look out to sea. In the darkness of the night you can see nothing, but you can tell by the whirr and rush of the rocket apparatus, by the cries of the lifeboatmen, that a vessel is in danger. You know there is a ship in distress by these signs, though you may not know the extent or reality of her danger. So, when I see the Lord Jesus Christ leaving His throne in glory, living a life of anguish, and dying a cruel death, I learn that sin is a terrible reality. Oh, what a hideous, fiendish monster is sin, when it turns its cursed enmity against the blessed Son of God, and imbrues its cruel hands in His precious blood! The Emperor Arcadius and his wife Eudoxia had a very bitter feeling towards St. John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople. One day, in a fit of anger, the Emperor said to some of his courtiers, "I would I were avenged of this bishop!" Several then proposed how this should be done. "Banish him and exile him to the desert," said one. "Put him in prison," said another. "Confiscate his property," said a third. "Let him die," said a fourth. Another courtier, whose vices Chrysostom had reprov'd, said maliciously, "You all make a great mistake. You will never punish him by such proposals. If banished the kingdom, he will feel God as near to him in the desert as here. If you put him in prison and load him with chains, he will still pray for the poor and praise God in the prison. If you confiscate his property, you merely take away his goods from the poor, not from him. If you condemn him to death, you open heaven to him. Prince, do you wish to be revenged on him? Force him to commit sin. I know him; this man fears nothing in the world but sin." Is there no lesson here for you and me? (*A. Finlayson.*) *Divine pleading*:—If anyone suffers very keenly from nervous exhaustion, it seems sometimes almost impossible for him to bear the noise of a child who persists in running heavily overhead. He will adopt a pleading rather than an angry tone: "My child, do not do this again; I cannot bear it." Let us think of God's holy nature as more sensitive to sin than the most highly-strung nerves to noise, and hear Him saying, whenever we are on the point of committing sin, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate." (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

Ver. 16. As for the word which thou hast spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee.—*The ministerial message and its reception*:—

I. IT DEVOLVES ON MINISTERS TO SPEAK TO SINNERS IN THE NAME OF THE LORD. 1. They represent to them their deplorable situation; they describe to them the horrors of the pit wherein there is no water, in which they lie; the miseries of that prison in which they are closely confined; the unprofitableness of the drudgery in which they are engaged; and the tribulation and anguish which they have to expect. "Knowing the terrors of the Lord, they persuade men"; and sensible that, if they are unfaithful, the blood of souls will be required at their hands, they are "instant in season and out of season," if by any means they could persuade them to flee from the wrath to come. 2. They do all this in the name of the Lord. (1) They speak in obedience to His command. (2) They speak in perfect agreement with the Divine word. (3) They preach in the hope of promoting His glory. II. THE UNPLEASANT RECEPTION WITH WHICH THEIR MESSAGE OFTEN MEETS. "We will not hearken." 1. We hope that there are but few who would plainly say this in words; who are so hardened as to glory in their shame; or so incorrigible as to tell God's ministers that they cast His words behind their back, as unworthy of attention, and beneath their notice: yet we are persuaded that there are many professors who say this in their hearts, and who will not see when the hand of God is lifted up; for if this were not the case, would ministers so often have to lament over them, saying, "Oh, that they were wise"; and, "Oh, that there were such a heart in them, to keep His commandments and do them"? Careless

hearers all say, "We will not hearken unto Thee." And oh, how few are there that will hear believingly! The word does not profit, "not being mixed with faith in them that hear it"; men often "reject the counsel of God against themselves," and disbelieve the record that God has given of His Son. Their conduct shows that they believe not in the name of the only-begotten Son of God. 2. What is the reason that they will not attend to those things, which, it is evident, belong to their peace? (1) Because they are in league with sin. (2) What your ministers preach loudly speaks your condemnation. I would say, by way of inference, In what an awful state are those persons who are making the resolution contained in the text. They are evidently exposed to the loss of their privileges; to hardness of heart, and contempt of God's Word and commandments; and to utter and eternal destruction. (*T. Spencer.*)

CHAPTER XLV.

VER. 5. *Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not.*—*Seeking great things*:—Baruch, the companion of Jeremiah, to whom these words were addressed, was a young man of learning, who had probably formed large expectations of distinction, which were sadly disappointed by the calamities which befell his country. The prophet checks his aspirations in the strong language of our text: "Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not." It is the selfish seeking of the great things of this world and the eager pursuits of them, as if they were of supreme importance, which is censured by the prophet. 1. They who thus seek them are least likely to attain them. It is said there is a fiery light which appears in marshy places, floating just above the surface of the earth, so volatile in its nature that the least breath moves it, and consequently those who rush towards it most eagerly, create a current of air which drives it from them, and it thus leads them on to miry places for their destruction; while, if they would quietly sit down it might float near them, or rest upon them when there was no agitation in the atmosphere to repel it. So is it with the great things of this world, they often fly from those who pant in the chase after them; they frequently rest upon those who reach after them more quietly. One of the wealthiest individuals in a distant city, who spends immense sums for benevolent purposes, was heard to say, that he hardly knew how his property came to him; it seemed to increase without effort on his part, and whether he would or no. The reason may have been because he was not selfishly eager in the pursuit of it, and because he consecrated it to good objects, and therefore God blessed him as He did Solomon. 2. They who selfishly and eagerly "seek the great things" of the world, are apt to have some sore trial coupled with success, if they are successful. Look at all history; when were its great men so wretched, as when they had attained the highest point of exaltation! "He has gained everything," said a companion of Napoleon, when he was in the zenith of prosperity, "and yet he is unhappy." So true is this, that one almost dreads entering upon a state of great worldly aggrandisement, or to see others entering upon it, lest something should happen to mar all. We feel as we do when one is on a lofty spire, admiring his elevation, but almost afraid to look at him lest he should fall. God has wisely connected such checks with worldly greatness, to teach us not to set our hearts upon it, and to enforce the prophet's warning, "Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not." 3. The thought of death should teach the vanity of the selfish and eager pursuit of worldly greatness. How one severe fit of sickness will change the aspect of all the glitter of the world! In health it is like the panoramic view where splendid palaces and cities pass before our delighted eyes; in sickness the glass is taken away, and a little painted daub is seen, no bigger than one's hand. And death shuts out even that from our sight. "Millions for an hour of life," was the dying exclamation of one of England's proudest queens. It is further humiliating to all worldly aspirations to see how small a vacancy one makes among the living by his death. Think of any person, however great he may have been, who has been two years dead, how little he is missed! how everything goes forward just as smoothly without him! What then, in conclusion, is the view of the great things of this life to

which such reflections lead? The proper view seems to be, not to despise the things of this world, but to be sure that our supreme affections are on those of another and a better; not to reject the good gifts of this life, but neither to toil for them as if they were all in all to our happiness, nor to use them, when gained, for our own selfish gratification. (*W. H. Lewis, D.D.*) *Seeking for "great things"* :—We wish, so to speak, not to annihilate the passions of human nature, which sin disturbs and perverts; but, if possible, to convert them, and turn them into another direction. You love pleasure, and we wish you to have pleasure; only we would draw you off from "the pleasures of sin for a season," to the joy of God's salvation; we would draw you from the filthy puddle to the "water of life, clear as crystal, which proceedeth from the throne of God and of the Lamb." You love wealth; we wish you to love it, and to obtain it; but not "the deceitful riches," as the Scriptures call them, but the "true riches," the "unsearchable riches of Christ." You are ambitious, and we wish you to be so; you wish to rise, and we wish you to rise; you wish to be great, and we wish you to be great; and therefore we would open a career of glory and grandeur, in pursuing which you will be placed far above philosophers, and politicians, and heroes, and kings; "dwelling on high," and being "quicken together with Christ," "raised up, and made to sit with Him in the heavenly places." There are four reasons why you should not "seek great things" for yourselves on earth, and four reasons why you should "seek those things that are above." I. THE ONE IS UNCERTAIN IN ACQUISITION—THE OTHER SURE. A great deal of what is called earthly greatness is placed beyond the reach of many, whatever they may do. Many are poor, and they have not the opportunities and the means of becoming affluent. Many cannot fill the seats of learning and of science; they have not capacities to acquire the needful treasures. But here is a reason why you should "seek those things which are above"; for these are always sure in their attainment. In the work of the Lord the servant may become equally great with the master; for moral greatness does not consist in doing great things, but in doing little things with a great mind. And these are accessible to all. II. THE ONE IS FLEETING IN POSSESSION—THE OTHER DURABLE. What is all history, but a relation of the revolutions to which all worldly things are liable—of the rich despoiled of their wealth, of nobles stript of their honours, of princes dethroned, exiled, imprisoned, put to death—Pharaoh in the Red Sea, Nebuchadnezzar eating grass like an ox, Belshazzar the conqueror and the conquered, Napoleon the emperor and the captive? These instances, perhaps, are too peculiar, and too remote, and national, to impress many of you: look therefore nearer home; look at those things which will touch you. What is honour, but a noise of airy breath? What is popularity? It hangs on the wavering tongue of the multitude, who are like the waves of the sea, driven to and fro and tossed; now rolling towards one shore, and now towards another, according to the gale; now crying "Hosannah," and now "Crucify Him, crucify Him." Yes, wherever on earth you lay up treasure, you must lay it up where "moth and rust do corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal." And here is another thing to be taken into the account too. Allowing that these things could be perpetuated in your possession to the end of life, they can be possessed no longer. You have only a life interest in any of them. Shall I set my heart on that which is not, and that from which I am so soon to be removed? But now this is a reason why you should "seek those things that are above"; for he that succeeds here (and we have shown that you will succeed if you seek them), has "chosen," as our Saviour says, "that good part, which shall never be taken away from him." He has seized a blessedness which is independent of external accidents, independent of the revolutions of states, independent of the vicissitudes of time, independent of the ravages of death, independent of the conflagration of the last day: so that when "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burnt up," he can stand upon the ashes of the universe and say, "I have lost nothing"; "I look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." III. THE ONE IS UNSATISFACTORY IN ENJOYMENT—THE OTHER SATISFYING. Take the "great things" you would here seek after for yourself; allowing that you attain them (and you have heard that the attainment is uncertain)—allowing that you could retain them (and you have heard that the retention is impossible)—yet there is no real contentment in them. Ahab was king of Israel. Was he satisfied with his dominion? No; he covets Naboth's little vineyard; and because he

cannot obtain it, he is sick forsooth and takes to his bed and can eat nothing. Some of the Roman emperors, who strode over the world, were the most wretched of all beings; they were burdens to themselves. I was one day walking with a rich individual over his estate; his mind was in a serious mood, and I endeavoured to avail myself of it; and he made this very wise remark, "Sir," said he, "those who have not succeeded in the world always impute their dissatisfaction to their want of success; they are not aware of the insufficiency of these things themselves. 'Oh!' say they, 'could we obtain them, we should be happy.' But those of us who have succeeded, and have obtained them, and find ourselves no nearer happiness than before, are the men who know that the fault lies in the things themselves." But this is a reason why you should "seek those things which are above." They are satisfying. IV. THE ONE IS DANGEROUS AND INJURIOUS IN INFLUENCE—THE OTHER SAFE AND BENEFICIAL. Yes; the "great things" you seek here for yourselves, owing to our depravity, are full of peril. "Who is the Lord," says Pharaoh, "that I should obey Him?" "How," says our Saviour, "can ye believe, who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh from God only?" Even good men, with regard to these "great things," as they are called in our text, want peculiar grace, or they will not be proof against their evil influence. Hezekiah could not bear the notice taken of him by the ambassadors of Benhadad; "his heart was lifted up; therefore was wrath upon him and all his people." I never yet saw a Christian improved by his rising in the world: I have seen many who have been injured by it: I have seen many who have been less constant and regular in their attendance on the means of grace, though they had more leisure, and could command a vehicle: I have seen those who have given less afterwards—not less comparatively, but less absolutely; some of them who gave gold, then gave silver, and some even copper. Wherefore, once more, "Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not"; but "seek those things which are above." There safety is. These are not only blameless; but they are profitable—"profitable unto all things; having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." These, instead of polluting the mind, will purify it; they will draw you off from earth, instead of allowing you to settle here. Instead of elevating you, they will clothe you with humility; instead of leading you away from your God, they will connect you with Him; they will prepare you for every condition in which you can be found. Therefore you cannot have too much of these. (*W. Jay.*)

The folly of ambition.—I. The first reason for not seeking the great things of earth and time is, that THEY WILL NOT BE ATTAINED. We do not deny that the energy and perseverance of an ambitious man will accomplish great results, but we affirm confidently that he will never attain what he desires. For his desires are continually running ahead of his attainments, so that the more he gets the more he wants. He never acquires the "great thing" which he is seeking in such a way as to sit down quietly and enjoy contentment of heart. Alexander, we are told, having conquered all the then known world, wept in disappointment because there were no more worlds for him to overrun and subdue. In this way, it is apparent that he who is seeking great things here upon earth will never obtain them. He is chasing his horizon. He is trying to jump off his own shadow. As fast as he advances, the horizon recedes from him; the further he leaps, the further his shadow falls. His estimate of what a "great thing" is continually changes, so that though relatively to other men he has accumulated wealth, or obtained earthly power and fame, yet absolutely, he is no nearer the desire of his heart—no nearer to a satisfying good—than he was at the beginning of his career. Nay, it is the testimony of many a man, that the first few gains that were made at the beginning of life came nearer to filling the desires of the mind, and were accompanied with more of actual contentment, than the thousands and millions that succeeded them. II. IF THEY COULD BE ATTAINED THEY WOULD RUIN THE SOUL. It is fearful to observe the rapidity with which a man's character deteriorates as he secures the object of his desire, when the object is a merely earthly one, and the desire is a purely selfish one. Take, for illustration, the career of Napoleon Bonaparte. He aimed at a universal empire in Europe. And just in proportion as he approached the object of his aspirations, did he recede from that state of mind and heart which ought to characterise a dependent creature of God. We always associate him with those pagan demi-gods, those heaven-storming Titans, who like the Lucifer of Scripture are the very impersonation of pride and ambition. But such a spirit as this is the worst species of human

character. It is the most intense form of idolatry—that of egotism and self-worship. It is the most arrogant and defiant form of pride. It would scale the heavens. It would dethrone the Eternal. The same effect of mere worldly success is seen also in the walks of everyday life. Cast your eye over the circle in which you move, and select out those who are the most greedy of earthly good, and are the most successful in obtaining it, and are they not the most selfish persons that you know? It is here that we see the moral benefit of failures and disappointments. Were men uniformly successful in their search after “great things”; did every man who seeks wealth obtain wealth, and every man who grasps after power obtain power, and every man who lusts after fame become renowned, the world would be a pandemonium, and human character and happiness would be ruined. Swollen by constant victory, and a sense of superiority, successful men would turn their hands against one another, as in the wars of the giants before the flood. There would be no self-restraint, no regard for the welfare of others, no moderate and just estimate of this world, and no attention to the future life. III. “GREAT THINGS,” so far as they are attained at all in this world, ARE COMMONLY ATTAINED INDIRECTLY. Saul, the son of Kish, was sent out by his father to find the asses that had strayed, but he found a kingdom instead. Look into literary history, and see how this is exemplified. The most successful creations of the human reason and imagination have rarely been the intentional and foreseen products of the person. The great authors have been surprised at their success; if, indeed, success came to them during their lifetime. But more commonly their fame has been posthumous, and their ears never heard a single note of the pæan that went up from the subsequent generations that were enchanted with their genius. Shakespeare and Milton never read a single criticism upon their own works; and to-day they neither know anything of nor care for the fame that attends them upon this little planet. Look, again, into the circles of trade and commerce, and observe how often great and lasting success comes incidentally, rather than as the consequence of preconceived purposes and plans. The person simply endeavoured to provide for the present and prospective wants of those dependent upon him, with prudence and moderation. He obtained, however, far more than he calculated upon. Wealth came in upon him with rapidity, and that which he did not greedily seek, and which he never in the least gloated upon with a miser’s feeling, was the actual result of his career in the world. Seekest thou, then, great things for thyself? seek them not. They will not come by this method. Seek first of all the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and then all these minor things, which the world and the deluded human heart denominates “great things,” shall be added unto you. Be faithful to your duties in the family, in the State, and in the Church, and then that measure of secular blessings which will accrue to you of itself, will exceed all that you will be likely to attain even by the most engrossing and violent efforts devoted to the sole purpose of obtaining them. IV. GREAT SORROW SPRINGS FROM GREAT ASPIRATIONS, WHEN THOSE ASPIRATIONS ARE UNATTAINED. There is only one species of aspiration that does not weary and wear the soul, and that is, the craving and cry of the soul after God. Humboldt, who had surveyed the cosmos, and who had devoted a long existence to placid contemplation of the processes of nature, and had kept aloof from the exciting and passionate provinces of human literature, said in his eightieth year, “I live without hope, because so little of what I have undertaken yields a satisfactory result.” This is the penalty which ambitious minds pay for seeking “great things.” There is an infinite aspiration, and an infinitesimal performance. The hour of death, and the falling shadows of an everlasting existence, and an everlasting destiny, bring the aspiration and the performance into terrible contrast. Go down, once more, into the sphere of active life, and see the same sorrow from the same cause. Look at that man of trade and commerce who has spent his life in gigantic, and, we will suppose, successful enterprises, and who now draws near the grave. Ask him how the aspiration compares with the performance. He has generally accomplished, we will assume, what he undertook. The results of his energy and capacity are known, and visible to all in his circle and way of life. His associates have praised him, and still praise him; for he has done well for himself, and for all connected with him. But he writes vanity upon it all. When he thinks of all the heat and fever of his life, all his anxious calculation and toil by day and night, all his sacrifice of physical comfort and of mental and moral improvement, and then thinks of the actual results of it all—the few millions of treasure, the few

thousands of acres, or the few hundreds of houses—he bewails his infatuation, and curses his folly. 1. In the light of this subject and its discussion, we perceive the sinfulness of ambition. 2. We see in the light of this subject, the complete and perfect blessedness of those who are free from all ambitious aims and selfish purposes; who can say, “Whom have I in heaven but Thee?” &c. (*G. T. Shedd, D.D.*) *Seek not great things for yourself* :—I. SEEK NOT GREAT THINGS FOR YOURSELVES, FOR SELF OUGHT NEVER TO BE AN ULTIMATE OBJECT. The glory of God is the only legitimate aim. The glorification of God is not to be sought as a mean to the good of the creature, but the reverse—man would be exalted above God. Even great spiritual things are not to be sought for our own purposes and exaltation—“name’s sake.” There is no hardship in this, for if we seek the glory of God, our own enjoyment will follow. II. SEEK NOT GREAT THINGS FOR YOURSELVES, FOR YOU THEREBY RENDER THEM THE OBJECTS OF IDOLATROUS WORSHIP. III. SEEK NOT GREAT THINGS FOR YOURSELVES, FOR TO DO SO IS TO SUBORDINATE THE DISCHARGE OF DUTY TO THEIR ACQUISITION AND ENJOYMENT. IV. SEEK NOT GREAT THINGS FOR YOURSELVES, FOR BY DOING SO YOU WILL INVOLVE YOURSELVES AND OTHERS IN MUCH POSITIVE SUFFERING. V. SEEK NOT GREAT THINGS FOR YOURSELVES, WHEN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST REQUIRES YOUR SYMPATHY AND YOUR EFFORTS.—*BARUCH. (Jas. Stewart.)*

A dissuasive from ambition :—I. WHEN WE MAY BE SAID TO SEEK GREAT THINGS FOR OURSELVES. 1. When we seek a larger portion of worldly good than is necessary. But still the question returns, How much is necessary? If men were to answer this question, they would soon prove that few or none are guilty of violating the command in our text; for they all pretend that they seek no more than is necessary. But by this term they usually mean all that would be necessary to gratify their sinful inclinations and desires. Now man’s chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy Him for ever; or, in other words, to obey God’s will and receive His everlasting favour. More than this no man needs; more than this no man ought to seek. 2. When we seek them for ourselves only, or seek them merely with a view to self-gratification or self-aggrandisement. II. SOME OF THE REASONS WHY WE SHOULD NOT SEEK GREAT THINGS FOR OURSELVES. 1. Because it is the sure way to multiply our disappointments and sorrows. In the lottery of life there are few prizes, and many blanks. He, then, who seeks great things for himself, engages in a pursuit in which it is exceedingly probable he will be disappointed; and the more ardent are his desires, the more eager his pursuit, the more keen will be the sufferings which his disappointment will occasion. But this is not all. The man whose pursuit is crowned with success, will be no less disappointed than his unsuccessful neighbour. After he has obtained great things, he will find himself as far from happiness, find his desires as unsatisfied, his mind as discontented as before. His desires will increase with his success. Nay, they will increase much faster than his success. 2. Another reason may be drawn from the nature and situation of the world in which we live. Might we not as easily employ our time and exertions in building upon a quicksand, or upon ice which the summer’s sun will melt away? 3. Another reason may be found in our own character and situation. We are ourselves sinful, dying, and accountable creatures. We have, therefore, a great work to do, no less a work than securing the favour of God, and obtaining the salvation of our immortal souls, a work which demands our time, our attention, our utmost exertions. And can we, in such a situation, find leisure or inclination to seek great things for ourselves here? to seek them while death is at the door; while the Judge is at hand; while eternity draws near; while our souls, unprepared, are in momentary danger of sinking beyond the reach of hope or mercy? 4. Another reason is, that seeking them is incompatible with the duties which we are required to perform; and of course incompatible with our best interests. Man has but one soul, but one heart, but a certain limited portion of time, strength, and energy. He cannot, then, give his heart to God and to the world at the same time. (*E. Payson, D.D.*) *Ambition* :—I. THE EVIL DENOUNCED. It may be viewed under three aspects. 1. There are some who pursue worldly objects that are far above them. 2. There are some who pursue with undue eagerness worldly objects they might reasonably hope to attain. 3. There are some who pursue all classes of worldly objects in a selfish spirit. II. THE REASONS WHY IT IS DENOUNCED. 1. Because it attaches excessive value to worldly objects. 2. Because it misapprehends the comparative advantages of the different ranks in the social scale. 3. Because it overlooks the duties which arise out of the relations we sustain

to our race and our Maker. 4. Because it ignores all the facts, and objects, and interests, and blessings of the spiritual world. Address—(1) Worldlings. (2) Christians. (*G. Brooks.*) *A great missionary's self-effacement*:—When Stanley found Livingstone in the heart of Africa, he begged the old heroic missionary to go home. There seemed to be many reasons why he should go back to England. His wife was dead; his children lived in England; the weight of years was pressing upon him, and the shortest march wearied him. He was often compelled to halt many days to recover strength after his frequent attacks of prostrating illness. Moreover, he was destitute of men and means to enable him to make much practical progress. But like the great apostle to the Gentiles, none of these things moved him, nor counted he his life dear to himself. "No, no," he said to Stanley; "to be knighted, as you say, by the Queen, welcomed by thousands of missionary enthusiasts, yes—but impossible. It must not, cannot, will not be. I must finish my task, and do what I can to bring Africa to Christ." *Thought of self mars the finest work*:—Every artist longs to have his work thought well of. But the higher artist seeks first truth and beauty, and hopes for praise as the meed due to them. The lower artist is so thirsty for praise, thinks so much more about himself than about his work, that he turns aside to make a display of his strength or skill. He is not wholly given to bringing forth truth and beauty, but he is hankering to strike the beholder's eye with his originality or power. This I take to be the secret of —'s aberrations. His pictures show wonderful force of painting; but what spoils them is that, instead of calmly striving to raise his painting to the highest, he has itched to amaze you by his boldness. (*Charles Buxton, M.P.*) *The folly of self-seeking in Christ's service*:—Spurgeon in a late sermon hits off a very common fault noticeable among Christian workers: "The hen in the farmyard has laid an egg, and feels so proud of the achievement that she must cackle about it; everybody must know of that one poor egg till all the country round resounds with the news. It is so with some professors: their work must be published, or they can do no more. 'Here have I,' said one, 'been teaching in the school for years, and nobody ever thanked me for it; I believe that some of us who do the most are the least noticed, and what a shame it is!' But if you have done your service unto the Lord you should not talk so, or we shall suspect you of having other aims. The servant of Jesus will say, 'I do not want human notice. I did it for the Master; He noticed me, and I am content. I tried to please Him, and I did please Him, and therefore I ask no more, for I have gained my end. I seek no praise of men, for I fear lest the breath of human praise should tarnish the pure silver of my service.'"

How to lose thought of self:—When a dog is not noticed, he doesn't like it. But when the dog is after a fox he don't care whether he is noticed or not. If a minister is seeking for souls he will not think of himself. Self is forgotten in a single aim to save others. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Ambition true and false*:—It is related of the late Charles Haddon Spurgeon that at the commencement of his ministry, when he was beginning to feel conscious of the wonderful powers with which God had endowed him—like most young people, I suppose, for he was but a boy, or little more than a boy at the time—he was one day walking across a common and seemed to hear, as it were, a voice speaking to his innermost consciousness in the terms of my text, "Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not." Mr. Spurgeon accepted the text which flashed into his mind as a Divine message and monition, and from that moment made a fuller consecration of himself, his life, his opportunity, his power to the service of the living God. We know the result, and looking back upon it we know, much better, I venture to think, than he did even on the day of his death, but not better than he knows it now, he chose the good part, which was not taken from him. He set his affections on things above, not on things of the earth. Mr. Spurgeon deliberately renounced worldly ambition. That is what I want you to do. But do not make any mistake and think that I mean you to renounce ambition in the truer sense, because Mr. Spurgeon certainly did not. I want you to see what is the difference between ambition false and ambition true, and to endeavour, if I can, to clear away some confusion of thought which clings around this particular subject. What is ambition, as commonly understood? You will gather it, I think, from such familiar phrases as "that last infirmity of noble mind," or "by this sin fell the angels." It takes many forms. If one wished to suggest a name or a life in which ambition had freest and most unrestricted reign, I think you would name Napoleon. He is the classical, outstanding instance; not that, I am quite sure,

he is any more guilty than thousands of persons before him and since. But in Napoleon ambition, insatiate and unconcealed, had undisputed sway. He waded to his throne, as has been said, through the blood and tears of millions. I never care to be too hard on a conventional type of a particular failing for fear one should happen to be wrong, but Mr. Gladstone said of Napoleon that perhaps he had the mightiest intellect that was ever packed into a human skull. Judged by the facts as they appear to us, that intellect was prostituted. It never was exalted as it might have been, and, as I believe sincerely, God meant it to be. Yet another type is Cecil Rhodes. Here, again, I speak somewhat diffidently, because it is possible that very different opinions in regard to the worth and work of Cecil Rhodes obtain in this congregation. But this is my view of his life. He had a great idea as to the position and place of England in the world. More than that, he believed in the mission of the Anglo-Saxon race. But he was not too scrupulous in his attempts to realise his ideal, if we may judge by the facts as they appeared to us. It was a form of ambition not so despicable as Napoleon's, because it was less self-centred, but I venture to think it was materialistic and mistaken, and now that the great man has gone there are thousands upon thousands of us who, looking upon his career, pronounce those saddest words of the tongue or pen, the saddest of all, "it might have been." Cecil Rhodes was a great empire builder, we are told. He might have been more than that. He sought great things, and he saw himself associated with them. Do you feel, you young men, that his is the highest ideal and the type to which you would like to conform your character? I trust to be able to show before I close that it was not. You men of the world know perfectly well how you weigh each other up. You see a good thing done for which a man is receiving an amount of public credit, and you promptly ask, "What is his aim? What axe has he to grind?" You can scarcely bring yourself to believe in disinterestedness at all, because, so far as you have been able to see, people who were apparently disinterested, really had some ulterior motive that would not bear the light. You know among your associates, for example—in the business house, it may be—the difference between the man of modest ambition and the man of vaulting, unscrupulous ambition. You prefer the former, but you never believe that he has no axe to grind at all. In most cases you are right, but beware of general statements. I think the chief danger of to-day is not that men are too ambitious, but that they serve the wrong form of ambition. There are fellows in your business—perhaps a good many of those who are here present could be included in the category—who are at fault not because they have too much ambition, but because they have not enough of the right sort. The man who will not work, the man who will not aspire—and there are plenty of them in our country—the man who never wishes to be any better or more powerful, or to live his life more completely than now, is of no benefit to society, and his selfishness is as real as the selfishness of any Napoleon. You owe something to God, you owe something to men. There is not one among you who is an isolated unit. I have with me here an extract from Carlyle, which I think can put more clearly than I can the distinction between the true ambition and the false. "Let me say that there are two kinds of ambition, one wholly blameable, the other laudable and inevitable. . . . The selfish wish to shine over others, let it be accounted altogether poor and miserable." "Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not." This is most true. "And yet I say," continues Carlyle, "there is an irrepressible tendency in every man to develop himself according to the magnitude which Nature has made him of, to speak out and to act out what Nature has laid in him. This is proper, fit, inevitable; nay, it is duty, the duty of duties. For man the meaning of life here on earth might be defined as consisting in this—to unfold yourself, to work what thing you have the faculty for. It is a necessity for every human being, the first law of our existence." I am going to try and spiritualise, if I can, that wonderful principle set forth by Carlyle. True ambition is to live out what is in you for the sake of Him who gave you life. It is a wonderful, it is even an awful, thought that God Himself finds fulfilment through what you are. God's work is being done, God's thoughts and purposes are being realised by these commonplace men and women that I see around me, and every one of you is the embodiment of the Divine. Would you shrink and shrivel that Divine which God has given you? It is to be manifested not only for your own sake, nor chiefly so, but for the sake of Him who gave it and to mankind. I want to warn you against misusing God's great gift, your own soul. You are a unique product in the universe, and there are un-

measured possibilities before every man here. Each of us, all of us are citizens of eternity. The true ambition is that of a man who is not afraid to endure, not afraid to sacrifice, not afraid to spend his soul, for in giving he is gaining, and he shall have more abundantly. Now, young men, I want to warn you before I go on against possible disappointment even in your endeavour to live up to your ideal. It may be that while I have been speaking in those terms to you some old and wise man in this assembly may have been thinking to himself, "That preacher will change his tone in a few years when he knows how sadly life can disillusion and can trample upon our ideals." Oh, the tragedies of life, the hopes blighted, the old men who are just doing their day's work in patience that no longer one can expect. Well, you are only saying what has been said before. That poor, wayward genius, Percy Bysshe Shelley, saw a little farther than the disappointment when he told us in so many words that it is never possible for the soul to live itself out completely here. How should it be? Because here is not the close of our destiny. It will take all eternity for you to live out what God has put in. Never think that you are going to live out all, but I think you will save yourself from disappointment if you will only say, "It is possible for me to get on the right track now and be living out in time that which I shall live out better when eternity comes." It is possible for you to give a whole-hearted, unselfish allegiance to a great ideal, and that not for your own sake. There is a Divine idea pervading the visible universe, the spirit of truth and beauty and good. We are called to service, every one of us is called to reveal and express it in some fashion. For us it is embodied in Jesus Christ. I cannot but halt there. The Christ contains for me all that humanity is able to aspire to or understand, the great Divine ideal. The life that is given to Christ is well invested. It has produced the best results in the history of human character. What a man was Paul! The Christ crossed his path, and this ambitious, zealous, burning soul changed to something else, Saul the persecutor became Paul the apostle, lived a suffering life and died an obscure death in a Roman prison; and this was his verdict when the evening came—"I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. . . . I am now ready to be offered." Paul knew that his life was hid with Christ in God. He knew that this is the shadow time, the other side is the reality. The Master's comment on the choice is this—"I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake." Young men, I strongly urge you, choose the life wherein you can throw your best energies for God. Have a purpose therein. Do not fear to give it Him back. Beware of seeming to drift into a destiny. Let your choice be rational, let it be strong, let it be pure. By and by you shall do greater things than these. In time be faithful to the little that you can do, that in eternity you may do the more for God. Believe that you have a vocation, a vocation for God. You will not live out all that is within you here. You cannot. But if you live only for yourself here you will be a wretched man. Give the best to God. We have all read that psychological novel, *John Inglesant*, with its too self-conscious hero. One character drawn therein, that of a Jesuit, who for a time is spiritual adviser to John Inglesant, seems to me to be a remarkable one. I know not whether such a Jesuit ever existed, but you know this, the Jesuits by their system of training manage to squeeze out of every man upon whom they get their grip any thought of living for his own self-interest. He becomes the bond-slave of the society. They have great strength from the fact that they can thus obsess a man, as it were, de-self him, and make him work for the great organisation. Here is the Jesuit's verdict to John Inglesant upon his own life, an exhortation for his pupil: Choose your side or your lot; when you have chosen it be true to it all the way. It matters comparatively little what a man chooses as his course of action provided it be a worthy one and his conscience tells him so, but when he has chosen, no looking back. Go straight on, be faithful to the uttermost, cost what it may. A grand and a glorious ideal for the twentieth century, as well as for the seventeenth. And there is a Divine principle within us which urges us to do our best to make the world better than we found it. I have often been struck with the fact that very ordinary people, who make very small profession of religion, somehow will do this at some part of their career, in some one of their interests. They feel they must even at a cost do a little to make the world gladder and to make the world better. I remember the utterance of the bishop in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*. As the convict stands at the door of the house, proclaiming what he was by his dress and his demeanour, thus spoke the servant of

God, "This house is not my house, it is the house of Jesus Christ. This door does not demand of him that enters it whether he has a name, but whether he has a grief." Oh, I feel that if our bodies were made the temples of the Christ as the bishop's house was made the tabernacle of his Lord; if our interests, our opportunities were consecrated to Him, oh, what a difference, majestic, far-reaching, redemptive it would make to the world to-morrow. And, if I could, I would like to fill every young soul before me to-night with that Divine ideal. What can we do, you and I, to bless the world? Just what these noble ones in times past have done, the Pauls and the Luthers and the Wesleys, not merely ambition, but the consecrating of everything they possessed to their Lord, and the counting all but loss if they might win Him. Let us do the same as these. "Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not." Seekest thou great things for God? Go on. Live out all that God has given you as His trustee. Seekest thou joy and blessedness and victory and power in the highest sense of that word? Would you come to the full stature of your manhood? Then "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." (*R. J. Campbell, M.A.*) *Self-seeking vetoed*.—This short chapter embodies the history of Baruch, the secretary of Jeremiah. I. THE VERY EXCUSABLE MOAN (ver. 3), "Woe is me now!" 1. He was probably pained for his master's sake. 2. Probably grieved on account of the unhappy national outlook. 3. Was evidently distressed on his own account. Possibly weary of being secretary with dangerous duties attached. II. THE VERY DECIDED VETO ON HIS AMBITIOUS DESIGN. 1. God interpreted his aspiration, whatever its nature. 2. Decidedly nipped the project in the bud. 3. Suggesting by implication that he seek great things for others—Jeremiah, to wit. To be identified with him was true greatness. Men are engrossed in themselves, their family, their party, their "ism." III. THE COMPENSATING GUARANTEE. "Thy life will I give unto thee." 1. The nation at large would pass through great tribulation. 2. Baruch and his master would be hurried hither and thither. 3. But the secretary's life would be given him as a reward. Baruch lived through all the dire experiences that followed. Escaped from Egypt to Babylon, and wrote the Book of Baruch. Who has not enjoyed the compensations of selfishness? Every surrender of selfhood helps to enrich the soul. (*W. J. Acomb.*)

CHAPTER XLVI

VER. 17. *Pharaoh king of Egypt is but a noise.*—*Religious judgments*.—How the Bible can torment its adversaries!—mock them, condemn them, dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Yet it is never mere contempt. The contempt of the Bible is the penal side of a profound philosophy. Its contempt is as necessary as its Gospel—nay, more, its Gospel renders its contempt necessary. Our God is a "consuming fire," "God is love," "the wrath of the Lamb." So when Pharaoh-Necho—mighty man—is called by the contemptuous term of "noise" no mere sneer is employed. This is a righteous judgment, a moral estimate, a correct representation of things as they are in reality, not of things as they appear to be. In all judgments we must have regard to distance, proportion, perspective. Pharaoh king of Egypt, with horses, chariots, swords, spears, hosts of men, is a terrific power; but to a man standing in the quiet of the Divine sanctuary, "Pharaoh king of Egypt is but a noise"—a waft of wind, a curl of smoke dying whilst it rises. If men would but consider this law of proportion the whole estimate of life would undergo an instantaneous and complete reversion. The text brings before us the great subject of religious judgments—by religious judgments I mean estimates. We must call religion into the house if we would take a true appraisement of what we possess. Only religion, as interpreted in Holy Scripture, can tell you what you are and what you are worth. 1. With regard to those religious estimates or judgments, note how fearless they are. They are not judgments about personal manners, social etiquette, little and variable customs; they challenge the whole world. We are moved by their heroism. Religious judgments do not fritter away our time and patience in discussing little questions and petty problems: they summon kings to their bar and call nations to stand back and be judged. There is a national entity as well as a personal individuality. Blessed is the voice that

fills a nation ; grand is the Gospel that spreads itself over the whole world. We cannot do without the heroic element, the heroic judgment, the broad estimate, the complete arbitrament, that takes within its purview and decision everything concerning individual life and general civilisation. You must have the great call, the sublime challenge, the heroic appeal, the white throne that stretches itself from horizon to horizon, and before which kings are as little men and little men as kings—the grand astronomical pomp and majesty before which all else settles into its right relation. That you have in the Bible, and nowhere else. 2. The judgments of the Bible are rational as well as fearless. Under all contempt there is a rock of logic. Why does the Bible condemn things ? Because of their proportion. It knows the exact proportion which everything bears to the sum-total of things and to the sovereign purpose of the Divine government. Then the judgments of the Bible are rational because the matter or element of duration is continually present to the minds of the inspired writers. The inspired writer has been locked up with God, and turning away from that glory all other things become as the baseless fabric of a vision. If we could see God we should be filled with contempt regarding all things, in so far as they affected to hinder us by their greatness or overpower us by their solidity. 3. Then the judgments of the Bible are also critical. They are very dainty in their expression : they take the right word with an inspired ingenuity. "Pharaoh king of Egypt is but a noise." You cannot amend that comment. Try to amend anything Jesus Christ ever said. As well amend a dewdrop ; as well paint the lily. And the nations, according to the biblical estimate, are but "a wind" that cometh for a little time and then passeth away ; and our life is but "a vapour," dying in its very living. These are the condensations of Omniscience ; these are the sharpened points whetted in eternity ; these stand incapable of amendment. 4. But "fearless," "rational," "critical"—is there no word that comes nearer to my own necessity ? Yes, there is a word that touches us all to-day : these religious judgments are inspiring. Man wants inspiration every day. The Bible was not inspired once for all, in the sense of having its whole meaning shown in one disclosure. Inspiration comes with every dawn, distils in every dew-shower, breathes in every breeze ; it is the daily gift of God. How are these judgments inspiring ? Because they enable a man who is right in his spirit and purpose to say, "If God be for us, who can be against us ?" (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 18. *As I live, saith the King, whose name is the Lord of hosts.—The oaths of Jehovah.* :—I. THE DIVINE OATHS RECORDED IN SCRIPTURE EXHIBIT AND DECLARE THE GLORY OF THE DIVINE CHARACTER. 1. As they show forth the infinite condescension of God. He has addressed us not only in the language of authority and goodness, but also actually condescended to confirm His own true sayings by the most solemn oaths, and this He has done, not only upon some one particular occasion, but in numerous instances, and in every variety of form. Sometimes, Jehovah swears by one or the other of His natural perfections. The Lord hath sworn by His right hand, and by the arm of His strength. At other times He swears by one or the other of His moral perfections, as, "Once have I sworn by My holiness." At other times by His great name, but the most expressive, as well as the most usual form is that in the text, "As I live, saith the Lord God." 2. The Divine oaths furnish a sublime and awful manifestation of the sincere earnestness of the Divine mind in what He declares unto us in His Word, with such an attestation. 3. The Divine oaths exhibit also the benevolent solicitude of God for the welfare of the unworthy creatures whom He thus addresses ; or as the apostle expresses it, "the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man." 4. The Divine oaths intimate the unchangeableness of the Divine mind in relation to those arrangements in His natural and moral government which were in that manner established and confirmed. II. THE DIVINE OATHS ALSO SERVE TO ILLUSTRATE THE MORAL CHARACTER OF MAN, AND TO EXERCISE A POWERFUL INFLUENCE ON HIS MORAL AND SPIRITUAL INTERESTS. 1. They strongly corroborate the fact that the human heart is corrupt and alienated from God. In speaking to His holy angels, "who excel in strength," and are swift to do His will, an oath in confirmation of His Word is altogether unnecessary. They know His character too well ever to entertain the slightest suspicion of His truthfulness ; but in dealing with fallen and apostate man, He knew it was necessary to confirm His own faithful words by most solemn oaths, pledging His own eternal existence on their truth. 2. They serve also as fearful warnings of the perilous condition

of the impenitent and unbelieving soul. Could not an angel have reasonably supposed that in the face of all the declarations and oaths of Jehovah, recorded in the Bible, unbelief on the part of man would have been a moral impossibility? After all, unbelief is the most common sin in the world, and the sin on account of which men generally feel the least compunction; the sin on account of which the Son of God marvelled and was grieved,—men neither marvel nor grieve. Just as if it was a thing of no moment to treat the eternal God as a liar and a perjurer! Be not deceived, God is not mocked. 3. They afford the strongest encouragement to believers in their onward progress to heaven. Christians, during their earthly pilgrimage, have to contend against many things in themselves and in the world, which are calculated to exert a most depressing influence upon their hearts. But they are, nevertheless, favoured with abundant sources of consolation in the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, and in the great and precious truths and promises of the Gospel. "God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of the promises the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." The firm stability of the ordinances of the covenant made with Noah, is employed to illustrate the stability and unchangeableness of the covenant of redemption. The mountains and the hills are referred to as fit emblems of its eternal immutability. (*W. Rees, D.D.*)

Ver. 28. *But correct thee in measure.—Chastisement duly proportioned:—* Correction is like physic, not to be given without good advice and caution. We use a difference when we go about to hew a rugged piece of timber, and to smooth a little stick, which you can bend as you please. A fit season must be observed. Cut your trees at some time of the year, and you kill them; prune them at other times, and they thrive much the better. Horses too straight reined in are apt to rise up with their forefeet; when they are allowed convenient liberty with their heads they go better. (*G. Swinnoek.*)

CHAPTER XLVII.

VER. 5. *How long wilt thou cut thyself?—The tender inquiry of a friend:—* Travellers in the East tell us that among the most melancholy scenes they witness is the following:—Men inflict upon themselves very grievous, voluntary wounds, and then exhibit themselves in public. They even disfigure themselves with gashes in the presence of excited throngs. I am speaking of what has occurred even within the last few years among the Moslems. When some great prophet or emir is coming that way, a certain number of fanatical Mahometans take swords, spears, and other sharp instruments, and gash themselves terribly therewith, cutting their breasts, their faces, their heads, and all parts of their bodies. Frequently they have taken care to dress themselves in white sheets, in order that, as the blood flows copiously from their bodies, it may be the more clearly seen, that they may become the more ghastly spectacles of misery, or the more fully display the religious excitement under which they labour. As everything in the East remains for ever the same, this Moslem superstition carries us back to the olden times whereof we read in the Old Testament, when the priests of Baal, having cried in vain to their idol, cut themselves with lances and with knives. Our translators were probably afraid to write the harsher words, and so they translated the passage "knives and lances," but they might have written swords and spears—sharp instruments of a desperate character. Thus they displayed their inward zeal, and thus, perhaps, they hoped to move the pity of their god. The Lord expressly forbade His people, the Jews, to perpetrate such folly. They were not even to shave the corners of their beards, or to hack their hair, as the Orientals do in the hour of their grief; and then they were further prohibited from injuring their bodies by the command (*Lev. xix. 28*). Men in Eastern lands, not only in connection with fanaticism, but in reference to domestic affairs, will cut themselves to express their grief and anguish, or to make other people believe that they are feeling such grief and anguish. We may congratulate ourselves that we are free

from at least one foolish custom. The prophet here speaks to the Philistines who were about to endure the tremendous judgments of God, and, indeed, to be crushed out as a nation by the Egyptians and the Chaldeans; and he says to Philistia, "How long wilt thou cut thyself?" How long would they continue to bring upon themselves such terrible judgments? I. I SHALL ASK THIS QUESTION VERY DESPAIRINGLY—"How long wilt thou cut thyself?"—for many are cutting themselves very terribly, and will have to feel the wounds thereof for a long time, neither can we induce them to cease therefrom. I. I allude, first, to some professors of religion who have been Church members for ten, twenty, or more years, and yet have practically done nothing at all for the Saviour. If they were really to awaken to a sense of their neglect, I do not know how long they would be in anguish, or how deep would be their distress; for if Titus mourned that he had lost a day when he had done no good action for twenty-four hours, and he but a heathen, what would happen to a Christian if he were really to see his responsibility before God, and to feel that he has not only lost a day but a year—perhaps many years? Have not some of you well-nigh lost a whole lifetime? 2. The same may be applied, and applied very solemnly, too, to those who backslide—who, in addition to being useless, are injurious, because their example tends to hinder others from coming to Christ. Oh, if any of you that name the name of Jesus, and have been happy in His service, and have enjoyed high days and holy days in His presence, turn aside, I shall use this lamentation over you! You will do yourselves terrible injury, and I shall shudder as I see the edged tools of sin in your reckless hands. Every sin is a gash in the soul. The Lord will bring you back and save you, as I believe; but oh, how long will you cut yourselves? 3. There is one thing which comes after these, and comes in connection with them. If you and I should know that souls have been lost—lost as far as we are concerned—through our neglect, how long shall we cut ourselves on that account? Fathers, if you have never sought to bring your children to repentance, how will you excuse yourselves? If you have never prayed with them, or wept with them—if you have never even instructed them in the things of God, what flattering unction will you lay to your guilty consciences? What will you say, mother, if your daughter passes into eternity unforgiven, and you have never tried to lead her to Jesus? 4. One other most solemn use may be made of this question: God grant that it may never be so, but if any one of you should die in his sins, how long will you regret it, think you? Oh, thou who hast lost eternal life, how long wilt thou cut thyself? If thou shouldst miss Christ, and miss mercy, and miss heaven, and miss eternal glory, if there were naught else, how long wilt thou bemoan thyself? With what depth of anguish wilt thou smart to have lost all this—to have, in fact, lost all which makes up life, and joy! II. I SHALL ASK THIS QUESTION HOPEFULLY, trusting that in many their sorrow is nearing its end. 1. This text may be very profitably and prudently applied to those who have been bereaved, and who, being bereaved, sorrow, and sorrow to excess. "How long wilt thou cut thyself?" Is not thy child in Jesus' bosom? Has not thy friend gone among the angels, to join the sweet singers of God? Is it not a gain to the departed, though it be a loss to thee, that they are translated to the place of everlasting bliss? 2. Turning to quite another character, I would use the same expression for another purpose. There are some persons with whom God is dealing in great love, and yet they are very rebellious. "How long wilt thou cut thyself?" Already they have met with great disasters and misfortunes: they will meet with many more. When the dogs are out hunting, they run in packs. The plagues of Egypt are ten at least, and every one who plays the Pharaoh may expect the full number. 3. I might use this expression even to the Jewish nation itself. Ah, God, through what seas of trouble have they had to swim since the day when they said, "His blood be on us, and on our children"! 4. But, now, all this has rather kept me from my main design, which is to speak to those dear friends of ours who are afflicting their souls with needless fears. No good can possibly come by a continuance in their unhappy moods: they are cutting themselves quite needlessly. They might at once have peace, and rest, and joy if they were willing to accept the Lord's gracious way of salvation. Despairing and desponding are not commanded in the Gospel, but they are forbidden by it. Do not cultivate these gross follies, these deadly sins. Do not multiply these poisonous weeds—this hemlock and this darnel—as if they were fair flowers of paradise. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 6. Put up thyself into thy scabbard, rest, and be still.—*War overruled*

for God's glory :—Notwithstanding all the boasted improvements of modern times, in knowledge and refinement, wars have not been less frequent than formerly, when mankind were in a rude and barbarous state. In making this reflection, the philosopher may profess his astonishment, but the genuine Christian will weep. Such are the mournful and ruinous effects which sin has produced in the world. Not only has it filled men's minds with enmity against God, but also with implacable enmity and revenge against one another. I. WHENCE IT IS THAT THE SWORD OF WAR MAY BE CALLED THE SWORD OF THE LORD. 1. Because the seasons in which this sword is drawn are governed or appointed by the Lord. The kindling of war, or the settling of peace, are appointed by the providence of that God who ruleth over all the earth. The direction of cabinets, the ambition of princes, of governors, of statesmen, are only the instruments which God employs with a powerful and a holy hand, to execute His will. 2. Because it receives its direction from the Lord. When God gives the commission, when He opens the brazen gates of destruction, no country, no city is secured against the ravages of war ; and when His providence forms a wall of protection around a country, no army can prevail, no weapon formed against it can prosper, for the Almighty God Himself is its fortress, its pillar, and its strength. 3. Because the execution done by it is of the Lord. It is a saying of King William, who had himself been in many battles, that "every bullet had its billet" ; intimating that it was under God's direction whom to miss and whom to strike. 4. Because God sanctifies and glorifies Himself in its operation. In the management of war, the reputation of kings and statesmen, of generals or soldiers, is considered, but this is only a secondary consideration. The glory of the Lord, whom the Scriptures call a Man of War, is illustrated and made conspicuous in the eyes of the world. The slayer and those who are slain are His creatures and subjects, and the instruments which defend the one and kill the other are His sword. II. THE REASON WHY ALL GOD'S PEOPLE SO ARDENTLY LONG TO SEE THE SWORD OF WAR SHEATHED AND AT REST. 1. Conviction that the wrath of God bringeth upon man the punishment of the sword, will cause the saints to long earnestly for its being sheathed and at rest. 2. All God's people will earnestly long to see the sword of war in its scabbard and at rest, when they reflect what multitudes of men are hurried by it into eternity without thought or preparation. 3. God's people earnestly long to see the sword of war sheathed and at rest, when they reflect on the unparalleled distresses and miseries inflicted on those countries which are the seat of war. Gracious persons are deeply affected with the miseries of their fellow-creatures, even though they be enemies. 4. God's people earnestly desire to see the sword of war sheathed and at rest, that Christ's Gospel may be propagated throughout the whole world, and its Divine power and influence felt by all nations. (*James Hay, D.D.*) *The sword of the warrior the sword of the Lord :—*As patriots, prophets felt the miseries which they denounced ; as mourners, they lamented the sins which brought on these miseries ; and as men, they wept over the graves of the enemies by whom their country had been harassed and wasted. I. THE SWORD OF THE WARRIOR IS THE SWORD OF THE LORD. 1. The seasons in which the sword is drawn and sheathed are appointed by the Lord. The direction of cabinets, the ambition of princes, and the caprices of statesmen in these affairs, are subordinated by His invisible influence to His own will, without violating the order of second causes, or breaking in upon the freedom of rational agents. 2. The sword of the warrior is put in commission by the Lord. 3. The direction of the sword of the warrior is from the Lord. The seat of war is marked out, and its bounds circumscribed, in the purpose of the will of God ; and thither the warrior marches without mistaking his way, whether it be to the shore of Tyrus, the valley of Jehoshaphat, the plains of Blenheim, the heights of Saratoga, or the mountains of Armageddon. 4. The execution done by the sword of the warrior is of the Lord. "A sparrow falleth not to the ground without our heavenly Father," and in the day of battle, no soldier loses his life without His knowledge and predetermination. 5. By the sword of the warrior the Lord sanctifies and magnifies Himself. According to the states of the sufferers wars of conquest and extirpation are corrections and punishments, and whichever of the sides gains or loses the victory, the supremacy of Jehovah over all is maintained, and the glory of His justice and holiness displayed and magnified. The cause in which the sword is drawn is always sinful on one side, and frequently sinful on both sides. But whatever be the quality of the cause, the views of men, or the issues of the contest, the Lord will not lose His end. He rules in

the seat of war, and commands on the day of battle. II. THE REASONS FOR WHICH MOURNERS IN ZION LONG TO SEE THIS SWORD SHEATHED. 1. Compassion for those who are delivered to the sword, or subjected to the insolence and rage of fierce and lawless men whose tender mercies are cruelty. 2. Knowledge of the consequences of driving men unprepared into eternity. 3. The peace of God, which rules in the hearts of mourners in Zion, inclines and constrains them to cry for the sheathing of the sword of the warrior. 4. Convictions that the wrath of God bringeth upon men the punishment of the sword, dispose mourners in Zion to long for its being put up into the scabbard. (*A. Shanks.*) *The means of terminating war*:—I. THE EVILS OF PROTRACTED WAR. 1. War is a tremendous evil. 2. Well might the prophet desire its speedy termination. II. THE REASON OF ITS CONTINUANCE. 1. War is one of those judgments with which God punishes the sins of men. 2. Till He has effected His purposes by it, no human efforts can bring it to a close. III. MEANS OF ITS TERMINATION. 1. The intention of God's chastisements is to bring us to repentance. 2. On the attainment of this end He will instantly remove His judgments from us. IV. SOME HINTS RESPECTING THOSE HEAVY JUDGMENTS WHICH GOD HAS DENOUNCED AGAINST SINNERS IN ANOTHER WORLD, AND RESPECTING THE BEST MEANS OF AVERTING THEM FROM OUR SOULS. (*C. Simeon, M.A.*)

CHAPTER XLVIII.

VER. 6. *Flee, save your lives.*—*The Christian's flight*:—Such was the warning addressed to Moab by the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel. The Chaldeans were about to lay waste the land of the Moabites—a punishment which they justly deserved for their iniquities and for their long-continued opposition to the people of God. But even "in wrath the Lord remembers mercy"; or, to use the beautiful language of the prophet, "He stayeth His rough wind in the day of the east wind." Though Moab shall be punished, her cities overturned, and the country laid waste and desolate, her princes, people, and priests carried into captivity, yet an opportunity is afforded for at least a remnant to escape. "Flee, save your lives, and be like the heath in the wilderness." I. FROM WHAT ARE WE TO FLEE? In a word, from everything that would wean his heart from God and endanger the safety of his soul, the Christian is to flee—"from all evil and mischief, from sin, from the world, the flesh, and the works of the devil, from hardness of heart and contempt of God's Word and commandment." II. FOR WHAT ARE WE TO FLEE? The life of your soul is concerned; and unless you flee from what stands in your way to God, and blocks up your return to Him, the wrath of God will assuredly overtake you, and you will become a prey to your enemies, to those who seek your life. It is for glory, and honour, and immortality we should flee—blessings of infinite value, prizes beyond all price—nay, far beyond the power of human tongue to tell of their inestimable preciousness; we should flee for the favour of God, the forgiveness of our sins, the worth of our souls, the love and glory of Christ, and the beauty and happiness of holiness. And we should hasten our flight, for the time is short, and death advancing. III. WHERE SHOULD WE FLEE? "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe," &c. Such was Simon Peter's declaration. Such is the confession of God's people still. To the Lord Jesus Christ, and Him crucified, must the sinner flee. He must go as he is, and "be like the heath in the wilderness," destitute of fruit or value, fit only for fuel, and seek to be engrafted in the living Vine. For Moab, we may observe, was commanded merely to "flee." Whatever would oppose their progress should be put away. (*C. A. Maginn, M.A.*) *Flee for your life*:—I. WHENOR YOU ARE TO FLEE. II. WHERE YOU ARE TO FLEE. III. HOW YOU ARE TO FLEE. IV. WHEN YOU ARE TO FLEE. V. WHY YOU ARE TO FLEE. (*H. Macmillan, D.D.*)

VER. 10. *Cursed be he, that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully.*—*The sin of lukewarmness in acquiring, and advancing, a knowledge of Christ*:—I. AS IT CONCERNS OUR RELIGIOUS BELIEF AND RESOLUTION. Some, professedly earnest in their search of truth, make no other use of the light that is given them

than to dispute and philosophise about it. Others, acknowledging the testimonies advanced in favour of it, are discouraged by the difficulties which it presents: consulting, yet dreading to be instructed; the slaves of their appetites, more than of their errors, rejecting truth manifested to them, because it would break the fetters which they love. Others again, still more deceitful in their work, convinced, in a great degree, of religious truth in their own minds, yet judge not of it by the light which it leaves there, but by its effect on the rest of mankind. The knowledge of Divine truth must spring from penitence and humility. Cease to have an earthly interest in wishing to find religion false, and you will soon perceive it to be true. Humble yourself before the mighty hand of God; His grace shall then be sufficient for you, and will lead you into all truth. But cursed is he that doeth any work of that God deceitfully, who, whilst He giveth His grace to the humble and sincere, has always scorned the prevaricating and the proud.

II. THE SILENCE WHICH WE OBSERVE IN DEFENCE OF CHRIST, AMIDST THE CLAMOURS OF THE PROFANE AGAINST HIM. God wants not your aid to support His truth. But He wants to see His pretended servants not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: and, although He actually wants not your aid, if He choose to adopt any other method of preserving His truth in the world, yet it appears to be the method, which in His wisdom He has adopted, to disseminate it by means of man to man. Your silence will be taken advantage of by the enemies of your Saviour: and they will think that he, who says nothing, has nothing to say. He, that is not with Me, saith our Saviour, is against Me. Let it not be said that the world has its defenders, and that Jesus Christ has none.

III. AN ACCOMMODATION OF THE SOLEMN TRUTHS OF THE GOSPEL TO THE WISHES OR PREJUDICES OF THOSE WITH WHOM WE ARE CONCERNED. Thousands are the miseries that might have been spared this world if the professed believers in God had all been true to their trust. How many a brother might have been prevented from imbruing his hands in a brother's blood, if they, to whom the cause of dispute was referred, had been firm to the dictates of truth. But the false notions of honour which their friends felt in the moment of anger, they in their cool moments will sanction and applaud: and, palliating, by every modification, the sin of murder, will deliberately second a black and wicked passion, and calmly behold two fellow-creatures, who trusted to their decision, attempting to hurl each other into the presence of their eternal Judge! (*G. Mathew, M.A.*)

Of lukewarmness and zeal.—I. HERE THEN IS THE DUTY OF US ALL. 1. He that serves God with the body without the soul serves God deceitfully. "My son, give Me thy heart"; and though I cannot think that nature was so sacramental as to point out the holy and mysterious Trinity by the triangle of the heart, yet it is certain that the heart of man is God's special portion, and every angle ought to point towards Him. (1) For to worship God with our souls confesses one of His glorious attributes; it declares Him to be the searcher of hearts. (2) It advances the powers and concerns of His providence, and confesses all the affairs of men to be overruled by Him; for what He sees He judges, and what He judges He rules, and what He rules must turn to His glory; and of this glory He reflects rays and influences upon His servants, and it shall also turn to their good. (3) This service distinguishes our duty towards God from all our conversation with man, and separates the Divine commandments from the imperfect decrees of princes and republics. (4) He that secures the heart, secures all the rest; because this is the principle of all the moral actions of the whole man. (5) That I may sum up many reasons in one: God, by requiring the heart, secures the perpetuity and perseverance of our duty, and its sincerity, and its integrity, and its perfection: for so also God takes account of little things; it being all one in the heart of man, whether maliciously it omits a duty in a small instance or in a great; for although the expression hath variety and degrees in it, in relation to those purposes of usefulness and charity whither God deigns it, yet the obedience and disobedience are all one, and shall be equally accounted for. 2. He that serves God with the soul without the body, when both can be conjoined, "doth the work of the Lord deceitfully." Paphnutius, whose knees were cut for the testimony of Jesus, was not obliged to worship with the humble flexures of the bending penitents; and blind Bartimeus could not read the holy lines of the law, and therefore that part of the work was not his duty; and God shall not call Lazarus to account for not giving alms, nor St. Peter and St. John for not giving silver and gold to the lame man, nor Epaphroditus for not keeping his fasting days when he had his sickness. But when God hath made the body an apt minister to the soul, and hath given money for alms, and power

to protect the oppressed, and knees to serve in prayer, and hands to serve our needs, then the soul alone is not to work. 3. They are "deceitful in the Lord's work," that reserve one faculty for sin, or one sin for themselves; or one action to please their appetite, and many for religion. We reprove a sinning brother, but do it with a pompous spirit; we separate from scandal, and do it with glory, and a gaudy heart; we are charitable to the poor, but will not forgive our unkind enemies; or, we pour relief into their bags, but please ourselves and drink drunk, and hope to commute with God, giving the fruit of our labours or effluxes of money for the sin of our souls: and upon this account it is, that two of the noblest graces of a Christian are to very many persons made a savour of death, though they were intended for the beginning and the promotion of an eternal life; and those are faith and charity. 4. There is one deceit more yet, in the matter of the extension of our duty, destroying the integrity of its constitution: for they do the work of God deceitfully, who think God sufficiently served with abstinence from evil, and converse not in the acquisition and pursuit of holy charity and religion. Many persons think themselves fairly assoilzied, because they are no adulterers, no rebels, no drunkards, not of scandalous lives: in the meantime, like the Laodiceans, they are "naked and poor"; they have no catalogue of good things registered in heaven, no treasures in the repositories of the poor, neither have the poor often prayed concerning them, "Lord, remember Thy servants for this thing at the day of judgment." 5. Hither are to be reduced as deceitful workers, those that promise to God, but mean not to pay what they once intended; people that are confident in the day of ease, and fail in the danger; they that pray passionately for a grace, and if it be not obtained at that price, go no farther, and never contend in action for what they seem to contend in prayer; such as delight in forms and outwards, and regard not the substance and design of every institution; that pretend one duty to excuse another; religion against charity, or piety to parents against duty to God, private promises against public duty, the keeping of an oath against breaking of a commandment, honour against modesty, reputation against piety, the love of the world in civil instances to countenance enmity against God; these are the deceitful workers of God's work; they make a schism in the duties of religion, and a war in heaven worse than that between Michael and the dragon; for they divide the Spirit of God and distinguish His commandments into parties and factions; by seeking an excuse, sometimes they destroy the integrity and perfect constitution of duty, or they do something whereby the effect and usefulness of the duty is hindered: concerning all which this only can be said, they who serve God with a lame sacrifice and an imperfect duty—a duty defective in its constituent parts—can never enjoy God; because He can never be divided. II. The next inquiry is into the INTENTION OF OUR DUTY. "Cursed is he that doeth the work of the Lord negligently," or remissly: as our duty must be whole, so it must be fervent; for a languishing body may have all its parts, and yet be useless to many purposes of nature. And you may reckon all the joints of a dead man, but the heart is cold, and the joints are stiff and fit for nothing but for the little people that creep in graves: and so are very many men; if you sum up the accounts of their religion, they can reckon days and months of religion, various offices, charity and prayers, reading and meditation, faith and knowledge, catechism and sacraments, duty to God, and duty to princes, paying debts and provision for children, confessions and tears, discipline in families, and love of good people; and, it may be, you shall not improve their numbers, or find any lines unfilled in their tables of accounts; but when you have handled all this, and considered, you will find at last you have taken a dead man by the hand, there is not a finger wanting, but they are stiff as icicles, and without flexure as the legs of elephants. 1. In every action of religion God expects such a warmth and a holy fire to go along, that it may be able to enkindle the wood upon the altar, and consume the sacrifice; but God hates an indifferent spirit. Earnestness and vivacity, quickness and delight, perfect choice of the service, and a delight in the prosecution, is all that the spirit of a man can yield towards his religion. The outward work is the effect of the body; but if a man does it heartily and with all his mind, then religion hath wings, and moves upon wheels of fire; and therefore, when our blessed Saviour made those capitulars and canons of religion, to "love God," and to "love our neighbour," besides that the material part of the duty, "love," is founded in the spirit, as its natural seat, he also gives three words to involve the spirit in the action, and but one for the body: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind,"

and, lastly, "with all thy strength." If it be in motion, a lukewarm religion is pleasing to God; for God hates it not for its imperfection, and its natural measures of proceeding; but if it stands still and rests there, it is a state against the designs, and against the perfection of God: and it hath in it these evils: (1) It is a state of the greatest imprudence in the world; for it makes a man to spend his labour for that which profits not, and to deny his appetite for an unsatisfying interest: he puts his moneys in a napkin, and he that does so, puts them into a broken bag; he loses the principal for not increasing the interest. (2) The second appendant evil is, that lukewarmness is the occasion of greater evil; because the remiss easy Christian shuts the gate against the heavenly breathings of God's Holy Spirit. (3) A state of lukewarmness is more incorrigible than a state of coldness; while men flatter themselves that their state is good, that they are rich and need nothing, that their lamps are dressed, and full of ornament. These men are such as think they have knowledge enough to need no teacher, devotion enough to need no new fires, perfection enough to need no new progress, justice enough to need no repentance; and then, because the spirit of a man, and all the things of this world, are in perpetual variety and change, these men decline, when they have gone their period; they stand still, and then revert; like a stone returning from the bosom of a cloud, where it rested as long as the thought of a child, and fell to its natural bed of earth, and dwelt below for ever.

2. It concerns us next to inquire concerning the duty in its proper instances, that we may perceive to what parts and degrees of duty it amounts; we shall find it especially in the duties of faith, of prayer, and of charity. (1) Our faith must be strong, vigorous, active, confident, and patient, reasonable and unalterable, without doubting, and fear and partiality. (2) Our prayers and devotions must be fervent and zealous, not cold, patient, easy, and soon rejected; but supported by a patient spirit, set forwards by importunity, continued by perseverance, waited on by attention and a present mind, carried along with holy, but strong desires; and ballasted with resignation, and conformity to the Divine will; and then it is as God likes it, and does the work to God's glory and our interest effectually. (3) Our charity also must be fervent: "He that follows his general with a heavy march, and a heavy heart, is but an ill soldier." But our duty to God should be hugely pleasing, and we should rejoice in it; it must pass on to action, and do the action vigorously; it is called in Scripture "the labour" and travail "of love." He that loves passionately, will not only do all that his friend needs, but all that himself can; for although the law of charity is fulfilled by acts of profit, and bounty, and obedience, and labour, yet it hath no other measures but the proportions and abundance of a good mind; and according to this, God requires that we be "abounding, and that always, in the work of the Lord." (*Bp. Jeremy Taylor.*)

Cursed laziness:—These words form a scriptural bomb which might with advantage be thrown into the midst of a great many of our Churches, where everything pertaining to the service is gone through in a precise and proper manner, but where there is an utter absence of zeal, enthusiasm, and Christlike earnestness. In the A. V. this passage does not attract much attention. That a curse should be hurled at the head of the traitor who does "the work of the Lord deceitfully" surprises no one. But to find a curse aimed at the merely negligent worker makes us pause, and think, and ask ourselves questions. The persons here referred to are amongst those who are doing "the work of the Lord." They profess and call themselves Christians. They have entered the kingdom of God, and by so doing they have enrolled themselves as servants of Christ, and are pledged to do His will. For be it never forgotten, the two must go together—namely, salvation and service. When in the sixteenth century Martin Luther blew the *réveille* of the Reformation, the slumbering Churches were roused and rallied by the call; and breaking off the fetters of delusion and superstition which had previously bound them, they joyously inscribed on their banner "Salvation by faith." And for three centuries that blessed truth has been floating before the eyes of reformed Europe. But "Truth" though it is, it is not the whole truth. The time has more than come for the uplifting of another banner with an inscription completing and explaining the first, by declaring that "Faith without works is dead." Soul-saving faith makes soul-saving men. I do not think that any man is ever saved except by the direct or indirect intervention of some other man. Christ alone can call the Lazarus forth, but there is a stone to be rolled away before, and there are wrappings to be removed after the miracle is wrought. And hence God is but working out His own economy in demanding that every member of His kingdom shall be a

servant and a worker. Through all time the test of saintship is service. But this is not all. The Divine claim is not exhausted by the mere demand for work. It is declared again and again that no service is acceptable unless it be rendered with the whole heart. Partial, perfunctory, half-hearted service He sternly rejects; and upon those who mock Him by offering it He pours His righteous wrath. What think you is the greatest of all the obstacles which impede the progress of the kingdom of Christ? It is the negligence or laziness of its members. To be an idler in the world is bad enough, but to be an idler in the Church is ten thousand times worse. It is an act of impious and audacious hypocrisy, and he who is guilty of it stands before God and man self-branded as an impostor. We often hear and speak of "Church work," but if we would speak correctly that phrase must be discarded. There is no such thing as "Church work." The work in question is God's work, and as such—if for no other reason—it claims our best energies. If any of us were commissioned to do work for the king would we not tax our powers to the very uttermost in order to present it as perfect as possible? Much more should we do so when the commission comes from the Court of heaven. "The King's business requireth haste," and all who are engaged in it must acquit themselves as servants of "the Most High God." Dull sloth must be shaken off, and with hearts aglow with zeal and eyes aflame with earnestness we must give ourselves to the task committed to our care. Remember also the intrinsic importance of the work itself. Have you ever been present at a critical surgical operation? What earnestness, what concentrated attention, what careful precautions against the dreaded possibility! How is all this tension of faculties brought about? It is created by the importance of the work in hand. It is a case of life or death, in which negligence would mean murder. Ay! and when the Christian worker is alive to his duty, and all that it involves, negligence is impossible. It is fraught with possibilities which cannot be told. Its issues belong not to time but eternity. Look around you and see how active and earnest are the forces arrayed against us. From centre to circumference the kingdom of darkness thrills and throbs with earnestness. Every subject is a soldier, and being a soldier he fights. Every subject is a servant, and being a servant he serves. There is no dilly-dallying or make-believe in the enemy's camp. Then why should there be any in ours? Has the Cross no longer its power? Has the sacred passion exhausted its inspirations? Does the love of Christ no longer constrain and the Holy Ghost no longer energeise? (*Joseph Muir.*) *Half-and-half religion*:—If you are not to make religion the principal thing in your lives, don't go in for it. It is better, and much easier, to go in for it entirely, than half and half—merely flirting with it. It was the saying of a shrewd thinker: "If it is worth while being a Christian at all, it is better to be a downright Christian."

Vers. 11, 12. *Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees.—The shrill trumpet of admonition*:—For a considerable season the country of Moab had been free from the inroads of war and the terrors of pestilence. The nation had, therefore, become so conceitedly secure, that the Lord said, "We have heard the pride of Moab (he is exceeding proud), his loftiness, and his arrogance, and his pride, and the haughtiness of his heart." The people became vain, hectoring, and boastful, and mocked at their afflicted neighbours the Israelites, manifesting ungenerous joy in their sorrows. "For was not Israel a derision unto thee? was he found among thieves? for since thou spakest of him, thou skippest for joy." From this pride sprang luxury and all those other vices which find a convenient lair in the repose of unbroken prosperity. The warriors of Moab said, "We are mighty and strong men for the war"; as vainglorious sinners, they defied all law and power; trusting in Chemosh, they despised Jehovah, and magnified themselves against the Lord. The prophet compares that country to wine which has been allowed to stand unstirred and unmoved: it settles on its lees, grows strong, retains its aroma, and gathers daily fresh body and spirit. "But," saith he, "the day shall come when God shall shake this undisturbed liquor, when He shall send wandering bands of Chaldeans that shall waste the country, so that the bottles shall be broken and the vessels shall be emptied, and the proud prosperity of Moab shall end in utter desolation." The fact that continued prosperity breeds carnal security, is not only proved by the instance of Moab, but is lamentably confirmed in the history of others. I. I shall first speak to THE UNCONVERTED, THE GODLESS, THE PRAYERLESS, THE CHRISTLESS. 1. The bold offenders who

are at ease in open sin. They began life with iniquity, and they have made terrible progress in it. They go from iniquity to iniquity, as the vulture from carcass to carcass; they labour in the way of evil, as men dig for hid treasure; "And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High?" "And if He doth know," say they, "what care we? Who is Jehovah, that we should obey Him? Who is the Almighty, that we should tremble at His word?" Yet, Oh, ye haughty ones, take heed, for Pharaoh, who was your prototype in the olden days, found the way of pride to be hard at the end. 2. A far more common form of that carelessness which is so destructive, is that of men who give themselves wholly up to the world's business. Such men, for instance, as one whom Christ called "Fool." Gain is the world's *summum bonum*, the chief of all mortal good, the main chance, the prime object, the barometer of success in life, the one thing needful, the heart's delight. And yet, Oh, worldlings, who succeed in getting gain, and are esteemed to be shrewd and prudent, Jesus Christ calls you fools, and He is no thrower about of hard terms where they are not deserved. "Thou fool," said He, and why? Because the man's soul would be required of him; and then whose would those things be which he had gathered together? 3. A third case is more common still, the man who forgets God and lives in slothful ease. It is not enough to abstain from outward sin, and so to be negatively moral; unless you bring forth fruits unto righteousness, you have not the life of God in you; and however much you may be at ease, there shall come a rough awakening to your slumbers, and the shrill sound of the archangel's trumpet shall be to you no other than the blast of the trumpet of condemnation, because ye took your ease when ye should have served your God. 4. There are many in the professing Christian Church who are in the same state as Moab. They have the virgin's lamp, but they have no oil in the vessel with their lamps; and yet so comfortable are these professors, that they slumber and sleep. Remember, you may think yourself a believer, and everybody else may think so too, and you may fail to find out your error until it is too late to rectify it; you may persevere for years in "the way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." Be ye not, Oh, ye professors, like Moab, that had settled upon his lees! 5. Equally true is this of the mass of moral men who are destitute of faith in Jesus. "I have no doubt but what it will be all right with me at last. I pay my neighbours their own; I give a guinea to a hospital, when they ask me for it; I am a first-rate tradesman. Of course, I have sown a few wild oats, and I still indulge a little; but who does not? Who dares deny that I am a good-hearted fellow?" Do you envy him? You may sooner envy the dead in their graves because they suffer no pain. II. We speak to THE BELIEVER. A Christian man finds himself for a long time without any remarkable trouble: his children are spared to him, his home is happy, his business extremely prosperous—he has, in fact, all that heart can wish; when he looks round about him he can say with David, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." Now, the danger is that he should think too highly of these secondary things, and should say to himself, "My mountain standeth firm, I shall never be moved." He has not been poured from vessel to vessel; he has not been sternly tried by Providence, or sorely tempted by the devil; he has not been led to question his own conversion, he has fallen into a profound calm, a deep dead peace, a horrible lethargy, and his inmost heart has lost all spiritual energy. The great disease of England is consumption, but I suppose it would be difficult to describe the causes and workings of consumption and decline. The same kind of disease is common among Christians. It is not that many Christians fall into outward sin, and so on, but throughout our Churches we have scores who are in a spiritual consumption—their powers are all feeble and decaying. The rapid results of this consumption are just these: a man in such a state soon gives up communion with God; it is not quite gone at first, but it is suspended. His walk with God is broken and occasional. His prayers very soon suffer. By degrees, his conversation is not what it used to be. He was once very earnest for Christ, and would introduce religious topics in all companies. He has become discreet now, and holds his tongue. He is quite ready to gossip about the price of wheat, and how the markets are, and the state of politics, and whether you have been to see the Sultan; but he has no words for Jesus Christ, the King in His beauty. Spiritual topics have departed from his general conversation. And now, strange to say, "the minister does not preach as he used to do": at least, the back-

slider says so. The reason why I think he is mistaken, is, that the Word of God itself is not so sweet to him as it once was; and surely the Bible cannot have altered! After a while the professor slackens a good deal in his liberality; he does not think the cause of God is worth the expense that he used to spend upon it; and as to his own personal efforts to win souls, he does not give up his Sunday-school class, nor his street preaching, nor distributing of tracts, perhaps, but he does all mechanically, it is a mere routine. He might just as well be an automaton, and be wound up, only the fault is, that he is not wound up, and he does not do his work as he should do; or, if he does it outwardly, there is none of the life of God in what he does. Very much of this sluggishness is brought on by long-continued respites from trouble. It were better to be in perpetual storms, and to be driven to-and-fro in the whirlwind, and to cling to God, than to founder at sea in the most peaceful and halcyon days. The great secret danger coming out of all this is, that when a man reaches the state of carnal security, he is ready for any evil. We have heard of two negroes who were accustomed to go into the bush to pray, and each of them had trodden a little path in the grass. Presently one of them grew cold, and was soon found in open sin; his black brother warned him that he knew it would come to that, because the grass grew on the path that led to the place of prayer. Ah! we do not know to what we may descend when we begin to go down hill; down, down, down, is easy and pleasant to the flesh, but if we knew where it would end, we should pray God that we might sooner die than live to plunge into the terrors of that descent. I must pass on to observe God's cure for this malady. His usual way is by pouring our settled wine from vessel to vessel. If we cannot bear prosperity, the Lord will not continue it to us. We may pamper our children and spoil them; but the Divine Father will not. Staying for a while in the valley of Aosta, in Northern Italy, we found the air to be heavy, close, and humid with pestilential exhalations. We were oppressed and feverish—one's life did not seem worth a pin. We could not breathe freely, our lungs had a sense of having a hundred atmospheres piled upon them. Presently, at midday, there came a thunder-clap, attended by big drops of rain and a stiff gale of wind, which grew into a perfect tornado, tearing down the trees; then followed what the poet calls "sonorous hail," and then again the lightning flash, and the thunder peal on peal echoing along the Alps. But how delightful was the effect, how we all went out upon the verandah to look at the lightning, and enjoy the music of the thunder! How cool the air and bracing! How delightful to walk out in the cool evening after the storm! Then you could breathe and feel a joy in life. Full often it is thus with the Christian after trouble. What ought we to do if we are prospering? We should remember that prevention is better than cure, and if God is prospering us, the way to prevent lethargy is—be very grateful for the prosperity which you are enjoying; do not pray for trouble—you will have it quickly enough without asking for it; be grateful for your prosperity, but make use of it. Do all you possibly can for God while He prospers you in business; try to live very close to Him. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Ease injurious to Christian character:—*I have somewhere read the following incident in the life of a distinguished botanist. Being exiled from his native land, he obtained employment as an under-gardener in the service of a nobleman. While he was in this situation, his master received a valuable plant, the nature and habits of which were unknown to him. It was given to the gardener to be taken care of; and he, fancying it to be a tropical production, put it into the hothouse (for it was winter), and dealt with it as with the others under the glass. But it began to wither away and decay. And the strange under-gardener asked permission to examine it. As soon as he looked at it he said, "This is an Arctic plant; you are killing it by the tropical heat into which you have introduced it." So he took it outside, and exposed it to the frost, and, to the dismay of the head-gardener, heaped pieces of ice around the flower-pot; but the result vindicated his wisdom, for straightway it began to recover, and was soon as strong as ever. Now, such a plant is Christian character. It is not difficulty that is dangerous to it, but ease. Put it into a hothouse, separate it from the world, surround it with luxury, hedge it in from every opposition, and you take the surest means of killing it. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Emptied from vessel to vessel.—The blessing of disturbance:—*The illustration is taken from the manner in which wine is prepared. The juice of the grape, at first thick and impure, is allowed to ferment. Then it is left for a time undisturbed, until a sediment, here called "lees," is precipitated.

After that it is drawn off into another vessel so carefully that all the matter so precipitated is left behind, and this emptying of it "from vessel to vessel" is repeated again and again, until the offensive odour that came at first from the "must" is gone, and it becomes clear and beautiful. Now, by the analogy of this process, familiar even to the common people of a vine-growing country, the prophet accounts for the character and condition of Moab as a nation. In the providence of God nothing had come to unsettle that people. No external enemy had attacked them. No great national disaster had ever fallen on them. We have here explained to us the reason why we are, as we phrase it, so frequently "upset" in life. We complain that we are never allowed to become "settled." Ever, as we think we have reached some place of rest, there comes a new upheaval to shake us up and out, so that we cry, "Is there to be no end of these changes?" As well talk of a ship as settled in the midst of the ever-restless, ever-changeable ocean, as talk of a man being settled in life. But, in the light of this verse, such repeated disturbance is recognised as a blessing.

I. WHAT THERE IS IN THESE "EMPTYINGS" THAT FITS THEM TO PROMOTE OUR SPIRITUAL ADVANCEMENT. 1. Such dispensations have in them an influence which is well calculated to reveal us to ourselves. Sudden emergency is a sure opener of a man's eyes to his own defects. He may contrive to get on, in seasons of prosperity and outward calm, without becoming conscious of the weak points of his character; but let him be thrown, all at once, upon his own resources by the coming upon him of some crushing calamity, and he will then find out whether he has that within him that can stand the strain that has been put upon him. It was a shrewd remark of Andrew Fuller, that "a man has only as much religion as he can command in the day of trial"; and if he have no religion at all, his trouble will make that manifest to him. Just as the strain of the storm tells where the ship is weakest, and stirs up the mariner to have it strengthened there, so the pressure of trial reveals the defects of character which still adhere to the Christian. One affliction may disclose an infirmity of temper; another may discover a weakness of faith; a third may make it evident that the power of some old habit is not yet entirely broken; and thus, from this constant revelation to him of the evils that still remain in him, he is led, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, to the attainment of a higher measure of holiness than otherwise he could have reached.

2. The frequent unsettlements which come upon us in God's providence have a tendency to shake us out of ourselves. We find that where we thought ourselves wise we have been supremely foolish. Where we imagined that we had taken all possible contingencies into the account, we discover that we had left no place for God. So our most matured schemes have been abortive, our most cherished hopes have been blasted; yea, just when we conceived that now at length we had reached our ultimatum, and were beginning to congratulate ourselves on the prospect of repose, there came a sudden reverse, which emptied us out again, and we were compelled to begin anew. Thus we are brought to distrust ourselves. We find that it will not do to "lean" always "to our own understanding." By many bitter failures we are made to acknowledge that "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps," and then by the Spirit of God we are led up to confidence in Jehovah. We have heard enough of the success of the millionaire; let us hear more now of the success of the unsuccessful—yea, of the success of soul that sometimes comes through the ruin of earthly fortune and the blighting of our fondest plans. Character is nobler than riches or position, and the growth of that in holiness and stability ought to be the highest aim, as it will be the noblest achievement of life.

3. These frequent unsettlements have a tendency to keep us from being wedded to the world, or from thinking of rooting ourselves permanently here. Some years ago, while rambling with a friend in the neighbourhood of Windermere, we came upon a house surrounded by the most beautiful shrubs I ever saw, and I was naturally led to make some inquiry concerning them. My companion informed me that, by a judicious system of transplanting, constantly pursued, the proprietor was able to bring them to the highest perfection. I thought at once of the manner in which God, by continuous transplanting, keeps His people fresh and beautiful, and prevents them from becoming too closely attached to the world. To be weaned from earth is one of the means of making us seek our spiritual food from heaven; and the trials of earth, transplanting us from place to place and from plan to plan, tend to prepare us for the great transplanting which is to take us from this world altogether, and root us in the garden of the

Lord above. II. THE PARTICULAR QUALITIES OF CHARACTER WHICH PROVIDENTIAL UNSETTLEMENTS ARE MOST CALCULATED TO FOSTER. 1. Purity of motive and conduct; and where shall we find a better illustration of that than in the history of Jacob? He began life as a supplanter. He out-bargained Esau. He imposed on Isaac. He out-generaled Laban. We cannot admire him, and we are not drawn to him then. But when he lay on his death-bed, no characteristics strike us more than his honesty in dealing with his sons, and his sincerity in dealing with his God. And how was that transformation wrought? "By the Spirit of God," you answer, and you answer well; but I would supplement your statement by putting it thus, "By the Spirit of God, through and in connection with the frequent unsettlements to which he was subjected." 2. They tend to foster strength, either for endurance or for action. Take for example, here, the case of Abraham. He was tried in Canaan and in Egypt; he was tested by the long delay in the fulfilment of the promise in regard to Isaac, and by the domestic discord that arose concerning Ishmael; and his wrestlings with these afflictions developed in him, by the grace of God, that spiritual might in which he conquered on the mount of the Lord, when he earned for himself the title of "the father of the faithful." 3. The recurrence of these "emptying" processes deepens the sympathy and widens the charity of the Christian. Indeed I hazard the assertion that no man can be called complete in character who has not been subjected to them. It is in this very relation that our Lord Himself is said to have been "made perfect through suffering," and each of us has doubtless had an experience of his own which enables him to understand what seems at first so strange. Experience is thus the mother of sympathy and charity. The older a Christian grows he learns to feel for others more, and to condemn them less, and he is a true "son of consolation" only in the proportion in which he is able to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith he himself is comforted of God. What I have been saying, then, all tends toward these two propositions, namely, that unbroken prosperity would be a curse to a man, and not a blessing; and that providential unsettlements, when rightly interpreted and improved, are really favours, though they do come draped in sadness. (*Ibid.*) *The discipline of sorrow*:—I trust it is the wish of each of us that God's will be done in us and about us: I trust it is our daily prayer, not so much that God would give us what we wish, as that He would teach us, simply and completely, to submit our will to His, and that He would give us grace and strength to bear whatever He may send. Let us seek that the utterance of our hearts may be that of the blind Galileo; who said, "It has pleased God that it should be so; and it must please me too." And yet it is natural to us to wish that it might please God to lead us by as easy and pleasant a way as may be: that it might please God to appoint us as peaceful and happy a life as possible, and to send us just as little evil and sorrow as may suffice to work upon us the wholesome results of evil and sorrow. God has made us so, that we wish for what is pleasant, and shrink from what is painful. But it does not follow that the thing we like best is the best thing for us. And the text tells us that a life of unbroken ease, a life in which all goes well with us, is a most perilous thing. The kingdom of Moab had enjoyed long tranquillity, though there were troublesome neighbours near, and though it was a state of no great power: it had pleased God to order it so. "Moab had been at ease from his youth." Then comes the comparison to wine: Moab had not been subjected to captivity, nor to other changes and troubles which are to a nation what pouring from one vessel to another is to wine: thus he had remained standing upon the lees, losing no part of his original strength and flavour. The suggestion is, that Moab was not good to start with: and he had not been tried with processes which might indeed have been painful, but in which he would have got rid of a good deal of the evil that was in him at the first. Moab had been secure in prosperity; and so he had remained the same as at the beginning,—all his bad qualities being only confirmed by time and use. Now the great lesson from all this is, that there is spiritual danger in the quiet lot, and in the quiet heart: that it is not God's purpose that those He loves should enjoy entire worldly tranquillity; that there is something good for you and me, in care, unrest, disquiet, sorrow, bereavement, disappointment, perplexity—in all that breaks up that perilous calm, in which we grow too well satisfied with this world, and in which we feel ourselves too little dependent on our Saviour and our Comforter; and in which we come too much to feel as if things went

on in their own way, forgetting that God directs them all; and in which we fail to realise it, that the one thing needful is something quite different from worldly enjoyment or worldly gain. So you see, how in love and mercy, and tender consideration for our best good, our Father sends us trouble. Philosophers vex and bewilder themselves in trying to explain how there is such a thing as evil in this world: we do not pretend to understand that, but one thing we do know perfectly, we know why evil and sorrow have been sent into our own lot and heart. They have come to make sure that we shall not "settle on our lees": they have come to keep this world from engrossing our affection: they have come to wean us from this world by making us feel its bitterness: they have come to teach us the grand, all-comprehending lesson, that if we want what will satisfy our souls, we must go to Christ and find it there. Yes, it is not good for us in this world to be evenly at peace: and thus sorrow is God's discipline, and disappointment, and bereavement,—in short, everything that is painful and disquieting,—all being sanctified by the Holy Spirit of God. And here is a truth we cannot remember too seriously. In all our troubles we cannot too earnestly and constantly pray for the presence and influence of the Holy Ghost. For sorrow does not necessarily sanctify; it is just as likely to sour, if left to its natural tendencies. You who have known many trials: you who have watched by the dying bed, and bent over the grave: you who set your heart on things which God said were never to be: you whose sensitive nature makes the little worries of daily life sit very heavily on you, and whose quick heart and fancy eat the enjoyment out of your life by suggesting a hundred anxieties and fears: let me ask, Have all these things been sanctified to wean you from this world, and make you feel that your portion must be in Christ and seek it there: or do you still cling to the earth, and refuse to profit by your Heavenly Father's teaching through all these trials and cares? Every grief that these hearts have ever known was a sharp lesson given by the best Teacher: and was meant to show us that this world will not do; and that if we want peace and rest for our souls, we must look for them in our Saviour. Now, do you accept that lesson heartily? (*A. K. H. Boyd, D.D.*) *Spiritual dislodgments*:—Observe—1. How God manages, on a large scale, in the common matters of life, to keep us in a process of change, and prevent our lapsing into a state of security such as we desire. The very scheme of life appears to be itself a grand decanting process, where change follows change, and all are emptied from vessel to vessel. Here and there a man, like Moab, stands upon his lees, and commonly with the same effect. Fire, flood, famine, sickness in all forms and guises, wait upon us, seen or unseen, and we run the gauntlet through them, calling it life. And the design appears to be to turn us hither and thither, allowing us no chance to stagnate in any sort of benefit or security. Even the most successful, who seem, in one view, to go straight on to their mark, get on after all, rather by a dexterous and continual shifting, so as to keep their balance and exactly meet the changing conditions that befall them. Nor is there anything to sentimentalise over in this ever-shifting, overturning process, which must be encountered in all the works of life; no place for sighing—vanity of vanities. There is no vanity in it, more than in the mill that winnows and separates the grain. 2. That the radical evil of human character, as being under sin, consists in a determination to have our own way, which determination must be somehow reduced and extirpated. Hence the necessity that our experience be so appointed as to shake us loose continually from our purpose, or from all security and rest in it. The coarse and bitter flavour of our self-will is reduced in this manner, and gradually fined away. If we could stand on our lees, in continual peace and serenity, if success were made secure, subject to no change or surprise, what, on the other hand, should we do more certainly than stay by our evil mind, and take it as a matter of course that our will is to be done; the very thing above all others of which we most need to be cured. It would not even do for us to be uniformly successful in our best meant and holiest works, our prayers, our acts of sacrifice, our sacred enjoyments; for we should very soon fall back into the subtle power of our self-will, and begin to imagine, in our vanity, that we are doing something ourselves. 3. That our evils are generally hidden from us till they are discovered to us by some kind of trial or adversity. What good man ever fell into a time of deep chastening who did not find some cunning infatuation by which he was holden broken up, and some new discovery made of himself? The veils of pride are rent, the rock of self-opinion is shattered, and he is reduced to a

point of gentleness and tenderness that allows him to suffer a true conviction concerning what was hidden from his sight. Nor is anything so effectual in this way as to meet some great overthrow that interrupts the whole course of life; all the better if it dislodges him even in his Christian works and appointments. What was I doing, he now asks, that I must needs be thrown out of my holiest engagements? for what fault was I brought under this discipline? 4. That we are prepared in this manner for the gracious and refining work of the Spirit in us. Under some great calamity or sorrow, the loss of a child, the visitations of bodily pain, a failure in business, the slanders of an enemy, a persecution for the truth or for righteousness' sake, how tender and open to God does the soul become! 5. Too great quiet and security, long continued, are likely to allow the reaction or the recovered power of our old sins, and must not therefore be suffered. Suppose a man is converted as a politician—there is nothing wrong certainly in being a politician—but how subtle is the power of those old habits and affinities in which he lived, and how likely are they, if he goes straight on by a course of prosperous ambition, to be finally corrupted by their subtle reaction. When he is defeated, therefore, a little further on, by untoward combinations, and thrown out of all hope in this direction, let him not think it hard that he is less successful now in the way of Christ, than he was before in the way of his natural ambition. God understands him, and is leading him off, not unlikely, to some other engagement, that He may get him clear of the sediment on which he stands. In the same way, doubtless, it is that another is driven out of his business by a failure, another out of his family expectations by death and bereavement, another out of his very industry and his living by a loss of health, another out of prayers and expectations that were rooted in presumption, another out of works of beneficence that associated pride and vanity, another out of the ministry of Christ, where, by self-indulgence, or in some other way, his natural infirmities were rather increased than corrected. There is no engagement, however sacred, from which God will not sometimes separate us, that He may clear us of our sediment and the reactions of our hidden evils. Application—1. It brings a lesson of admonition to the class of worldly men who are continually prospering in the things of this life. "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." I commend it to your deepest and most thoughtful attention. 2. Others, again, have been visited by many and great adversities, emptied about from vessel to vessel all their lives long, still wondering what it means, while still they adhere to their sins. There is, alas! no harder kind of life than this, a life of continual discipline that really teaches nothing. Is it so with you, or is it not? There is no class of beings more to be pitied than defeated men, who have gotten nothing out of their defeat but that dry sorrow of the world which makes it only more barren, and therefore more insupportable. 3. It is necessary, in the review of this subject, to remind any genuine Christian what benefits he ought to receive in the trials and changes through which he is called to pass. Receive them meekly, rather, and bow down to them gladly. Bid them welcome when they come, and, if they come not, ask for them; lift up your cry unto God, and beseech Him that by any means He will correct you, and purify you, and separate you to Himself. (*H. Bushnell, D.D.*) *Alternations in religious experience*:—Transitions from elevation to depression of soul, from "joy and peace in believing," to spiritual anxiety, are beneficial as disturbing perilous security, as leading to such critical scrutiny of conduct and of the motives which underlie it, as reveals shortcomings which there would be no effort to detect were spiritual enjoyment to continue unbroken. In such ease of soul the feeling of security—though not, perhaps, finding audible expression in the words, "I shall never be moved, Thou, Lord, of Thy goodness, hast made my hill so strong," might find in them a fitting description. Then, a season comes when God, for a time, hides His face and causes trouble, when the chastened soul is taught humility, and mercifully roused from a dangerous state of over-confidence. To be left, Moab-like, "at ease," so as never to be subject to apprehensions and doubts, would indeed be detrimental to the health of the soul, and therefore, by wisely contrived changes, alternations experienced in that life which "is hid with Christ in God," the Christian is experimentally taught that salvation is not promised to the experience of feelings, however ardent, but to "patient continuance in well-doing," to "endurance unto the end," to gradual progress in conformity to the will of Him who has made obedience to His commandments the test of the genuineness of professed discipleship.

In the way by which heaven is to be reached, there are salutary changes from one kind to another of spiritual experience, and by their means invaluable lessons are conveyed to the soul. If there be a tendency to become less vigilant, to "restrain prayer before God," to grow remiss in religious exercises, public and private, there is a change to the experience of some humiliating conviction. If, on the other hand, there be a tendency to spiritual dejection, which if too long dominant, would have the effect of paralysing effort, there is a change to an experience animating and consolatory. Whether God manifests His power in the soul by gladdening it with tokens of His favour, or depresses it with a painful sense of their withdrawal, He is, all the while, educating it for immortality. But further. For all who carefully observe it there is spiritual teaching in what the Church terms, in one of her comprehensive prayers, "the sundry and manifold changes of the world." Evidences of mutability and uncertainty in the world external to us, are set before us in order that we may be disciplined for that "life immortal," which is promised to those who "walk by faith." The present state is designed to be one of pupilage for a higher and a nobler, and no sadder aspect of it can be imagined than when it is viewed as a season of opportunity wasted, a life in which nothing has been learned which is of profit to the imperishable soul. Of momentous import, therefore, is the consideration, whether you be really advantaged by the teaching of those mutabilities. The manner in which prosperity and adversity are borne, the effect which these opposite experiences produce upon character, the spirit in which benefits upon the one hand, and trials upon the other, are received—it is to that you must look if you be desirous of arriving at a reliable conclusion as to whether or not you be spiritually disciplined under God's providential dispensations. May the mutable nature of all sublunary things be so impressed upon you, as an influential conviction, that the result may be the sure fixing of your hearts "where true joys are to be found." (*C. E. Tisdall, D.D.*) *Divine plan in changes:—* Why these constant removals from town to town; from church to church; from situation to situation? Why this perpetual change and revolution in our plans? Why this incessant going into captivity to irksome and trying circumstances? All this is part of God's manufacture of the wine of life. We must be emptied from vessel to vessel, else we should settle on our lees, and become thick and raw and unpalatable. When the next change comes in your life, do not fear it. The blessed God will see to it that no drop of the precious fluid shall be spilt on the ground. With the tenderest care He conducts the whole operation. Perhaps there is a counterpart to this incessant change from place to place in the perpetual flux of our emotions. We never feel the same for long together. We are constantly being emptied from one blessed frame into another, not quite so joyous or peaceful. We have to hold the most heavenly emotions with a light hand, not knowing how soon they may have passed. And it is well. Otherwise we should never lose the taste of our proud self-complacency. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

Ver. 17. How is the strong staff broken.—*The strong staff and the beautiful rod:—*I. THE PURPOSES OF OUR HEAVENLY FATHER IN GREAT BEREAVEMENTS. 1. To teach us that we should not misplace our trust. 2. To convince us of our sins and to sever us from them. 3. To teach us His own independence of the instruments He employs. 4. To remind us of the sovereignty of God. 5. To exhibit His wise and watchful providence. II. THE DUTIES TO WHICH WE ARE, AMID SUCH SCENES, SPECIALLY CALLED. 1. We are to exercise submission. 2. That we should profit by the example of those who have died in the Lord. 3. That we should cease from man and put our trust in God. (*W. R. Williams.*)

Ver. 25. The horn of Moab is cut off.—*The history of Moab:—*The first charge brought against Moab is self-confidence, self-trust, self-sufficiency (ver. 7). This makes us contemporaries of the Moabites. We thought they were an ancient people, but behold how human they are, how English, how like ourselves and our children! They were so pleased with the stone wall they had put up; they measured it, and admired it, and said that it would save them from the high wind and the mighty storm. It was enough—high enough, broad enough, impenetrable, invincible. Now that is the kind of reasoning which God will not allow in human life. He demands that human life be lived in Himself, and not in things that our own hands have made. We are to be taught distinctly that we do not live in ourselves; that

in ourselves we have actually no life ; that we have nothing that we have not received, and in that spirit alone we are to hold life and to live. It would seem to be easy to put our whole trust in the living God, and yet it is the most difficult of all lessons. We will persist, even in opposition to many theories of our own to the contrary, that we are self-contained, self-consisting, and self-managing ; and herein arises God's perpetual controversy with mankind. There is, too, so much to favour the temptation. It looks as if we could do most things ; that as we have so much we might easily have more. God says to us in every day's providence, You are here for a purpose ; you are here for a little time ; you now but begin to be ; every lesson you must learn, and every commandment you must keep. It is against that arrangement that we chafe, just as the little child chafes against parental authority and loving restraint. From the history of Moab we see that even blessings may be perverted, and sacred privileges may be turned into occasions of self-destruction (ver. 11). Too much ease, too little upset, too little anxiety, too little trouble will kill any soul. To come into a business made to your hands, to have a fortune left you, and to have everything pre-arranged, is to be exposed to very peculiar and urgent temptation. Thank God for the rough places in your lives. They are unpleasant, but they are disciplinary. They are like steep hills, but remember that great temples and blessed sanctuaries stand at the top of them. When discipline is not endured gradually it is brought to bear upon the life as an overwhelming judgment. This is the burden of the text. Two classes of persons should consider this. First, those who have daily discipline ; they should say, Better have discipline a little at a time, as we are able to bear it. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous : nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." These daily chafings and frettings are hard to bear, these daily disappointments are sharp thorns thrust into the very eyes ; yet who knows what the judgment would be were it all to come at once ? I will rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him : no temptation has happened unto me but such as is common to men ; by and by the explanation will come, and then I shall be able to say, He hath done all things well. Then the lesson should be well considered by those who seem to escape discipline of God. The volcano is a long time in gathering all its fiery energy, but the outburst is momentary, and who can measure the destruction which follows ? Christ may well say, "What I say unto one, I say unto all, Watch,"—even those who have apparently least necessity to watch should not relax their vigils for a moment. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." See how frightful is the humiliation to which God can bring a man or a people. Look at the picture of Moab—horn cut off, the arm broken, the man drunk but not with wine, and reeling in helplessness, the proud one wallowing in his vomit and laughed to derision ! We cannot, however, rest here : for the mercy of the Lord endureth for ever. Mercy triumphs over judgment. The destruction, therefore, was not arbitrary, but moral, being based upon an assigned reason. "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." We should say, therefore, that this verse was the concluding verse in the whole history of Moab. What can there be after destruction ? With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible. The chapter does not end with the forty-second verse, but with the forty-seventh, and this is how it reads, "Yet will I bring again," &c. One would fain construe these words into a hopeful omen. Out of what extremities cannot God deliver mankind ? Let the most desponding rekindle their hope, and the most distant prodigal hear his father's voice. Who can set bounds to the mercy of God ? Yet must there be no trifling, even with a Gospel of hope. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 28. **Dwell in the rock, and be like the dove.**—*Dove and rock* :—I. GOD SHOWS MUCH COMPASSION NOT ONLY TO FRIENDS BUT TO FOES. 1. It is for Moab—guilty, apostate, persecuting Moab—that God expresses all this compassionate concern. 2. The New Testament is filled with warnings, invitations, and promises, addressed to those who are farthest off from God, intermingled with signal instances of the conversion of hardened transgressors. II. GOD WOULD HAVE US FORSAKE FALSE REFUGES AND AVAIL OURSELVES OF THE TRUE. The wild doves and pigeons of the East delight in cool and inaccessible places. They build their nests in cliffs and caverns, overhanging fearful precipices, where man cannot tread. Learn the importance of shunning false confidences, and of resting our

hope of salvation where alone it can be safe. God would have human weakness rely on almighty strength; human ignorance on almighty wisdom; human sinfulness on almighty mercy. The finite needs the Infinite; the sinner, the Saviour. III. CONTEMPTUOUS NEGLECT OF WARNINGS AND MERCIES AGGRAVATES FINAL CONSEQUENCES. This was the case with Moab. 1. We may not presume on God's mercy and forbearance. The longer the judgment delays, the heavier its weight of woe. 2. Despair is to be banished. The atonement is all-sufficient. 3. Delay must be avoided. God's voice is always "To-day"; Satan's, "To-morrow." 4. We must not be satisfied with our own safety, but aim at leading others to flee as doves to "the Rock." (*Homiletic Magazine.*)

Ver. 36. *Because the riches that he hath gotten are perished.—Riches are ever liable to perish.*—Prosperity is not to be deemed the greatest security. The lofty unbending cedar is more exposed to the injurious blast than the lowly shrub. The little pinnace rides safely along the shore, while the gallant ship advancing is wrecked. Those sheep which have the most wool are generally the soonest fleeced. Poverty is its own defence against robbery. Who would shake those trees upon which there is no fruit? (*T. Secker.*)

CHAPTER XLIX.

VER. 8. *Dwell deep, O inhabitants of Dedan.—Dwell deep, O Dedan.*—We do not quite know who these inhabitants of Dedan were, but in all probability they were some Arabian tribe or tribes. The text intends one of two things—either to inform these inhabitants of Dedan, that however deep in the cavernous rocks they should hide themselves, they would certainly be destroyed; or else it was a gracious warning to remove from Edom, strike their tents, and retreat into the depths of the wilderness, and so escape from the invaders. I. Let us take it SARCASTICALLY. It is as though the prophet said to these Edomites, and those that dwelt with them, "You think you never can be destroyed, for your city is situated in a rocky defile, where a handful of men can hold the pass. You suppose that the mightiest armies will fail to conquer you, and therefore you are very proud; but your pride is vain." "Thy terribleness hath deceived thee, and the pride of thine heart, O thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, that holdest the height of the hill: though thou shouldst make thy nest as high as the eagle, I will bring thee down from thence, saith the Lord." That word has been terribly fulfilled, for the ancient rock-city stands as a wonder to all travellers, and when they ride through it, which is not often, for it is with great difficulty that you reach the place at all, they find the city standing, but the houses desolate, and without inhabitants. Edom is a perpetual desolation, because of her sins. 1. From the text I hear a cry, like the stern voice of Elias, to every profane sinner who thinks that he will ultimately escape the wrath of God. Thou mayest dwell deep, O transgressor, but God shall find thee out. Thou sayest, "How shall He reach me?" The hand of death has only to be stretched out, and thou art His captive at once: and a little thing will do it—the wind has but to pass over thee, and thou art gone. A drop of blood may go the wrong way, a valve may refuse to open, a vessel may burst, a band may snap, and there thou liest, beneath God's avenging hand, like a stag smitten by the hunter. Thou art dust, and a breath will scatter thee to the four winds. Thy spirit will be equally unable to escape from God. When it leaves this body, whither will it fly? 2. The same solemn warning may be applied to those who are self-righteous, and who think that they are forming a hiding-place for themselves. You think that you will save yourselves by your works. Ah! labour mightily; for hard must be your toil if you think to finish a righteousness of your own. In the very fire must you labour. You would make a dwelling for yourself as secure as the Rock of Ages? You had need build anxiously. I do not wonder that you are ill at ease. I wonder you have any peace, for the labours which you propose are more stupendous than those of Hercules! You would work miracles without the God of miracles! Vanity of vanities, all is vanity! 3. The same text, in the same way, might be applied to those who are hypocrites, and are

practising secret sins while they yet wear the name of Christ, and are numbered amongst His people. Where are the deep places which can afford refuge to religious pretenders? Where shall liars conceal themselves? O hypocrite! it may be you have planned your sin so cleverly that the wife of your bosom does not know it: your scheme is so admirably cunning that you carry two faces, and yet no Christian sees other than that Christian mask of yours. Ah, sir! but you are a greater fool than I take you for, if you think you can deceive your God. Cast off your double-mindedness. "Cease to do evil, learn to do well," for it is time to seek the Lord, and may God grant you His effectual grace that you may do so at once, ere He condemn you to the lowest hell. II. But now we will use the text INSTRUCTIVELY, in which view, the first and natural sense would be, that the prophet warns the tribe of Dedan, who had come to live among the Edomites, to go away from them, and dwell in the depths of the wilderness; so that when the destroyer came, they might not participate in Edom's doom. It was the warning voice of mercy, separating its chosen from among the multitude of the condemned. 1. The people of God, like the tribes of Dedan, to some extent, dwell in Edom. Your business, your duty, is to come out from among them. "Be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing." Better go to heaven alone, than to hell in company. Better be true to God, with Abdiel, "faithful among the faithless found," than win the applause of the crowd by great liberality and equal inconsistency. More important still, however, is the separation of every Christian from worldly habits, customs, and ways. Wherever you are, dear friend, though you must be in the world, take care that you be not of it. Dwell deep in the solitudes where Jesus dwelt—in the lonely holiness which was fostered on the cold mountain's side, and then shone resplendent amid temptation and persecution! Commit yourself unto no man; call no man master; lean on no arm of flesh; walk before the Lord in the land of the living, and so dwell deep, as did your Lord. 2. My earnest desire is that every saved soul among you may dwell deep, that is to say, that none of you may be superficial Christians, but that you may be deep believers, well rooted plants of grace, thorough, downright, out-and-out Christians—that you may not only dwell in the Rock of Ages, but dwell deep in it. To this let me call your attention. (1) It is highly important, beloved, that every one of us should have a deep sense of sin, and a profound horror of it. Oh, to loathe iniquity and see with self-abhorrence its heinous character; for so shall we prize the salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love which thought it, the blood which bought it, and the grace which wrought it out! (2) Should your convictions of sin be already deep, then seek to dwell deep as to your faith in Jesus Christ. The nearer to Jesus the more perfect our peace. The innermost place of the sanctuary is the most Divine. (3) So would I have you dwell deep in the matter of Christian study. An instructed Christian is a more useful vessel of honour for the Master, than an ignorant believer. (4) Above all things, and beyond all things, would I earnestly impress upon my beloved friends the need of deep living unto God. There is such a thing as flimsy living, in which you pray, and pray,—yes, but it is a superficial, routine exercise. Those who live only upon outward ordinances, and do not practise private devotion, and are not abundantly with God in secret communion—those do not dwell deep. Get to the roots of things. The gold mines of Scripture are not in the top soil, you must open a shaft; the precious diamonds of experience are not picked up in the roadway, their secret places are far down. Get down into the vitality, the solidity, the veracity, the divinity of the Word of God, and seek to possess with it all the inward work of the blessed Spirit. 3. If any inquire what are our reasons for bringing forward at this time such an exhortation as this, I will briefly answer them. (1) It is well for us to dwell deep, because trials will surely come. (2) Again, there is a necessity that you should dwell deep, for in these days many errors have gone abroad in the world, and many teachers of heresy and infidelity; and if you do not dwell deep, they will shake you terribly. (3) Dwell deep, for there are seasons coming when all your grace will be wanted. I have never heard of a man coming to mischief through having too much grace. Presumption brings a thousand evils, but holy carefulness brings very few, if any. (4) Dwell deep, because those who live near to God, and are substantial in godliness, are the happiest of people. The top of the cup of religion may be bitter, but it grows sweeter the deeper down you drink. (5) While this deep living gives a man more happiness, it also endows him with more strength. (6) Dwell deep, for you will glorify God most. The nearer you get to the sun, the brighter you will be. The nearer you live to Christ,

the more like Him you will be. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Dwell deep*:—I. DWELL DEEP IN THE PEACE OF GOD. God's peace is so deep and blessed that it cannot be fathomed or explained; the fugitive into its sacred secrets cannot be followed or dragged forth to perish by the merciless pack of the wolves of care. Men of the world cannot understand that mystery of peace; but the believer knows the way into it, and makes it his hiding-place and pavilion. II. DWELL DEEP IN COMMUNION WITH GOD. Get away from the rush and strife around, and go alone into the clear, still depths of His nature. The Rhone loses all its silt in the deep, clear waters of Geneva's lake. A few hasty words of prayer will not avail for this. A day's climb is often necessary before one can reach the heart of the mountains. III. DWELL DEEP IN STILLNESS OF SOUL. Get within. God awaits thee there. Centre thyself. When the world is full of alarm and harassments, study to be quiet. The soul's health cannot be maintained apart from the observance of times of waiting on God in solitude. The great importance of perseverance in the exercise of prayer and inward retirement may be sufficiently learnt, says one, next to the experience of it, merely from the tempter's artifices and endeavours to allure us from it, and make us neglect it. (F. B. Meyer, B.A.) *Deep dwellers*:—The plants which grow in the Alps are, as a rule, firmly and largely rooted. An authority on this topic says: "The roots of some plants enter so far into the gritty soil as to defy the tourist to bring them out, while others simply search farther into the heart of the flaky rock, so that they are safer from any want of moisture than if in the best and richest soil." So in many lives, the very strength and beauty of Christian character are a proof that the roots of the soul have struck deep into the everlasting truth and love, the granite truths of the Divine Being and attributes. "Dwell deep! O Dedan!" (H. O. Mackey.)

Ver. 11. Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in Me.—*The compassion and beneficence of the Deity*:—No subject is more open to general observation, or more confirmed by manifold experience, than the goodness of God. In Scripture it is most frequently presented to us in the light of compassion to the distresses of mankind (Psa. cii. 17, x. 17, lviii. 5, lxix. 33, cxlvi. 7, xxii. 24, &c.). I. THE DISCOVERIES OF DIVINE COMPASSION WERE PURPOSELY INTENDED TO FURNISH TO US PARTICULAR GROUND FOR TRUST IN GOD AMID ALL THE VICISSITUDES OF HUMAN LIFE. Compassion is a principle which we all feel and know. We know that it is the strongest of all benevolent instincts in our nature, and that it tends directly to interest us in behalf of those who need our aid. We are taught to believe that a similar attribute belongs to the Divine nature; in order that, from that species of goodness which we are best acquainted with, and which we can most rely upon, we may be trained both to love our Almighty Benefactor, and, as long as we are in the practice of our duty, to trust to His protection amid every distress. Compassion to the unfortunate, as it is exerted among men, is indeed accompanied with certain disturbed and painful feelings, arising from sympathy with those whom we pity. But every such feeling we must remove from our thoughts when we ascribe an affection of this nature to the Deity. His compassion is such a regard as suits the perfection of the great Governor of the universe, whose benignity, undisturbed by any violent emotion, ever maintains the same tranquil tenor, like the unruffled and uninterrupted serenity of the highest heavens. II. SUCH DISCOVERIES OF THE DIVINE NATURE WERE DESIGNED, NOT ONLY TO ADMINISTER ENCOURAGEMENT AND CONSOLATION, BUT ALSO TO EXHIBIT THE PATTERN OF THAT DISPOSITION WHICH WE ARE BOUND, IN OUR MEASURE, TO IMITATE AND FOLLOW. That hardness of heart which renders men insensible to the distresses of their brethren, that insolence of prosperity which inspires them with contempt of those who are fallen below them, are always represented in Scripture as dispositions most opposite to the nature of God, and most hateful in His sight. In order to make this appear in the strongest light, He has turned His goodness chiefly into the channel of compassionate regard to those whom the selfish and proud despise (Psa. xii. 5, x. 17, 18). III. IN THE COURSE OF HUMAN LIFE INNUMERABLE OCCASIONS PRESENT THEMSELVES FOR ALL THE EXERCISES OF THAT HUMANITY AND BENIGNITY TO WHICH WE ARE SO POWERFULLY PROMPTED. The diversities of rank among men, the changes of fortune to which all, in every rank, are liable, the necessities of the poor, the wants of helpless youth, the infirmities of declining age, are always giving opportunities for the display of humane affections. (Hugh Blair, D.D.) *The God of orphans and widows*:—The Rev. J. Brown of Haddington, said that

his epitaph might appropriately be: "Here lies one of the cares of providence, who early wanted both father and mother, and yet never missed them."

Vor. 16. Thy terriblehness hath deceived thee, and the pride of thine heart.—*On the deceitfulness of the heart, in the abuse of prosperity*:—The words afford us the following doctrine, That worldly prosperity is often abused by the heart, as the occasion of self-deceit; or, that the heart often discovers its deceit in the abuse of prosperity. All that is intended here is to illustrate the actions of this corrupt principle in abusing prosperity. 1. By ingratitude. (1) Sinners receive all God's mercies with an unthankful heart. They sit down to their table and rise from it, they eat and drink like the brutes that perish; without considering, that whether they eat or drink, or whatsoever they do, they should do all to the glory of God. Many are the spiritual mercies which the unregenerate receive from God. He gives them His Word and ordinances, wherein the Bread of Life is exhibited. He warns them by His servants. He strives with them by His Spirit. They reject and despise the heavenly manna. Their souls loathe this light food. (2) Ingratitude is a sin eminently chargeable even against the children of God. When they are anxious for any mercy, they resolve, and perhaps solemnly vow, that if God will be pleased to bestow it, they will ever retain a grateful sense of His kindness. He condescends to grant their request. But often they remember not the multitude of His mercies, but provoke Him, like His ancient people, at the sea, even at the Red Sea. This conduct towards our gracious Benefactor is productive of bitter consequences. Our ingratitude for mercies received often provokes Him to deny us others which He would otherwise bestow, sometimes to recall those already given, and frequently to blast them in the enjoyment. 2. By disposing us to make a God of our mercies. The deceitfulness of the heart, so violent is its opposition to the living God, works by contraries, and often by extremes. If it do not tempt us to despise His mercies altogether, it will excite us to put them out of their proper place. By either of these methods, although directly opposite, it gains its wicked purpose, in making us forget the God of our mercy. He will suffer no rival in thy heart, O Christian, for it all belongs to Him; and when thy love to worldly comforts ceases to be secondary and subordinate, it is an encroachment on His prerogative. Therefore must the usurper of the throne of God be cast down, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence. When precious comforts are thus converted into severe crosses, how great is the trial! There is a double bitterness attending it; not only that of the distress presently felt, but the painful recollection of the happiness formerly enjoyed. 3. By consuming Divine mercies on lust. The wicked ask that they may consume it on their lusts. They neither desire mercies, nor improve those which are bestowed, for the glory of God; but only as making provision for their inordinate or unlawful affections. 4. By ascribing their prosperity to some other cause than God. Even the Lord's people, from the prevalence of deceit, are in great danger of ascribing their mercies to some other cause than God, or to something besides Him. They will not wholly deny the praise to the God of their salvation; but they do not ascribe it entirely to Him. When they receive signal mercies from Him, they are apt to imagine that these are in some degree deserved by their holiness and integrity of conversation; that He could not justly deny them such tokens of His favour, when they are so faithful and diligent in His service. 5. By denying God the use of those mercies which He hath Himself bestowed. When, in the course of His providence, He confers on one a greater portion of common blessings than on another; it is for this end, that he may use them for His glory, and in the manner of laying them out, return them to the Lord. No talent is to be laid up in a napkin. According to the measure of temporal benefits received from God, we are stewards for Him. 6. By unsatisfied desires and immoderate longings for a greater degree of temporal prosperity. When the heart hath tasted of mercies of this nature, it is not satisfied; it craves more. If its desires be fulfilled, instead of being content with these, it flatters itself, that if such another mercy were bestowed, it would ask nothing further. But this only argues its deceit; for even though this be granted, it is still as importunate as ever. The more it receives, its desires are enlivened and enlarged the more. 7. By hardening itself under prosperity. No mercy whatsoever can leave us as it finds us. It must either prove a blessing or a curse. It will either have a mollifying, or a hardening influence on our hearts. (*J. Jamieson, M.A.*) *Deceitfulness of pride*:—How nimbly does that little lark mount up, singing towards heaven in a right line,

whereas the hawk, which is stronger of body and swifter of wing, towers up by many gradual compasses to its highest pitch. That bulk of body and length of wing hinder a direct ascent, and require the help both of air and scope to advance his flight; while the small bird cuts the air without resistance, and needs no outward furtherance of her motion. It is no otherwise with the souls of men. Some are hindered by those powers which would seem helps to their soaring: great wit, deep judgment, quick apprehension, send about men, with no small labour, for the recovery of their own incumbance, while the good affections of plain and simple souls raise them up immediately to the fruition of God. Why should we be proud of that which may slacken our way to glory? (*Bishop Hall.*)

Ver. 23. **There is sorrow (as) on the sea; it cannot be quiet.**—*Life on the ocean*:—That which was true of the cities spoken of in our text, is also true, though in a different sense, of every voyager on the sea of life. “There is sorrow (as) on the sea.” I. **SORROW AS ON THE SEA IS DIVINELY PREDICTED.** Voyagers you all must be. Out on that wide mysterious ocean which is swept by storms untold, and which teems with dangers innumerable, you must sail. Many of you are as yet but as landmen lying in the docks. You are admiring your vessel, and putting on nautical airs, and wondering when you will be freed from the trammels of the shore. Some of you are just dropping down the stream, your breasts big with hope, and your imagination painting glowing pictures of the ocean life beyond. ‘Mid the songs of the sailors, and the music of the passengers, bright visions are rising of sunny seas and blue skies, of mirth and boundless happiness. With all my heart I wish you God-speed. I would not unnecessarily becloud that fair prospect. May the sunbeams which begild the waves around you follow you abundantly. And yet, though at the risk of being charged with unkindness, I must warn you that “there is sorrow on the sea.” I would not, I could not, prevent your sailing; but I must remind you of that which should not be always forgotten, that in life’s voyage troubles will come. II. **SORROW AS ON THE SEA IS UNIVERSALLY EXPERIENCED.** 1. From the mutability of life. I have no wish to play the misanthrope, to paint you a leaden landscape under a lowering sky, where no break of sunshine ever comes to chase the shadows from an ebon sea. There is sunshine! Though all life has its clouds, life is not all sorrow. But while life’s joys may be many and real, it will have its sorrows by reason of its changes. To-day the sea may be calm, and the sky may be without a cloud, but even while we speak the glass is falling, and the calm sea will soon be lashed into foaming fury, and the cloudless sky will soon be overcast with messengers of coming woe. 2. From the uncertainties of life. Which way to steer—what to do—whether to enter into this speculation or to avoid that transaction—how to meet this engagement, or how to be relieved of that responsibility—often drives men to their wits’ end. Business goes wrong, markets are unsteady, panics are abroad, and fogs and thick darkness so enshroud the mercantile world, that with dangers and uncertainty everywhere around, the perplexed tradesmen often just throws up the helm in despair, and allows the vessel to drift whithersoever the current will take her. And in his spiritual voyage the Christian is not always free from similar sorrow. With the Psalmist, we have sometimes to lament that “we see not our signs.” 3. The disappointments of life. (1) Think of life’s friendships! Where we anticipated most consolation, there, in the day of our need, we were most bitterly deceived. (2) Look at life’s prospects! You remember how hard you toiled to secure that position which you thought would consummate your joys, and be the very climax of your every earthly ambition. You remember how bright your prospects seemed to be. You know that towards the end everything was so apparently propitious that you never for a moment entertained a doubt of success. But you were disappointed! III. **SORROW AS ON THE SEA MAY BE GREATLY MITIGATED.** 1. A good ship. Let a sailor be persuaded of the soundness of the ship in which he sails, and “it may blow big guns”—he is comparatively at ease. We want similar faith in the grand old Gospel ship. We want the unswerving confidence which will inspire us ever to say, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation.” Classed *Al* for ever in the heavenly register, this “everlasting Gospel” can never fail. In this good ship millions have reached the “desired haven” in peace; on her deck millions are sailing thither now; and there is room for millions yet unborn. 2. A reliable chart. Without this a man may well be anxious. By what chart are you steering? Is it the Bible, or is it the “Age

of Ronson" ? Blessed be God, we know whom and we know what we believe. 3. Sufficient provision. Lacking provision, what can the sailor do ? There is often such "sorrow on the sea." Want often stares men in the face when they are far from port, and when they can by no possible means obtain supplies. This can never happen on board the ship of the Gospel. This vessel is stored abundantly with the choicest provisions of free eternal grace. (*W. H. Burton.*) *The sea, a parable of human life* :—The ocean is, and always will be, so long as man keeps the faculty of imagination, a mournfully suggestive parable of human life. The restlessness of the sea, its constant alternations of storm and calm, its treachery, for ever deceiving us by false appearances, the atmosphere of mystery that broods over it, all these contribute to make it the natural symbol of man's condition here in this world. Take only one of those characteristics—mysteriousness. David had been visited by this thought also. "Thy judgments," he says, while pondering the strange confusion of good and evil in the world, "are like the great deep." The sea does suggest, with wonderful power, the mysteriousness of God's providence in the affairs of men. "Thy way is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters, and Thy footsteps are not known." The human mind is by nature prone to the misgiving that fate rather than providence orders the procession of our life. Events, so the temptation whispers, fall out according to an iron law of necessity. There is no loving Father who notes the sparrow's fall, and gives His children their daily bread; neither is there any blessed consummation, any final victory of the good over the evil towards which history may be supposed to move. These hopes are delusive; they rest on no foundation. The only thing of which we are certain is that effect follows upon cause in uniform succession, any given human life being as powerless to quicken, or retard, or alter the movement of this endless chain, as if it were only a tiny bubble molten in the fibre of the iron of one single link. This is what we understand by such words as "destiny," "fate," "necessity," and this is the idea which the sea, looked at as a parable, most easily suggests. You sit upon some rocky promontory and watch the incoming tide. You note how wave after wave dashes itself against the hard face of the cliff, and perishes in the act. You observe that every now and then a larger wave comes in, and seems to make a braver effort; but that also, like its predecessor, falls back and is gone. Meanwhile the general level of the water rises and rises, until a predetermined point is reached, and then, as gradually, the tide recedes, sure to return again as soon as a few hours have past, and to make its mark a little higher, or a little lower, according to rules which the astronomers wrote out long ago, which you might have found all calculated for you in their books before you started on the walk. Surely, if there be anywhere in nature a vivid emblem of the idea of destiny, it is here. And, if anything were needed to heighten the impression which the eye has already carried to the mind, the ear might find it in the monotonous, melancholy music of the breaking waves, a sound which possibly suggested to the mourner among the prophets his pathetic cry, "There is sorrow on the sea." What is the relief for a mind oppressed, weighted down with thoughts like this ? "The sea is His, and He made it." "Have faith in God," said our Lord Jesus Christ to His disciples, when they found themselves in perplexity. Have faith in God. He who made the sea is greater than the sea. He who ordained the strangely tangled scheme of providence, is greater than His scheme. He who is responsible for the mystery of human life, holds the key of that mystery in His hands. Do you ask for proof of this ? There is no proof. If there were proof, Christ need not have said, "Have faith in God." Where knowledge leaves off, there faith begins. At the outer boundary of demonstration, belief lifts up her voice and sings. Do you say, Convince me that the idea of destiny is false, and that the idea of providence is true ? No, I cannot convince, I can only, by God's help, persuade you; and yet, when once persuaded, you will be as certain as if you had been convinced; for what a man believes with all his heart, he holds as firmly as he does that which he knows with all his mind. "We know," says St. Paul, grandly asserting his faith in a doctrine the opposite of destiny, "that all things work together for good to them that love God." How did he know this ? Had it been proved to him by strict processes of reasoning in which his keen intellect had been able to detect no flaw ? Was that the ground of the confidence with which he spoke ? Far from it. The foundation of his certainty was what he elsewhere calls the "assurance of faith." And who is the teacher of this glad faith ? To whom shall we go that we may learn to believe that God is love ? I know not, if not to Him who, standing once upon

the deck of a tempest-tossed ship, rebuked the wind, and said unto this same sea, "Peace, be still." Did not He, the Redeemer, come into this world, and take our nature upon Him, and suffer death upon the Cross, for the very purpose of freeing men from the bondage of their fears, for the very purpose of breaking up this evil dream of destiny and enfranchising us with the liberty of the sons of God? Has He not made for us, as for Israel of old, a pathway through the dreaded sea, and having overcome the sharpness of death, has He not opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers? Well may He ask, Where is your faith? One who has done so much for us has at least the right to expect that we shall trust Him; having at so great a cost purchased us this freedom, He has at least the right to expect that we shall be thankful for it, and use it as His gift. (W. R. Huntington, D.D.)

Vers. 30, 31. **Flee, get you far off, dwell deep, O ye inhabitants of Hazor, saith the Lord.—Dangers to the Church:**—What is called "Underground Jerusalem" is largely the space from which the stones were taken for the building of Solomon's temple. That space, according to Josephus, was afterwards honeycombed with passages, canals, and secret galleries, not for sanitary purposes, but as places of refuge for women and children in times of war. These passages were all connected with the forts and towers of the city, and were a secret means of escape when the city was besieged. When Jerusalem was surrounded by the Romans under Titus large numbers of the Jews fled for refuge to these underground hiding-places. Before the Romans knew of these hiding-places, they were often astonished, and sometimes startled, by seeing persons rising as from the ground and making their escape by the towers. When at length they entered the city, and had passed from Moriah to Mount Zion, they thought that their work of destruction was ended; but they only then learned that thousands of the Jews were living beneath the ground. It is alleged that more than a hundred battles were fought underneath the city, and that more than two thousand dead bodies were taken out of the tunnels and secret chambers of what is now called Underground Jerusalem. When the prophet enjoined the inhabitants of Hazor to flee, and dwell deep, he may have had some such invisible cities of refuge in view. But even in such hiding-places they were only comparatively safe. Their enemies often sought them, and found them, and put them to death. I. One of the dangers to which the Church is exposed in modern times is **SHALLOWNESS OF THOUGHT**. Many seem to be satisfied with as little of Christianity as possible. Shallowness of thought means want of heart, want of understanding, want of principle, moral purpose, and power. The Church can outlive pagan conspiracies, tyrannical laws, and cruel persecutions; but she cannot outlive thoughtlessness. "Dwell deep" may be regarded as synonymous with Solomon's injunction, "With all thy getting, get understanding." It means that we should get beneath the surface and find out the true meaning of things. We are to know things not as they may have been perverted, or as they seem, but as they are. Who that is wise would estimate the value of a chronometer by its cases, or of a picture by its frame, or of a book by its binding? We would sooner expect a man to tell us all about the growth and development of a tree without reference to sunshine and showers, or the soil in which the tree was planted and in which it grew, than we should expect him to understand all about salvation without any reference to sin, or all about God without any reference to Jesus Christ. Things can only be known thoroughly and satisfactorily as they are studied in their proper connections. Take the letters of the most precious word you know, and transpose them, and they cease to convey thought to your thought. Separate the Old Testament from the New, or the first Adam, in his federal relationships, from the second Adam, and you will fail to understand one of the deepest doctrines of the Bible. But unite these as Paul does in his Epistle to the Romans, and you have the key to understand much of the great mystery of godliness. II. Another source of danger to the Church in these days is **SUPERFICIALITY OF CHARACTER**. In the course of our voyage to America, some years ago, the motion of the ship was on some days very disagreeable to the passengers. She pitched and lurched and rolled among the waves so constantly as to render it impossible for us to rest or be at peace in any position. The sea on the surface being comparatively calm, some of us wondered why the vessel was so unsteady, and on making inquiry were informed that it was owing to her light cargo. The ship had no grip of the water, and the water had no grip of her, and hence her unsteady movement. Men of super-

sical character are somewhat like this ship, not very steady. Superficial Christians remind you of those shopkeepers who make the most of their limited stock by putting it all or nearly all in the windows. In all substantial buildings there is much invisible mason work. The foundation of every palatial edifice is not only deep and solid, but it has been laid with a view to sustain the structure that rests upon it. It is also well known that there is a fair proportion between the roots of a tree in the ground and its height and breadth above it. It is even so with respect to human character. Those who grow up to Christ in all things cannot be strangers either to the depths from which the Psalmist cried, "Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord!" or to the secret place of the Most High, when the soul resides under the shadow of the Almighty. III. Another source of danger to the Church in modern times is her apparent acquiescence in pious frauds. "The greatest obstacle," says Archbishop Whately, "to the following of truth is the tendency to look in the first instance to the expedient. Pious frauds," he says, "fall naturally into two classes—positive and negative: the one refers to the introduction and propagation of what is false; the other refers to the toleration of it. A plant may be in a garden from two causes, either from being planted designedly or being found there and left there. In either case some degree of approbation is implied. He who propagates a delusion, and he who connives at it when already existing—both alike tamper with truth." (J. K. Campbell, D.D.)

CHAPTER I.

VERS. 4, 5. They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward.—Travelling Zionward.—To return to one's land of nativity after a long absence is one of the most pleasant experiences of human life. We are all pilgrims and strangers in this land. We have wandered from our Father's home. Let us follow the example of these two tribes, who were now united and returning to their own land. I. Consider the first act of this liberated people. **THEY ASKED THE WAY TO ZION.** This was wise of them, for many try to go there without knowing the way. They did not inquire through mere curiosity, but with a determination to put their knowledge to practical use. There is not a ransomed soul around the throne to-day but who has asked this question. II. The second act of Israel and Judah after they received their answer was to **TURN THEIR FACES THITHERWARD.** Their faces are Zionward now. They had been travelling in a wrong direction, and so long as this was the case it would be impossible for them to reach their destination. Satan is always trying to persuade Christians to take a slide-track, or a side-view, and turn their backs on Zion, but so long as they keep their faces toward the city of God they are invulnerable. III. After turning their faces toward Zion they moved on. How? "**WEEPING AND REJOICING.**" Weeping now and rejoicing then. Here again the life of the Christian is typified. The Christian often weeps as he marches on, but will rejoice when he obtains the crown of life at the close of the day. IV. **THEY DECIDED TO BIND THEMSELVES IN AN EVERLASTING COVENANT UNTO THE LORD,** having one purpose, one object, one desire in life—a perpetual covenant unto the Lord. There is no coercion in this covenant, because they said to each other, "Come, and let us join ourselves unto the Lord." The word "come" is one of the gems that shine in the Word of God. Not do or die, but "come" and live. It is like the flower that blooms in the desert, or the evening that comes after the hot and weary day. V. **SOME REASONS WHY WE SHOULD JOIN OURSELVES UNTO THE LORD IN A PERPETUAL COVENANT.** 1. Because the sinner separated from the Lord misses the end of his creation. 2. Because of the everlasting relationship into which you enter. 3. Time develops strength, and the longer you put off the harder it becomes to break the chains that bind you. 4. The pleasures and benefits of a life with Christ infinitely outweigh the brief pleasures of sin. (M. C. Cameron, B.D.) **Mourners, inquirers, covenanters.**—The previous part of this chapter declares the overthrow of Israel's cruel oppressor. "Babylon is taken, Bel is confounded, Merodach is broken in pieces." The Assyrian and Babylonian power had been the great tyrant of the ages, and the Lord had employed it for the chastening of His people,

until at last Israel and Judah had been carried away captive to the banks of the Euphrates, and the land of their fathers knew them no more. When, therefore, the Lord deals with Babylon in a way of vengeance it is that He may deliver His own people. See how the two things are joined together in the eighteenth and nineteenth verses. When Pharaoh is drowned, Israel is saved; when Sihon and Og are slain, the Lord's mercy to His people is seen to endure for ever. To-day the power of the adversary is broken, and we may flee out of the Babylon of sin. A greater than Cyrus has opened the two-leaved gates, and broken the bars of iron in sunder, and proclaimed liberty to the captives. We may now return to our God and freely enjoy the holy and happy associations which belong to the city of our God. Every one who is really seeking the Lord desires to be sure that he is seeking aright; he is not willing to take anything for granted, since his soul is of too much value to be left at hazard. He inquires, "Are my feelings like those of the truly penitent? Am I believing as those do who are justified by faith? Am I seeking the Lord in a manner which will be pleasing to Him?" They have so long been as lost sheep, going from mountain to hill, that they have forgotten their resting-places, therefore in their confusion they are afraid of going wrong again, and so they inquire with eager anxiety. Perhaps we may show them from this Scripture how others sought and how others found, and this may be a guide and a comfort to them; for albeit there are differences of operation, and all do not come to Christ with equal terrors, or with equal joys, yet there is a likeness in all the pilgrims to the holy city. 1. To begin at the beginning, the Lord's restored ones during the processes of grace were first of all **MOURNERS**. 1. Oh, after all your sins I will not believe that you are truly coming to God if there is not about you a great sorrow for sin and a lamenting after the Lord. Some seekers are made to drink of this bitter cup very deeply; their sense of sin is terrible, even to anguish and agony. I know that there are others who do not taste this bitterness to the same degree; but it is in their cup, for all that. The clear shining in their case so soon follows the rain that they scarcely know that there has been a shower of grief. Surely, in their case the bitterness is passed; yet is it truly there, only the other ingredient of intense delight in God's mercy swallows up all its sharpness. Oh, you cannot imagine the Jews returning from captivity without bewailing the sins which drove them into the place of their exile. How could they be restored to God if they did not lament their former wicked estrangement? While the heart feels no compunction concerning its wanderings, no mourning over its guilt, no grief at having grieved the Lord, there can be no acceptance with God. There must be a shower in the day of mercy: not always a long driving rain causing a flood, but the soft drops must fall in every case. There must be tenderness toward God if we expect reconciliation with God. 2. Observe that this mourning in the case of Israel and Judah was so strong that it mastered other feelings. Between Judah and Israel there was an old feud. Yet now that they return unto the Lord, we read, "The children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together." Oh, happy union in a common search for God! One of the first results of holy sorrow for sin is to cast out of our heart all forms of enmity and strife with our fellow-men. When we are reconciled to God we are reconciled to men. A penitent sense of our own provocations of God will prevent our being provoked with men. As Aaron's rod swallowed up all other rods, so a sincere sorrow for sin will remove all readiness to take offence against our fellow-sinners. 3. Keeping close to the text, we notice again that the exiles on their return were mourning while marching. Observe the words, "going and weeping." A true heart that is coming to God takes the road by Weeping-Cross: it feels its sin, its guilt, its undesert, and it therefore mourns. The closet is sought out and prayer is offered; but in the supplication there is a dove's note, a moaning as of one sorrowing for love. 4. Turning the text round, we read not only of "going and weeping," but also of weeping and going. The holy grief here intended does not lead to sitting still, for it is added "they shall go." That word "weeping" is sandwiched in between two goings—"going and weeping; they shall go and seek the Lord." To sit down and say, "I will sorrow for my sin, but never seek a Saviour," is an impenitent pretence of repentance, a barren sorrow which brings forth no cleansing of the life, and no diligent search after the Lord. The way to repent is with your eye upon the sacrifice, viewing the flowing of the sin-atonement blood, marking every precious drop, gazing into the Redeemer's wounds, and believing in the love which in death opened up its depths unsearchable. All the while we must be saying, "My God,

my God, I groan within myself that such a sacrifice should have been required by my atrocious transgressions against Thee." 5. We must not pass over that last word, "They shall go and seek the Lord their God." This shall be a guide to you as to whether your present state of feeling is leading you aright. What is it you are seeking? "I am seeking," says one, "I am seeking peace." May you soon obtain it, and may it be real peace; but I am not sure of you. "I am seeking," says another, "the pardon of sin." Again, I pray that you may find it; but I am not sure of you. If another shall reply, "I am seeking the Lord; for I desire above all things to have Him for a friend, though to Him I have been an enemy"; then I have good hope of him. Here is a little child, picked up from the gutter, diseased and filthy, unclad, unfed; and if you ask me to make out a catalogue of what the child wants you must give me a sheet of foolscap paper to write it all down, and then I fear I shall leave out many things. I will tell you in one word what that poor infant requires—it wants its mother. If it gets its mother it has all it needs. So to tell what a poor sinner wants might be a long task; but when you say that he wants his Heavenly Father you have said it all. Oh, souls, you are seeking aright if you are seeking your God. Nothing short of this will suffice.

II. Secondly, these mourners became INQUIRERS. "They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward." They knew within a little the quarter in which Zion lay, and they looked that way; but they did not know all about the road: how should they? 1. The saving point about them was that they were not ashamed to confess their ignorance. Minds that the Lord has touched are never boastful of their wisdom. There are many persons in the world who would be converted if they could but consent to be taught by God's Word and Spirit; but they are such wise people, they know too much to enter the school of grace. 2. It is clear from their asking their way that these inquirers were teachable. "They shall ask the way to Zion": they shall therefore be conscious of ignorance, and they shall be willing to be taught; these are good characteristics, such as God accepts. 3. More than this, they will be anxious although they are right. "They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward." They are travelling in the right direction, and yet they ask the way. He that has never raised a question about his condition before God had better raise it at once. The fullest assurance of faith we can ever attain will never excuse us from the duty of self-examination. 4. At the same time, note concerning those that are coming to the Lord and His people, that they are questioning, but they are still resolved. They ask how they can be right with God, not as a matter of curiosity, but because they mean to be at peace with Him: by God's grace nothing shall turn them aside from their God and His temple, and hence their anxiety to be surely right. True penitents will have Christ or die. 5. Though they ask the way, we may remark further that they know whither they are going. They ask their way, not to somewhere or other, but to Zion; not to some imaginary blissful shore that may be or may not be, but they seek God's own dwelling-place, God's own palace, God's own sacrifice. They ask boldly too, for they are not ashamed to be found inquiring; and when they are informed, their faces are already that way, and therefore they have nothing to do but to go straight on. May God grant us myriads of such inquirers! III. These inquirers become COVENANTERS, for they said one to another, "Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten." Oh, that word "covenant"! I can never pronounce it without joy in my heart. It is to me a mine of comfort, a mint of delight, a mass of joy. The doctrine of the "covenant" is a kind of Shibboleth by which we may know the man of God from the false prophet. Let the people of God take no delight in the man who does not delight in the covenant of grace. 1. These inquirers become covenanters, for we read that they seek to be joined unto the Lord. "Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord." Is not this the one thing you long for, that you may be so at peace with God through Jesus Christ that you may be joined with Him? You are a right-hearted seeker, in fact, you have found the Lord already, or else you would not find it in your heart to use such an expression as seeking to be joined unto the Lord. 2. Next, notice for how long a time this covenant is to be made. "Let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant." In our English army of late they have enlisted "short time" men. A good brother came to join the Church last week who is in the Reserve, and I said to him, "You are not coming to unite with us for two sixes, the first six with the colours, and the other six as a reserve man,—you have come, I hope, to fight under the colours as long as life lasts." "Ay, sir," he said,

"I give myself up to the Lord for ever." No salvation is possible except that which saves the soul for ever. A real man of God has his religion interwoven into the warp and woof of his being; he could not be other than he is whatever his circumstances might be. The covenant of life requires a life-long covenant. We do not take grace upon a terminable lease; it is an entailed inheritance, an immortal, eternal possession. 3. Note, further, that this joining to God these covenanters intended to carry out in a most solemn way. "Let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual"—agreement? or promise? No. "Covenant" is the word. It is a profitable thing for the soul to covenant with God. In the ordinance of baptism we have the best visible setting forth of that covenant. Circumcision set forth the taking away of the filth of the flesh; but baptism sets forth the death and burial of the flesh itself; we see in it the emblem of our death and burial with our Lord. The believer thereby says, "Now I am come to an end of my old life, for I am dead and buried," and he becomes henceforth as one who has risen with Christ, to walk in newness of life. 4. Those who came mourning and inquiring, when they became covenanters, felt that they had a nature very apt to forgetfulness of good things, and so a part of what they desired in their covenanting with God was "a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten." God will never forget, yet may you pray, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." The fear is lest you should forget. What is your view of that possibility? Would it not be terrible? (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Marks of genuine repentance*.—I. It is said, "THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL SHALL COME, THEY AND THE CHILDREN OF JUDAH TOGETHER." In other words, these two people, who, though members of the same family, had so long lived in a state of the most deadly hatred and hostility, when touched by a feeling of genuine contrition, shall "come" "together"; shall amalgamate; shall forget their former subjects of contention, and approach in one body the throne of love and compassion. And such is the constant effect of genuine religion. Vice, by increasing our selfishness, by sharpening the natural irritability of the temper, by filling us with a feverish anxiety about the objects of time and sense, "separateth even chief friends." In like manner, a merely speculative and ceremonial religion rarely fails to disunite its followers. But on the contrary, serious, heartfelt, spiritual scriptural religion binds and consolidates. Never, till the temper of real contrition, with all its train of accompanying graces, enthrone itself in the mind; never, till real Christianity take the place of that which is nominal; never, till we love God better than we love ourselves; never, till we choose rather to sacrifice our interest and indulgences, than to disturb the peace of the Church, and rend the seamless garment of our Redeemer. II. It is here said of the people of Israel and Judah, that "THEY SHALL COME WEEPING." As the tenderest parent sees with joy the tear of penitence steal over the cheek of his guilty child; as no pang is deeper than that inflicted by the discovery that a state of separation from himself costs the child of his bosom neither fear nor anguish; thus our Father, which is in heaven, expects in us, the prodigal children of His family, sorrow and anguish of soul, till our reconciliation with Himself is accomplished. But how is it possible to reconcile with language such as this, the conception, so prevalent in the world, that the proper object of life is amusement, and our reasonable and legitimate temper of mind thoughtlessness and a spirit of almost ceaseless dissipation? It is indeed true, that the temper of mind becoming the man who is reconciled to God is peace, and cheerfulness, and joy:—"Rejoice in the Lord; and again I say, rejoice." But peace of mind before reconciliation—peace, when the Lord has a "controversy" with us—peace, this is not the peace sanctioned by Scripture, but a state of repose leading to almost inevitable destruction. The true penitent is there described as "going and weeping." It is not, indeed, my intention to affirm that tears are the necessary, or the only sufficient, expression of grief for sin. Many a sad heart would delight to weep, but cannot. III. These returning penitents are described as "SEEKING THE LORD THEIR GOD." Here is one of the grand distinctions between true and false repentance. That sorrow of the world which "worketh death," ordinarily evaporates in a few unmeaning words or tears. The real penitent, on the contrary, is not merely startled by his danger; he detests his offence. His soul longs for emancipation from its corruptions, and for a full and free entrance into the presence of the Lord. IV. It is said of the returning penitents in the text, "THEY SHALL ASK THE WAY TO ZION." It is something in religion to have discovered that we are out of the way. The next mark of genuine repentance is a lively, persevering anxiety to be put into the

way. But this anxiety will not discover itself in blind and random efforts to search out the path by our unassisted powers; but in humbly and earnestly availing ourselves of every appointed channel by which safe and sure intelligence on this all-important subject may be conveyed to the soul. The penitents in the text "ask their way." Distrusting a heart which has often misled them, they go for instruction to the servants of the Lord, and especially to Him who loves to "go before" his sheep, and lead them to the pastures of their proper happiness. And, observe, the place which they are said to seek is "Zion,"—the "city of their solemnities"; the holy city; the city in which dwelleth the Great King; where His temple arises; where, having laid aside the thunders of His just indignation, He sits between the cherubim, to dispense mercy and love to His guilty creatures. The real penitent never stops till he reaches the city of God. And however bright the sunshine, and clear the fountains, and extensive the prospects, which cheer him on the journey; and however wise and strong and compassionate the Guide who goes with him, and delights to succour, to defend, and to bless him, he neither puts off his armour nor rests from his labour till he sits down in eternal tranquillity in the paradise of God. V. It is said of these penitents in the text, they ask their way to Zion "WITH THEIR FACES THITHERWARD." In other words, they are really bent on discovering the city which they profess to seek. Their eye is upon its towers; and their hearts are honestly impelling them in the right line of direction. Their inquiry has no alliance with the empty curiosity of the man who has no intention of adopting the advice which he solicits, and follows one path when his guide directs him to another. But, hearing a voice behind them, saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it," they implicitly follow the leadings of providence and the suggestions of the Spirit. VI. The individuals in the text are described as saying, "COME, AND LET US JOIN OURSELVES TO THE LORD IN A PERPETUAL COVENANT THAT SHALL NOT BE FORGOTTEN." Such is uniformly the desire of the true penitent. Are we not the sworn enemies of sin, the world, and the devil? And how have we fulfilled our engagements to God? Will any single man venture to lay his hand on his heart and say, I have fulfilled them as I ought? And, if not, what is our duty to-day? Is it not to say, as in the text, "Come, and let us join ourselves," &c.? (*J. W. Cunningham, M.A.*) *Young Christians congratulated, encouraged, and exhorted to trust in God:—I. JEHOVAH, AS A RECONCILED GOD IN CHRIST JESUS, IS THE OBJECT OF THEIR INQUIRY.* God and the light of His reconciled countenance, in opposition to the delights of sense, the gains of merchandise, the discoveries of science, and the felicities of friendship. It is the Divine favour they seek supremely, though not exclusively; for no one enjoys, with a keener relish, the productions of nature and the bounties of providence, than a true believer. II. *IT IS USUAL WITH INQUIRERS TO ASSOCIATE WITH THOSE WHO ARE LIKE-MINDED WITH THEMSELVES.* III. *THIS INQUIRY AFTER GOD AND HAPPINESS IS FREQUENTLY ACCOMPANIED WITH TEARS.* "They shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping." They weep over the times of their former ignorance. "To how little purpose have we hitherto lived," will they say; "our lives have been little better than a complete blank. And now that we have at length awaked to some sense of our danger, and desire for spiritual blessings, how little do we know of God and of ourselves, of sin and the method of salvation!" They weep over their numerous and aggravated transgressions. And they will weep frequently at such a time because of strong temptations, from the great enemy of souls. What a mercy is it when we are disposed to weep for sin! Many weep for pain of body, or because of the disappointments they have met with in business, but never grieve on account of their offences before God. They lament the difficulties of the times, but heave not a sigh over the hardness of their hearts. IV. *MOUNT ZION IS THE PLACE TO WHICH THEY WILL REPAIR FOR INSTRUCTION AND COMFORT.* V. *DEVOUT AND SINCERE INQUIRERS WILL GLADLY AVAIL THEMSELVES OF THE DIRECTION AND COUNSEL OF CHRISTIAN MINISTERS, AND OF OTHER PILGRIMS, WHO HAVE MADE SOME ADVANCES IN THE WAY TO THE CELESTIAL CITY.* VI. *YOUNG CONVERTS, HAVING FOUND GOD, TO THEIR UNSPEAKABLE SATISFACTION, WILL DO WELL TO JOIN THEMSELVES TO THE LORD, IN A PERPETUAL COVENANT, THAT SHALL NOT BE FORGOTTEN.* They must do this, by pleading and laying hold for themselves on the blessings of the covenant of grace;—by publicly professing faith in the Redeemer's name; for having first given themselves to the Lord, they should give themselves up to the Church, according to the will of God. (*Essex Remembrancer.*) *God the proper object of human pursuit:—I. God should be our SUPREME object*

of pursuit. God's will is in everything; we should find it out, and act accordingly. II. The supreme pursuit of God requires **EARNEST ENDEAVOUR**. What of that? We should see to it that in everything we do and attend to, thought should apprehend, feeling embrace, will regard, and aim terminate in, God. III. This seeking of God should be **CONTINUOUS**. For what reason? The mind is susceptible of indefinite enlargement in acquaintance with God. Religion admits of eternal progress. IV. The constant, earnest, seeking of God is, in this world, ever more **DIFFICULT**, and sometimes **GRIEVOUS**. Why? Because of past neglect and failure; and because of existing contrary influences, agencies, attractions, and allurements. V. The **SINCERE, INTELLIGENT** pursuit of God will issue in a **SATISFYING** conviction of the **RIGHTNESS AND BLESSEDNESS** of subordinating everything to entire, unswerving, ever advancing allegiance to God in creation, providence, and redemption. VI. True seekers of God, **HELP AND URGE** one another to **ABIDE** with God in truth, and love, and deed. (*W. J. Stuart.*) *The Israelites returning from Babylon*. :—I. **THE STATE OF THE JEWS IN BABYLON**. 1. The captive Israelites were obviously in a degraded state. And what is the state of man, but a state of degradation? He boasts of the dignity of his nature, but an angel might weep over its baseness. He has brought himself almost to a level with the brutes that perish. 2. The condition of the Jews in their captivity was as wretched as it was degrading. We too are a suffering people. Once indeed the world was a paradise, but sin has entered it, withered its beauty, and robbed it of its happiness. 3. Our state, like that of the captive Jews, is also a guilty state. It was sin which caused them to be delivered into the hands of their enemies; and it is sin which has made us base and wretched. Our first father transgressed and died; but the vengeance which followed his transgression, deterred not his children from treading in his steps. To say nothing of the follies of our childhood and the sins of our youth, how many iniquities have we willingly and daringly committed since we attained the age of manhood! 4. The enslaved Jews were in a helpless state, or in one that appeared helpless. And what power have we to rescue ourselves from that state of guilt and wretchedness into which we are fallen? The law we have violated, denounces misery on our heads, a misery as great and lasting as our guilt; and who can resist its authority or repeal its curse? II. **THE DELIVERANCE OF THE ISRAELITES**. 1. It was effected for them by the power of another. Cyrus was a type of Christ, the great spiritual Deliverer; and if we are ever brought out of our spiritual bondage, we must be content to owe our liberty to Him alone. He beheld them in thralldom to sin and Satan, and trembling under the power and fear of death; He came and overthrew their enemies, and burst their bonds. He made an end of sin; He destroyed death; He bruised Satan underneath their feet. Their degradation too was not overlooked by Him. They were in exile, and they were wretched there; but He raised them up from their low estate, and recovered for them the blessedness they had lost. He is now employed in restoring them to their forfeited inheritance. 2. The deliverance of the Israelites was also openly proclaimed and freely offered. To this proclamation St. Paul alludes in Romans x., and speaks of it as a representation of the preaching of the Gospel to the enslaved nations of the earth. III. **THE FEELINGS WITH WHICH THIS JOURNEY WAS COMMENCED**. 1. As we behold the Israelites leaving in a body the land of the Chaldeans, the first circumstance which arrests our attention is their penitence. But why do they weep? The mercy they have received has softened their hearts. It has shown them the tenderness of their heavenly Father. This godly sorrow is, in every instance, one of the first fruits of genuine religion. By nature our hearts are hard, so hard that the most awful judgments can make no abiding impression on them; but when we are roused out of our spiritual unconcern by the Spirit of God, and begin to look with the eye of faith on the great Saviour of sinners, a train of new and deep emotions is excited within us. 2. Notice also in these liberated Jews, their anxiety lest they should mistake the way that is to lead them to Jerusalem. "They shall ask the way to Zion." And is not this anxiety, this spirit of inquiry, found in all who have fixed their heart on heaven? There was a time when they were destitute of all care on this subject. They thought themselves sufficiently acquainted with the way to God. They deemed it broad and plain, and looked on him as an enthusiast who bid them ask what they must do to be saved. But now all this self-confidence and imaginary security are come to an end. They know too that mistakes in this matter

are not trifling errors; that there is but one way in which they can obtain the salvation they need, and that to seek it in any other way is to be for ever undone. 3. We may notice also the decision of these returning captives, the earnestness and resolution with which they seek the Lord. And no man ever arrived at the heavenly Zion without possessing such a mind as this. (*C. Bradley, M.A.*) *God's deliverance of us from spiritual bondage*:—I. GOD, BEFORE HE SEES FIT TO LOOSE THE SPIRITUAL BONDS OF THOSE WHOM HE INTENDS TO DELIVER, IS FIRST PLEASED TO BRING THEM TO FEEL THEIR CHAINS, AND TO MOURN OVER THEIR DISTANCE FROM ZION. II. UNDER THIS PAINFUL CONCERN OF MIND, THEY SHALL ANXIOUSLY INQUIRE AFTER THE MEANS OF RECOVERY. "They shall go and seek the Lord their God." The poor captives are here represented—weeping. Though depressed with their perfect thralldom, though weeping, they go; they sit not down in despondency. They set their faces towards Zion; and let them but find the Lord their God, let them but perceive His gracious intentions towards them, and they can wait His time and way of a full and final deliverance, and commit everything else to Him. III. ANIMATED BY THIS HOPE, THEY SHALL VIGOROUSLY PRESS TOWARDS ZION; "they shall ask the way with their faces thitherward." In the ordinary affairs of life, when men have a particular object in view in which they are deeply interested, and that hope or object is merely probable, they exert every nerve; they toil by day and wake by night; they encounter dangers with resolution, and suffer hardships without complaint. And is it possible to believe that temporal considerations, which can fall under no certain calculation as to the certainty of acquiring them, should engage our affections, and employ all our active powers; and that considerations of infinitely greater moment confessedly, and certain as to their attainment and duration, should have less influence, or no influence at all, upon us? It is impossible; the idea is absurd. What mighty effects, then, it may be asked, will the Christian's hope produce? They are, no doubt, various in degrees, and correspond to that hope as it is more or less vigorous; but they are the same in kind; and they may in general fall under one view,—a change of the objects of his affections and pursuits. The bonds in which he was held formerly by his passions and sensual appetites, restrain him no longer; he is no longer under their tyranny and blind impulse. He feels himself overawed by a superior authority; and he perceives objects presented to him which he had formerly viewed with indifference, or had been wholly unnoticed by him, which by a new energy seize his soul,—captivate his affections, and fix his choice. Again, animated by this hope of salvation, the soul rises superior to the world; and feels a Divine elevation that cannot stoop to it, when courted by its most flattering forms, as its ultimate object. This hope of salvation inspires the soul with a Divine zeal, a holy impatience after further attainments. The higher this hope rises, the more it enlarges the heart. IV. IN ORDER TO CONFIRM AND STRENGTHEN THEIR RESOLUTIONS, THEY WILL BIND THEMSELVES BY A SOLEMN DEED AND COVENANT. "Come, let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant, that shall not be forgotten." A personal covenant with God is inseparable from genuine closet-devotion. Every prayer, every pious purpose, every devout meditation, is virtually a covenant with the Lord. And there may be certain occasions wherein devout souls may see cause to be more explicit to express at large their sense of Divine things, their present feelings, their past experiences, and to commit to writing their solemn purposes and engagements, and, to impress the whole the stronger upon their minds,—to append their names. But this I only mention, the words leading me to speak, not of a personal or closet transaction, but of a public bond of union, the common act of a religious society. Single resolutions slip easily out of the mind, and lose their hold of us; but in a public transaction, where the great God is supposed to stand on the one part, and His poor dependent creatures on the other, there is something so awful and solemn, as must leave upon a mind, not wholly hardened and insensible, some suitable impressions; especially where the transaction is accompanied and confirmed by sensible and expressive symbols. (*Thomas Gordon.*) *A test for true seekers*:—By nature all are captives under the power of Satan, sin, and death. Now, just as Israel found comfort and hope, and had an expectation of getting back to the promised land, when the might of Babylon was broken, so there is comfort for every sinner who desires to escape from the power of sin and Satan, in this great fact, that Christ has broken the power of the old dragon. He has snapped in sunder the iron yoke, that His redeemed might go free. Thus

Babylon's destruction is Israel's salvation. Notice, next, those words in ver. 4: "In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together,"—from which I gather that, when men's hearts are set upon seeking the Lord, it is wonderful how neighbourly they become. Attend to this hint, then, you who are seeking the Saviour. You are encouraged by the fact that the power of Satan is broken, take care that you make up all quarrels, and put an end to all envyings and disputes, for thus you will be helped in seeking the Lord. Notice, next, that the right way for a sinner to return is, first to seek the Lord, and then to seek Zion,—that is, the Church, or heaven, whichever you understand Zion to be. "They shall go, and seek the Lord their God"; and then follows our text, "They shall ask the way to Zion." Another remark arising out of the context is this, that many who seek the Lord seek Him weeping: "The children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping." Notice that combination, "going and weeping." Some are weeping, but never going; and some are going, but never weeping; it is a blessed thing when we have the two together,—practically drawing near to God, and passively feeling deep sorrow for sin. There are two kinds of tears, and I think that they who truly seek the Lord shed both of them; the one is a tear of sorrow because of sin, the other is a tear of joy because of pardon.

I. There are SOME PERSONS WHO NEITHER ASK THE WAY TO ZION NOR SET THEIR FACES THITHERWARD. Their relationship to Christ is that of utter indifference. They regard eternal things as though they were mere trifles, and they look upon temporal things as though these were all-important. They call this "minding the main chance," and "looking after the principal thing"; but as to their souls and God, and heaven, and eternity, they are utterly indifferent. Let us think of what it is to which they are indifferent. They are utterly indifferent to God. You know how many there are who live as if there were no God at all. This is a terrible thing, because God will require all this at their hands. It is no slight thing to be utterly indifferent to Christ, to Him who loved mankind so much that He could not abide in heaven, and let them perish, but must needs come here and be a lowly, suffering, despised, crucified man, that He might redeem men. Yet, after all that He has done, which must have astonished the angels in heaven, and which ravishes the heart of every gracious man on earth, these people do not care. They are utterly indifferent also with regard to themselves. They expect to have troubles in this life; but as to that which comforts many of us under these troubles, they do not wish to know about it. They see many of God's people calm and quiet under pain and bereavement and sorrow, and they are sometimes curious to know what the secret is; yet their curiosity is not strong enough to stir them out of indifference. Often, when a man is indifferent about Divine things, it is because he vainly imagines that he is wise. I do not think that you and I ought to meddle with everything; there are some things we may as well let drift, but this will never do about God and eternity. I may be indifferent to God, but He is not indifferent to me. I may forget Him, but He has not forgotten what I do, and think, and say. Another thought that ought to come home to many is that this indifference is so foolish. When a man is indifferent to his own happiness, then he is a fool. If a man were miserably poor, although he might be rich, but he was indifferent about it, you would think him insane. Now, there is no joy like the joy of salvation in Christ; there is no bliss under heaven that can parallel the bliss of the man who has committed himself into Christ's hands, and is resting calmly in Him; yet these indifferent people do not care about it.

II. There is another set of people who ASK THE WAY TO ZION, WITH THEIR FACES TURNED AWAY FROM IT. It is a very strange thing that any should say, "Tell us the way to heaven," and yet, when we have told them, that they should set off walking the other way. "Go due east," you say; but they go due west directly. Now what can be the reason for that? A man is secretly a drunkard, or he is unchaste, or a woman is living in secret sin, yet always found listening to the Gospel. Why is this? Do you wish to increase your own condemnation? Do you? I cannot think that it is so. I hope that you do not come in order that you may hear of things to quarrel with and quibble over. I remember one, who was afterwards an eminent saint, who first went to hear Mr. Whitefield, because he was a great mimic, that he might take him off, and he afterwards went to the club which they called the "Hell Fire Club" to spend the evening. "Now, my mates," said he, "I am going to give you a sermon that I heard Mr. Whitefield preach yesterday"; and the man repeated

the sermon, but he himself was converted while he preached it, and so were several of his mates, who had met for blasphemy. So, come, even if you do come for such an evil purpose as that. Still, it is a sorrowful business that there should be men who ask the way to Zion, and turn their faces in the opposite direction. III. There is a third class of people who ASK THE WAY TO ZION, BUT TURN NOT THEIR FACES. What is the meaning of their conduct? Is it an idle curiosity? Do they want to understand theology as others wish to understand astronomy or botany? That is almost like drinking wine out of the sacred vessels, as Belshazzar did; and you know how that night he was slain. Why do such people ask about salvation? Do they dream that mere knowledge will save them? You may get a clear head, but if you have not a clean heart, it will not avail you at the last. Peradventure, however, some of those who are seeking their way to Zion, but have not set their faces that way, are asking with a view to quiet their consciences. It makes them feel better to hear a sermon. Oh, you are strange people! There is a man who is very hungry; does it make him feel that his appetite is appeased when he smells the dinner, when he sees the plates arranged upon the table, and hears the clatter of the knives? Is it that you are trying to store up some little knowledge to use by and by? Are you asking the way to Zion that you may run in it when it becomes convenient to you? Ah, sir! are you making a convenience of God? Do you intend to make Him stand by while you attend to more important things? IV. There is a fourth set of people who HAVE THEIR FACES THITHERWARD, BUT THEY DO NOT ASK THE WAY. Do they fancy that there are many ways? How many roads are there to heaven? This Book declares that there is only one. Do you ask, "Where are we to enquire?" Well, first of all, inquire of the Book. When you have inquired of the Book, then go on your knees, and inquire of the blessed Spirit who inspired the Book. If you cannot understand the Bible, ask the Author of it to explain it to you. He giveth wisdom, therefore ask the Holy Spirit for guidance. Ask the Lord Jesus Christ to manifest Himself unto you as He does not unto the world, and to lead you in His way. I may also say, but quite secondarily, inquire of His servants. And I may also add that you will do well to ask about the way from many of God's people. Although they do not preach, they will be glad to tell you what they do know, and many godly men and women can explain to you just what you want to know. V. Those are the best inquirers who TURN THEIR FACES TOWARD ZION, AND YET ARE WILLING TO ASK THE WAY. Is that your condition, dear friend? Well, then, let me say two or three things for your encouragement, and the first is, Thank God that your face is thitherward, and that you are asking the way. Set a high value on this little grace, for it is no small thing, after all; and, as you think of it, bless God for it. Remember, next, that you must act as far as you know how to act. If the Lord has shown you the right pathway, go in that pathway. Perhaps you say, "There are many difficulties there." Never mind the difficulties; cross each bridge as you come to it. "Oh, but there are some things that I do not understand!" No doubt there are; and there are many things that I do not understand; and there are some things that I do not particularly want to comprehend. If I understand what really concerns my eternal welfare, and the good of my fellow-men, and the glory of God, it is enough for me. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The way to Zion*:—Like these Israelites—we have been going "from mountain to hill," that is, from one form of idol-worship to another, till we have forgotten our resting-place. There is but one resting-place for the creature, and that is the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ, apprehended by the soul, fled to, clung to, trusted to. But we thought we could find another rest, some enjoyment, some indulgence, some pursuit, some ambition, some affection, some passion, something which would be all our own, something that would fill the empty chamber, mind, heart, soul, and make us independent of all and everyone except itself. From mountain to hill we ran or we wandered; the last new idol reigned for its hour; then another showed itself in the horizon, and we thought that surely will be the real rest, the true home of this footsore, this wind-lashed and storm-tossed being. "They have gone from mountain to hill, they have forgotten their resting-place." Well, then, inquiry must be the dawn of hope. We must "ask the way." I. THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL IN THE SPIRIT OF INQUIRY. The very face of the inquirer shines. That kindling of the eye as a man listens—the man who has a thirst for knowledge—the man whose soul is set on finding its way into some new region of science, or into some new joy, is a touching sight to the looker-on, and it is an inspiring influence to the teacher who feels that he has a message.

It is very delightful, indeed, to feel that inquiry is abroad. But of all inquiries the way to Zion is first and foremost. It lies at the root, I believe, of all this questioning. Whatever form inquiry takes this is its meaning. Even intellectual inquiry is often either the escape from, or is a substitute for, this. Some men say, and some men encourage the saying, "Religion is all doubtful, let me enjoy myself in the study of the certain; revelation may be insoluble, let me interrogate nature, whose very mysteries are substantial. "The way to Zion," such men say, "has no signposts and no landmarks; I cannot guess in such matters, of doubt I am impatient; God in nature shall be my God; if there be a hereafter we will study it when we can know." And then others have no idea of any method of knowing save what they call intellectual. It is not that they profess indifference to revelation; on the contrary, they would rather call themselves inquirers into its documents and into its pretensions; they treat it just as they treat a science or a philosophy—dissect, discuss, dispute over it, and lecture upon it with all the freedom and with far more than all the positiveness which they would think becoming if the matter in hand were either geology or botany, either the telescope or the microscope. If anyone were to say, "Are you aware that religion is the knowledge of a person, and that you may just as well expect to become acquainted with your friend by arithmetic or algebra, as hope to learn the way to Zion by processes of pure intellect," they would turn round and accuse you of wanting to throw in an element of romance or feeling, and so to disturb every calculation and invalidate every result. And yet, can any word be truer than this, that they who would inquire into the truth of revelation must inquire with the whole man? Intellect is one part of the man—by all means bring intellect with you—but there are other parts as distinctive, as characteristic, and far more vital. If God has spoken, be quite sure He has spoken to all parts of us, and to the sum of all—the willing, acting, feeling, judging, reflecting, resolving, loving, and living man. Many answers might be given, all true, and all hopeful, to this question as to the way to Zion. We will suggest one. The latest chapters of the Bible tell us one or two things like this—that the glory of God enlightens that world, that "the Lamb" (our Lord Jesus Christ) is the "Light thereof"; again, that the "Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it"; and, once again, that the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, that "His servants shall serve Him," that they "shall see His face," that they shall, as it were, have His name in their foreheads. The desire of every soul surely must be to endeavour to anticipate that kind of life, to live now in the life of God, to see Him now by faith, to follow Him now whithersoever, by His prophets, by His Word, by His Spirit, by the example of Christ, He leads. This surely must be something of the way to Zion. II. THE SPIRIT OF INQUIRY MUST BE ALSO A SPIRIT OF RESOLUTION AND DETERMINATION. For there is an inquiry about the way which is all speculation. We can fancy some of those captives in Babylon busying themselves with conjecture as to the shortest and best way home. They sit there with a map on their knees, and discuss the Lebanon route, and the desert route, with great eagerness, with much ingenuity, with many arguments both ways, yet without an idea but that they themselves will have to end their days as they began them, in exile. There is an asking of the way to God's Zion which is of this character. This is the case of all who can discourse about the scheme of salvation, argue for it, quarrel for it, condemn and execute for it, yet forbear altogether the "weeping," which this passage tells us of, for their own sins; the "going," which this passage tells us of, in the path of duty; the "seeking," which this passage tells us of, as always preliminary to the finding. Their faces are not thitherward, whatever be the talk or the profession. Let each inquiry be a determination. If we hear in a sermon, if we read in the Bible, that "without holiness no man can see the Lord," then let us instantly say to ourselves, "What is that sin which is hindering holiness in me at this moment?" and let the day not end without a struggle against it, without some special indulgence foregone in the might of prayer, some trial made of God's promise, that whosoever we call upon Him an enemy shall be put to flight. If we hear that watching and praying can alone guard us against temptation, then let us instantly wake up the drowsy powers of earnestness and devotion, keep our loins girt, and our lamp burning, lest, perhaps, after much serving, we be found without the one thing needful; lest Satan, watching his moment, get an advantage; lest Christ, coming suddenly, find us sleeping. (Dean Vaughan.) *Seeking after finding*:—The singularity of the passage lies in the face of the inquirer being towards Zion, whilst he is yet forced to ask what

road he ought to take. "They shall ask," &c. They are in the right road, or at least are advancing in the right direction; but, nevertheless, whether through ignorance, or through fear of even the possibility of mistake, they continually make inquiries as to the path to be followed. We think that this circumstance indicates such honesty of purpose in the inquirer, such vigilance, such circumspection, such anxiety to be right, and such dread of being wrong, as should distinguish every Christian, though too often we look for them in vain. And, at the same time, we evidently learn that persons are not always fair judges of their spiritual condition; they may be asking the way like those who are in ignorance and darkness, and all the while their faces may be towards Zion. Let us consider first the case of those who, though going right, suppose themselves going wrong; and secondly, that of those who believe themselves right, but yet desire further assurance; for of both classes it may equally be said, "They ask the way," &c. Now it is the object of such parables as that of the tares and the wheat, or that of the net which gathered of all kinds, to teach us that there is to be a mixture in the visible Church, and that it is not men's business to attempt a separation. We are all too much disposed to exercise a spirit of judgment, to pronounce opinions on the condition of our fellow-men, whether the living or the dead, just as though we had access to God's Book, and could infallibly read its registered decisions. But there is everything in the Bible to warn us against this spirit of judgment, and to urge us, on the contrary, to a spirit of charity. A very comforting remembrance it is, that we are not to stand or fall by human decision, that our portion for eternity is not to be settled by what men think of us here. But not only are men likely to deliver a false judgment upon others, and therefore bound to confine their chief scrutiny to themselves, it is further very possible that they may form a wrong opinion of their own spiritual state, not only, as you all know, in concluding themselves safe whilst in danger, but, as is perhaps less suspected, in concluding themselves in danger whilst safe. They are downcast because faith seems weak, or elated because it seems strong; whereas it is not faith which is to save them, but Christ; and whilst faith, whether in itself or its evidences, may change from day to day, Christ changes not, but is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." And we always think it safe to tell those who are spiritually depressed, that their very depression is no mean argument of their safety; for so unnatural is it to man to feel anxious for his soul, that, wheresoever there is the anxiety, we recognise a higher agency, even a Divine, as having wrought to excite the solicitude. And over and above these cases of depression, in which one cause or another weaves darkness round a man, so that, whilst his face is towards Zion, he cannot perceive that he is on the road to the heavenly city, we nothing doubt that there are many instances of parties who have begun in true religion, and nevertheless think that the first step has not been taken. It is not always, nay, it is not, we believe, often, that conversion is suddenly effected, nor through some special instrumentality which fixes, as it were, the date of the change. In the majority of cases, the change, we are inclined to believe, is gradual, imperceptibly effected, so that, although the man becomes at length conscious of a great moral alteration, he cannot tell you when it commenced, nor by what steps it went on. Regarding conversion as a gradual work, a work in which "one soweth and another reapeth," we do not look on those who are evidently confirmed believers, as the only travellers towards the celestial city: we rejoice in thinking that there are numbers in whom the moral change is not yet distinctly marked, but who are nevertheless in the act of passing the strait gate. But let us pass on to the case of men, in regard of whom there can be no doubt that they have made a beginning, and let us see what our text may indicate as to these more advanced characters. Let it first be observed, that a Christian should never be too confident; that he should never take for granted, as a point on which there could not be doubt, that he is indeed "a new creature," and on the high road to the kingdom. Do you find an increasing delight in secret prayer? does sin seem to you more and more odious? are you more and more penetrated by the exceeding great love of God in giving His Son to die for your sakes? is holiness becoming your happiness, duty your privilege, and heaven the very home of your affections? These, and the like questions are those which you should be frequently proposing to yourselves. On the answer to these, an answer given as in the sight of a heart-searching God, should rest your answer to the most momentous of all questions, "Are we on the way to Zion?" And if the answer to this last question can only be come at through the answer to a series of inquiries, each of which may be said to need,

from its very nature, the being daily proposed, it necessarily follows that you ought to be imitating the children of Judah and Israel, asking as to the road to Zion, however you may hope that your faces are already thitherward. Can this be the way to Zion in which I am? Ask the dead, who have reached that heavenly city: with one voice they will tell you, that, if it be the right way, it is a way of self-denial, leading you through mortified lusts, and over subjugated affections; and then judge ye whether or not it be such a way in which you are found. Ask the living, of whom you have best cause to believe that they are heirs of the kingdom: they will assure you that the way is one of faith and obedience, every step of which is an advance in the knowledge of your own depraved hearts, and in the sense of the worth and sufficiency of Christ; and then judge ye whether or not this can be the way in which you are walking. Ask the Bible, on whose pages the Holy Spirit hath mapped out the path, and it will tell you that the way is a narrow way, which will not admit of your encumbering yourselves with perishable things, but which can be traversed only by those who lay aside every weight; and then judge ye whether ye have obtained the description of a path which ye yourselves are pursuing. And ask ye, yet further, of God. By diligent and fervent prayer make inquiry of God as to the road which conducts to the place where He dwells. And the answer to this inquiry, an answer, which, if there be sincerity in the inquirer, shall certainly not be withheld, will expose to you the deceitfulness of all hope of reaching Zion which is not founded on the appropriation of the merits of the Redeemer, the reality of that appropriation being proved by the produced fruits of righteousness; and then determine whether such answer ought to leave you assured that you are not self-deceived, when concluding yourselves in the heavenward path. We do not wish you to be always uncertain as to whether or not your faces are turned towards Zion; but we wish you to understand that their being so turned is a reason in favour of, not a reason against, your frequently inquiring the heavenly path. It is not sufficient that they be turned; the great matter is, that they be kept turned; and whilst such is your nature, that, without constant vigilance, the direction may be gradually changed, and yet appear to you the same—even as the eyes of a well-drawn portrait follow you as you move, and so might persuade you that you had not moved at all—it is evidently bound on you, by your regard for your safety, that you be always ascertaining the landmarks, in place of judging by your apparent position. Is my life the life of a believer in Christ? is faith producing piety, humility, charity, patience? What is this mountain before me? is it on the map? what is this valley which I have to cross, this stream which I have to ford? are they what I was to meet with, or do they show that I have wandered? And here the road divides—which turn am I to take? what is to decide me in this perplexity? Let me be firm on one point—that it is the direction of the road, not its quality, by which I will be determined. The road which leads to heaven, that is my road, be it, or be it not, strewed with the rocks, and swept by the torrents. Other paths may look more inviting: but I have nothing to do except with their termination: if they conduct not to Zion, I would not venture to follow them even a solitary step, though they might lead me to riches, or honours, or pleasures. This it is to imitate the emancipated Jews. But there is yet more to be gathered from this description, when considered as that of a believer in Christ. We will now suppose him certified as to the direction in which he is proceeding, certified that his face is towards Zion, and nevertheless busying himself with inquiries as to the way. And what would this mark? Christianity is that in which no man can be too advanced to study the alphabet. The simple and fundamental doctrines of our holy religion,—the doctrines of human corruption, of the renewing power of God's Spirit, of the incarnation of the Eternal Word, and of the atonement effected by a Mediator,—these, which may be said to show the way to Zion, present continually new material for the contemplation and instruction of the Christian. There is a sense in which there is no getting beyond the very alphabet of Christianity; that alphabet will always be beyond us; any one of its letters being as a mighty hieroglyphic which the prayerful student may partially decipher, but the most accomplished scholar never thoroughly expound. By this, then, amongst other tests, let those who think themselves advanced in Christianity try their spiritual condition. What ear have they for simple truths simply delivered? In their private studies, what pleasure have they in meditating the first principles of the Gospel? do they find those first principles inexhausted, inexhaustible? or is it always to deeper doctrines that they turn, as though it were only when quite out of their depth,

that they gain a resting-place for the soul? But there is yet one more particular on which we wish to insist. We would direct your attention to what we may call the honesty of purpose displayed by the Jews, and hold it up for imitation to all who profess to be seeking the kingdom of God. The Jew had his face turned towards Zion, whilst he was inquiring the road: if he did not know the precise path, he knew the direction in which the city lay; and he was looking in the direction, when he asked what way he should take. We have a right to require and expect a similar conduct from all those who ask of us the way to heaven. There is such a thing as asking the way to Zion with the face towards Babylon; and if there be this dissimulation—for no milder word will express the precise truth—in vain will the preacher point out the road, and urge the traveller to decision and dispatch. We would have you distinctly understand that there is a certain part which the unconverted man has to perform if he hope for conversion; and that whilst this is undone, he has no right to look for the visitations of grace. It may not be in his power to find for himself the pathway of life; still less to take a step on that pathway when found. But he may ascertain the direction in which Zion lies, and he may be looking in that direction, if not advancing. It is quite idle to say that he knows not the direction: he knows it to be the exact opposite to that in which he naturally looks; to turn his eyes from the world is, as he must be thoroughly aware, to turn them towards Zion. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*)

Question and attitude:—Inquiry and attitude should correspond. You should look as if you meant your questions. Do not let us have any discrepancy in the man himself; no asking of questions about one way whilst we are looking over the shoulder towards another. Do not mock kind heaven. "Thitherward": literally, hitherward. Jeremiah is writing in Judah, and he says the time will come when the returning ones will face this way; and they will be asking from step to step, Which is the road to Zion? Sometimes we look our prayers; sometimes we are on the right road and do not know it. Questions about a certain kind of knowledge seem to be born in every soul; love for certain kinds of intelligence is inborn. Here is a little creature three years old who cannot be kept away from the piano. He will be there when you are not looking; he will rise early in the morning and grope his way towards the musical instrument. Why this, thou little Mozart? I cannot help it. Would it not be more in your way, poor little child, to have hoop, or humming-top, or bagfuls of marbles? He does not answer in words, but he goes back to the piano as if he had left it in some other world and was delighted to find it again; it talks to him, and he talks to it, and if you will allow the little soul to tarry there he wants no other heaven just now. Others are fond of language or science or history; there is a predestination that settles us if we will listen to it. The Lord has not turned any one of us into a pathless world. He says to every traveller, I want you to go down this road; do not turn to the right or the left; you must be trained in the way you should go, the predestined, foreordained road; you will find walking smooth down there, but if you get upon any other path your feet will be pricked with sharp thorns. When the soul is really alive with interrogation it will know how to put its own questions, and it will give the Church no rest until those questions have been answered substantially. If the Church cannot answer the great questions of the soul, then it is no Church, though its spire be high as heaven. Nor must we think that only the nominally great can answer the soul's questions. Sometimes a little child might guide a king. What are the great questions that men should ask? Men must answer that inquiry themselves. Why be so anxious about details and trivialities and frivolities? Why hold the letter in your hand and ask a score of questions about the sealing of it? You are not going to be saved by the seal; break it, open the letter, read it. If you are really in earnest, if your souls be aflame with Divine sincerity, you will know what questions are important and what are trivial. There shall come a time when the only questions worth asking will be religious questions. Where is Zion? Where is God? What is truth? Where is peace? What do all your inquiries amount to when set side by side with the possibility (let us use no firmer term at this moment) of knowing and realising the spiritual and the Divine? Now suppose you know all about the strata, how they were built, and how they were piled, and how they were coloured, and can trace every line, and discourse with eloquence upon every lamination,—now how do you feel after all that? Are you at peace? are you at rest? I see your fingers going out after other worlds to clutch them because you have exhausted the little volume of the earth. But the universe is just

as little to God as the earth is to you and the universe. There is nothing great beside God—that is, in comparison with Him, in relation to Him. We must prove the reality of our sincerity by the set and stress of our lives. Observe, these people do not only ask a question, they discover a disposition, they represent an attitude. "They shall ask their way to Zion with their faces thitherward." They lose no time in asking questions; they ask them as they go. Is this the road? we know it is: and the answer is, Yes, go on; fair Zion, beautiful as heaven's morning, stands yonder, with doors thrown back to give you welcome and hospitality. It is well thus to be doing two things at once, to be gathering information and to be realising it, to be asking questions and to be losing no time in progress. Here we have no mere speculation, no mere intellectual entertainment; here we have nothing but dead earnestness, the tongue asking the question which the face represents in action. How is it with us? We can show where we would be if we could. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Zionwards*.—Why ask the way to Zion when going thither? A certain inconsistency strikes us between the right movement of the foot and the confessed uncertainty of the mind. But second thoughts show us how real is the harmony between the Zionward question and the Zionward move. 1. Is it not an experimental fact that men are often moving Zionward, whilst mentally they do not know the way? The mind of an awakening man reveals a strange comingling of truth and error, of knowledge and ignorance. There are many things he does not know—as to the nature and the law of God, as to the exact manner of life He would have us lead, as to the spirit and the employ of that new kingdom which Christ Jesus has set up—he has ever need to "ask the way." On the other hand, there are some things he does know. He at least knows in what directions the road to Zion does not lie. In Bunyan's great allegory Christian's first idea of heavenwardness was to turn from the City of Destruction. He did not know where the Celestial City was; but he knew it could not lie anywhere near that seat of Satan. The kingdom of God must be opposite to the realm of the devil. So his first step was a step away from that repulsive spot. When soon after his feet sank in the Slough of Despond you remember he struggled to get out on the side farthest from his own home. The true inquirer reasons in the same way. Zion must be elsewhere than in the world—its "way" must somehow lead away from it. Now, this is, of course, only negative knowledge; but it is positive advantage. It is only half-knowledge; but it means half-salvation. The first real stride towards heaven is the soul's break with the world. The man who has got so far is really on the path to Zion. What is this type of man? Where do we find this class? They are men whose way of life is out of the common run. You do not find them in the circles of frivolity or where the crowd is densest. They are men who have cast off from them that spell named Fashion, who have sought out for themselves the true standards of righteousness, who are daily preferring principle to gain and an easy conscience to a famous reputation. You will find these men in the house of God as often as is possible. They are good listeners—devout, intelligent, teachable, ever willing to know the truth that they may do it. These are the people whose faces are Zionward, though they themselves are not yet there; nor do they even know with certainty its "way." And these are the men who also "ask." How do they so? Is not their very posture an inquiry? Is not their separation from the City of Destruction—their exodus from Satan's Egypt—is not that a token that they desire a better portion? The life shows the heart. The posture indicates the will. The step denotes the aim. And it is often this which in the long-run decides the question of salvation. It is the lie of the heart, more than the achievement of the life, which approves a man to God. It is the direction of his face and not the extent of his progress which fits a man for Zion's citizenship. For, indeed, it is these first motions which are the most difficult to make and the most cardinal. To go with the crowd is the easiest of all motions; to go against the stream is the hardest of all. The further inquiry of the awakened soul is usually in the line of its rudimental notion—its further steps in the direction of its first movement. For the Spirit of the Lord is in that soul's uprising. It is the invisible hand of the Almighty which thrusts him from the doomed spot. It is the Saviour's voice which he hears calling, "Escape for thy life." 2. I have known another class of men who "ask the way to Zion with their faces" turned the other way. The inquiry of these is by the lip; the posture of their heart is towards the world. Some of them are consciously insincere. They are wanting in even pious motive. They may be outwardly righteous; but it is with a righteous-

ness which they have learned in worldly schools. They pass for men of purity ; but their purity is the price they pay for social esteem. Their honesty is only their policy. Their action is Zionwards, their words are in heaven's language ; but their heart's direction is towards the world. There are some who maintain this inconsistency with a measure of pious motive. The things of their religion are really religious things. They use the means of grace as means to grace. They recognise the ways of truth and virtue as things of heaven, and they approve and love them all as such. They want to be Christians and to go to glory. They set their feet in the acknowledged ways of righteousness. They ask the way to Zion with all ingenuousness and without conscious reserve. And so far as the indicated path is a course of outer goodness and general integrity they willingly pursue it. But all the while their face and their heart are worldwards, not Zionwards. It is about the world that their affections cluster. It is the world in which they inwardly believe. They have no objection to piety plus worldliness, but they do not want a piety which is the negation of worldliness and the substitute for worldliness. What is their success ? It is plainly a difficult thing to walk the opposite way to that in which you look. You see children sometimes doing that in the streets, but with many a bump and many a tumble. And quite as small success attends the experiment in spiritual things. Here and there a man may perform, for a time, the risky feat. For a while he may maintain the form of godliness and get credit for the reality of it. Neither the onlooking world, nor the man himself, knows how truly his heart is with the creature, rather than with God. He is called a seeker after Zion ; but none but the All Knowing knows how completely his whole cast of thought belies that quest. But inconsistencies nearly always come into the light. It is seldom that the heart and the practice can be long disjoined. The foot and the eye generally agree. Only the eye leads the foot, and not the foot the eye. Where the heart goes the conduct will eventually follow. A man with his heart in the world usually comes out poorly even as a formal saint. Generally the man who is content to be half a Christian ends in not being one at all. Whatever we do our heart must be disposed aright. There is verily no hope of heaven and God apart from a Zionward gaze : that is sure to make our feet move Zionwards. 3. To the most sincere and whole-hearted there is need to "ask the way." God's Spirit in man's heart never supersedes God's Spirit in His Word. God's Spirit in His Word seldom supersedes God's Spirit in His Church. The truth of heaven does not flow automatically into the human mind when once that mind has seen the light. The way of God is never revealed to those who do not search. Answers to our heart's most urgent problems do not come without asking. When we are but walking some common road upon some ordinary errand, we do not like uncertainty. We want to be sure that we are going right. We question many passing travellers rather than go astray, and we check one guide's advice against another's. It is vastly more important that we keep the right way in our Zion-quest. The issues of this journey surpass in moment every other, and whatever the pains we have to take, and however reiterated the inquiries we make, we must be quite sure. Happily there is assurance for us, if we will have it. There is truth and light in abundance for ready minds and docile hearts. It is stored in the Sacred Book, in the ministry of the Church, and in the experience of the faithful. The man who seeks the guidance of the Spirit through these means will not seek in vain. Those who go where the light beams are sure to get some of it into their souls. They who follow Christ shall not walk in darkness ; they shall have the light of life, guiding them to the realm of perfect light and life eternal. (*J. J. Ingram.*) "*Faces thitherward*" :—"With their faces thitherward," those words seem to me to convey a special message to us, to prescribe to us a certain attitude, to suggest to us what is possible in a day like our own. For there are so many matters in which we find ourselves in captivity. We are forced to acquiesce in evil conditions which long years have left as our inheritance. Ancient ideals have broken up in Church and State, old homes lie waste and desolate, and from them we have wandered far. They are but as lost dreams. God's purpose was once in them, but sin was strong and stubborn, and it was fruitless work for Him to repeat forgivenesses which never availed, and to prolong His mercy. And at last the Word of God was given to let the judgments fall, and things were allowed to take their course. God's earlier purpose was suspended and broken off, and the story of man and the story of Christ's Church takes on a new development ; it passes over into strange and troubled situations, and the Divine will sanctions the change, and admits of trouble. God

sets to work under the conditions of the exile in captivity. Not that the sacred purpose is abandoned, but that God proposes now to reach its fulfilment by the road of surrender, by the way of captivity, through the discipline of defeat. Just as in the Gospel the blindness of the man who was sightless from his birth, though in itself a curse due to some original sin, was, as it were, cut off by the action of God from its connection with sin, and there accepted as a pitiful fact, and was turned into a new call upon the goodness of God, and became the motive for a fresh exhibition of His compassion, and an exhibition that opened out unsuspected depths of glory in the love of God for sorrowful man, so even the miserable plight of a divided Christendom gives us a deeper insight into the immeasurable patience, tolerance and burden and pity of the Divine heart than we ever could have guessed before our misery evoked it. We might have thought that His wrath would have been so hot against the Church which was divided against itself that He would have abandoned it to its proper penalty. But no, though a father and mother may forsake, though a woman might forsake her sucking child, yet will He never forsake us. He will follow us down wherever we are into our Babylons; He will put to profit disastrous situations. Babylon is but an interval and a discipline. Our Christendom must be again united, a prayer of Christ for its unity is still within it and behind it. That prayer for ever lives as a witness to the mind of God and to the end for which He is ever working. We may never forget it, we may never consider it to be the abandoned ideal. Whatever God works in us during the dismal course is still so done as to lead back the formative purpose which created the Church to be one Godhead. Though we cannot see how it would be possible, and though we can know nothing positive and practical towards its realisation, though we are hedged in by harsh, unyielding circumstances, and though it is our plain duty to learn all that God has to teach us through that harsh circumstance in which He has placed us, yet still the prophet's voice cries to us to remember, even in impossible things, to look in the direction of the unforgotten vision, to turn our faces thitherward. Turn our faces thitherward! We cannot see our Zion; it is far, far away. We cannot hope to distinguish with our eyes the whole Church of earth become again what Christ meant it to be. Alas! we die in exile from our home. We shall lay our bones in Babylon. East and west and north and south we shall see only divided brothers until our eyes close in death. But before we die, the prophet says, we can at least turn those eyes thitherward. Towards the direction in which peace lies we can ever send out hearts of prayer and longings. Not always shall Christian hate Christian, not always shall altar be divided from altar, not for ever shall east, west, and north be sundered from the south. Once again we shall all understand one another's speech, and a new Pentecost will blot out the light of Babel. What it will be like, that recovered unity, we cannot guess; it will be in some form new and strange, as was the recovered life of Israel round the rebuilt Zion. How utterly unlike was unity and the dispersion after the captivity to the earlier unity of the compact kingdom. That walled little kingdom would never come back again, but the larger spiritual union that held the dispersion together round Jerusalem was far more intense and real than was the superficial coherence of the twelve tribes and the one kingdom. We cannot forecast the changed conditions under which the Church will find herself once more at one. But still through faith, in spite of the darkness, we can look out for the dawn of a new day, we can watch the visions for ever shining, we can snatch at all that makes in that way; we can hope and believe against facts, and hope against hope, and never fail to be found praying for the peace of Jerusalem, with our faces at least turned thitherward. With our faces turned thitherward! Is not that the word by which those who held fast, who perhaps for no fault of their own that they could detect, find themselves caught in the wilderness of doubt? Doubt! It has come upon them like an enemy in the night, it has laid siege, it has encompassed them about within and without. As we have each of us so often to feel the pressure of the world's vast sorrows, so we may have the full pressure of the world's doubt, not, indeed, that we can enter into the cloud with a light heart, wilfully and carelessly, merely to follow the fashion. But if the doubt be real, it can only be dealt with by facing it and probing it to the end. It then passes the first stage of depression and anxiety and loss and damage. While the trial continues that must be, it must be miserable to be robbed of your gladness, to be blind to the vision, to feel far from home, to find no longer joy in going up to the temple of Zion with the multitudes on the holy day, to wander as a lonely shepherd amongst the hills, to have

nothing you can follow, no kindly light about your feet. But though this trouble be allowed to fall, you have still one duty, to remember Zion, to ask the way thither, and to turn your face thitherward. Believe me, God has not forgotten or deserted you because He has led you down to Babylon, and given you over to the Chaldees. You will come out of it a far stronger man than you went in, if only you will trust with all the might of your soul that it is He who has led you to suffer this deprivation, that there is no care for the pain that you have but to be faithful to the purpose which for the time denies you the sight of your Jerusalem, and that there is a real effectual will still at work for you and upon you even where God most surely hides it from your eyes, and always you must be saying this is not the end. Death, doubt, cannot be the final stage of the soul, doubt—though it seems so dreadfully long while it lasts—can only be a period, an interval, for a "time, a time, and half a time." Hold to that, poor blind heart; be not afraid. There shall yet come the day when the Lord will turn again the captivity of Zion; then it will all be like a dream; then will your mouth be filled with laughter, your tongue with joy. (*Canon Scott Holland.*) *Asking the way*:—Our human nature is like a ruined temple in which the echo of old hymns and prayers still lingers and where a spectral Levite walks and murmurs of a lost glory. Hence our longing to return. All souls in their lowest depths are troubled to know the way of everlasting life. This universal consensus of aspiration led Plato to speak of the "wings of our pre-existent state." The world is full of men and women who as Jesus passes by are half moved to throw themselves before Him as the young ruler did, crying, "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" It is our vocation, as ministers of the Gospel, to point out the way to Zion. A grave responsibility rests upon us. Not long ago a signalman swung a white lantern as the railroad train swept by. On it went with impetuous speed until, on a sudden, there came a shock like a thunderbolt, and the train plunged down an embankment. The cars were piled one upon another, and oh, the shrieking and praying then! Who shall depict the anguish of that scene? Its record will be told on grave-stones and in the sable garments of the mourners who go about the streets. It was all because of the mistaken signal. Who is sufficient to stand in this sacred place and direct souls into the way of spiritual life? No one of us could dare do this thing were it not that we have a sure oracle. At the outset we are admonished in these Scriptures that there is only one way to Zion. It used to be a proverb, "All roads lead to Rome." In the centre of the Forum was a golden mile-stone, *Milliarum Aureum*, whereat all thoroughfares converged. If a traveller even in a distant province should ask, "Which way to Rome?" the answer would be, "Keep on and you will reach the golden mile-stone." There are those who seem to think that all ways, in like manner, lead to heaven's gate. If you are only sincere, keep on and you will get there. But alas, the Scriptures speak with a different voice. "There is a way which seemeth right to a man, but the end thereof is death." All roads lead out into the wilderness save one, and that is the King's highway, whereof the prophets spake. "A highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness." I. THE KING'S HIGHWAY LEADS DOWN THROUGH THE VALLEY OF BOCHIM, THE PLACE OF TEARS. Repentance is prerequisite to an entrance into life. To repent is to make a frank acknowledgment of sin and to forsake it. Is there aught unreasonable in this? If I have wronged a fellow-man do I not count it a point of honour to make amends to him? Shall we not observe as high a rule of honour and manliness in our attitude to God as we do in our human relationships? II. THE KING'S HIGHWAY RUNS OVER THE HILL OF ATONEMENT. It is the royal way of the Cross. The law speaks on Calvary. It says to the sinner, "The soul that sinneth it shall die." Nor is it possible to exaggerate the dreadfulness of that death. The Lord spoke of it under the figure of fire and the undying worm. To Christ also the law speaks, Thou mayest expiate the sinner's guilt. The sword awakes against the Shepherd. The only-begotten Son of God, assuming our place before the law, is wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. He dies that we may live. But between the sinner with the death sentence resting upon him and Christ suspended upon the shameful Cross there is a mighty chasm. How can the innocent suffer for the guilty? and what avails it for the sinner that Jesus dies? Over that chasm faith springs a mighty arch. By Divine appointment the exercise of faith on the part of the sinner is made the sole condition of salvation. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life. III. THE KING'S HIGHWAY RUNS THENCEFORTH ACROSS THE OPEN COUNTRY TO HEAVEN'S GATE.

With the heart man believeth unto righteousness and with the lips confession is made unto salvation. If I have found a Saviour, and the joy of the great discovery has come into my heart, I cannot but sing my hosannas. The power of godliness is like ointment in the hand, which ever bewrayeth itself. (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*) *The way to Zion to be inquired after*:—I was coming to Larnie from Carrickfergus in a gig. Taking for granted that I knew the road well enough, I drove right on, passing many people going to market. After a while I began to doubt whether I was right, and meeting a gentleman on horseback, I said to him, "How far is it to Larnie?" "This is not the way," said he. "You are two miles past where you should have turned to the left up the hill. Come back with me and I will show you the right way." Then striking his forehead with his hand he said, "You could fool, why didn't you inquire in time?" So you go on from day to day, thinking you are going right to heaven; but you are in the wrong way. The great God has told you the right way in His blessed Bible. The priest says you mustn't read it; but if you don't inquire, you'll find you're wrong as I did. (*W. Arthur's Life of Gideon Ouseley.*) **Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten.**—*The redeemed sinner joining himself in a covenant with God*:—In our intercourse with the world, we seldom hear such language as this from others, or utter it ourselves. But a kinder invitation could not possibly be addressed to us; nor could we offer to those whom we love more friendly advice. **I. WHY THE LORD CONDESCENDS TO ENTER INTO A COVENANT WITH HIS REDEEMED PEOPLE.** 1. He has thus pledged Himself to His people to show how greatly He honours them. 2. This gracious God has entered into a covenant with His people, that He may bind them more closely to Himself. 3. But the chief reason why it has pleased God to enter into a covenant with His servants, is this—to show them the sureness of His mercy, the certainty of their receiving pardon, grace, and salvation at His hands. **II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN THEIR AVAILING THEMSELVES OF HIS CONDESCENSION, AND JOINING THEMSELVES TO HIM IN A COVENANT.** 1. The spiritual union spoken of implies a renunciation of every covenant which is opposed to this covenant with God. 2. But before we can enter into covenant with God, we must proceed a step farther, and accede to the terms of His covenant. Now these terms are so simple, that a child may comprehend them; and so gracious, that they fill the minds of angels with wonder; but because they are opposed to the imaginations of our depraved hearts, thousands daily reject them, yea, perish rather than accept them. "He that believeth shall be saved." It asks of us no merit; it demands of the penitent sinner no righteousness. It tells him to cast away all dependence upon everything that he can feel, or suffer, or do; and upon this one condition, that he heartily believes and embraces the promises of the Gospel, it assures him that all the blessings of the everlasting covenant are his. 3. And what follows? Is the believing sinner henceforth at liberty to live as he will? to be disobedient and lawless? No; the man who joins himself in a covenant to his redeeming Lord, gives himself up entirely and for ever to His service. (*C. Bradley, M.A.*) *Entering into covenant with God*:—**I. WHAT WE ARE TO UNDERSTAND BY THIS UNION TO GOD.** 1. It must include a renunciation of all created dependencies, and of everything that stands in competition with God. We are not in danger, like Israel of old, of worshipping the hosts of heaven. The world attracts the eye and engages the heart. Its riches and honours have a charm, in which those of heaven are forgotten. Forbidden pleasures make their court in such address, that numbers are devoted to them; and some are idols to themselves, and place a dangerous dependence there. 2. A deliberate and cordial choice of God as our God. 3. A solemn surrender of ourselves, and an entire devotedness to Him. 4. A resolution to abide by the choice and surrender described, and to act as becoming those who stand in a covenant relation to God. **II. SUCH CONSIDERATIONS AS PROVE IT TO BE THE DUTY AND INTEREST OF US ALL TO JOIN OURSELVES TO THE LORD IN THIS COVENANT, AND NEVER FORGET IT.** 1. God has an absolute right and title to us. 2. There is everything in God that can lay claim to our supreme regards, and invite an union to Himself. All the lustre of the heavens, all the beauty and grandeur in the material world, and all the excellence to be found amidst the various orders of beings in the intelligent creation, is, as it were, but a ray from God, and is lost in the excellence and glory of the Divine nature. 3. "Joining ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant," will insure our safety, our honour, and our truest happiness in the present life. 4. "Joining ourselves to the Lord," will issue in a blissful union to Him for ever. Improvement—1. Let us examine ourselves on the

subject of this discourse. 2. Let those who have not joined themselves to the Lord be prevailed on to do it immediately. 3. Let those who are joined to the Lord in this covenant, rejoice in it, often renew it, and make it their principal concern through life, to walk worthy of it. 4. We should call on each other, and on all to whom we are related, in the language of the text. "Come, let us join ourselves," &c. Friendship cannot express itself better, than by well-judged attempts to engage the hearts of its objects for God, and to maintain and strengthen their attachment to Him. This is serving the best interests of others: it is gratitude to Him who "has made us to differ"; and carrying on, in our humble sphere, that grand design in which heaven is engaged. (*N. Hill.*) *The solemn engagement*:—I. THE NATURE OF THE TRANSACTION. 1. What it is not. (1) An engagement of the nature of a covenant of works, in which we propose to obey the law of God as the condition of our acceptance in His sight. (2) An engagement in which we promise to love God and serve Him as a compensation for blessings already received. (3) An engagement to believe and repent, in order to obtain salvation through Christ. 2. What it is. (1) In joining ourselves to the Lord, we take Him as our God and portion in Christ Jesus. This is just, in other words, to acquiesce in His purpose of mercy as it is revealed and offered to us in the promise. (2) Devoting ourselves to the service of God, as a willing and obedient people. (a) A voluntary surrender. (b) Universal, without exception or reserve. (c) Renouncing every other object, in so far as an attachment to it interferes with the love and duty we owe to God. (d) This surrender is for ever. "Perpetual." II. IN WHAT RESPECTS THIS IS THE DUTY OF THOSE WHO PROFESS TO BE, LIKE THE ISRAELITES, PENITENTS RETURNING UNTO THE LORD.

1. To join themselves unto the Lord in a perpetual covenant is a duty He requires of every returning penitent. It makes a part of what is required in the very first of the ten commandments. For what is the covenant we have now described but an acknowledging, worshipping, and glorifying the Lord as our God in Christ Jesus? 2. God not only requires, but the great things He has done for them give Him a right to expect that they should join themselves to Him in a perpetual covenant. 3. The advantage to be derived from such a connection, points it out as our duty to join ourselves unto the Lord. Since they are dependent upon Him for every blessing, the regard they owe to their own interest renders it necessary.

III. ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE PERFORMANCE OF THIS DUTY. The obligations of authority, gratitude, and interest, unite in calling us to this exercise; why, then, should we hesitate a moment about taking a decided part? 1. The privileges you think it would be presumptuous to claim, God Himself freely offers. I will, says He, be your God. 2. The fear that He will reject you is no just cause why you should not now join yourselves unto the Lord. In devoting yourselves unto Him, you are only obeying His commandment; and surely you have no cause to fear that He will reject the service He Himself requires. 3. The fear of departing again from Him is no just cause why you should not now join yourselves unto the Lord, since He Himself hath undertaken to preserve you from falling, and to keep you by His almighty power through faith unto complete salvation. Even now He is opening up all the stores of His fulness to supply your need, and enable you to fulfil every engagement into which, by His grace, you are disposed to enter. (*G. Campbell.*) *National covenanting a national privilege*:—It is when Israel and Judah—the ten and two tribes—are brought to seek the Lord their God, and ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, that they say one to another, "Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten." I. THE PARTIES WHO ENGAGE IN COVENANTING. 1. God. It is to God the people propose to join themselves. It is not, however, God absolutely considered, but a three-one God in Christ,—God, as the Creator of the ends of the earth, as having all persons and all events entirely under His control, as the Father of lights, the Father of mercies, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of all comfort, that in Christ is reconciling sinners to Himself, and saying to them, "I will make a covenant with you";—it is to this God that the people seek to stand in the covenant relation. How great the condescension of the three-one God—who is so high in rank, so great in wealth, in love, in wisdom, in power, in goodness—to enter into covenant with the poor worms of His footstool, and enable them to say of Him, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His; He feedeth among the lilies." 2. Man. It is with men, and not with angels, that God condescends to enter into covenant. The proposal, however, to engage in covenanting, and the disposition to comply with that proposal on the part of man, must come from

the Lord. For it is not until God takes hold of sinners in the covenant of grace that they cheerfully give themselves to God in a covenant of duty. The surrender they then make of themselves to God is a complete or entire surrender—a surrender, not in one, but in all the relations of life. Those, therefore, that give themselves to God in a covenant of duty, as individuals, must esteem it a privilege to be permitted to give themselves to God, in the same covenant, as families, as Churches, as nations. It is national covenanting that is referred to in our text. It is Israel and Judah, or the kingdoms of the ten and two tribes, that propose to join themselves in covenant to the Lord. II. THE WARRANT FOR COVENANTING. Clearly it is our first duty in considering national covenanting to ask, Have men any warrant from Scripture for claiming in their national, or in any other relation in life, to be the bride—with all the rights and privileges of the bride—of the Lord of the universe? Undoubtedly they have. The scriptural warrant for nations, as such, giving themselves in covenant to God, is of the clearest and most encouraging description. There is the great fact that God Himself proposed and entered into covenant with Israel as a nation at Sinai. But the warrant arising from the covenanting at Sinai is confirmed—1. By many scriptural examples, as the covenanting in the days of Asa, when all Judah rejoiced at the oath; and the Lord was found of them, and gave them rest round about; in the days of Nehemiah, when the nobles of the people made a sure covenant, and our princes, Levites, and priests' seal unto it. 2. By many prophecies and promises, a few of which only we can quote in your hearing. There are, for instance (Isa. xix. 18-21, xlv. 3-5, xlv. 23). And how can the kingdoms of this world become Christ's kingdom, but by swearing allegiance, or giving themselves in covenant to Him? May the time soon come when Israel and Judah, when Great Britain and Ireland, when all the nations of the earth shall say one to another, "Come, let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten." III. THE NATURE OF COVENANTING. What is a covenant? A covenant is a bargain or marriage. And a marriage is the union between two parties, or the declaring of them formally to be one. The marriage is based on mutual consent. And such, in its essence, is covenanting. It is the Lord formally giving Himself to His people, or saying of them, It is My people; and the people formally giving themselves to God, or saying of Him, The Lord is our God. 1. That in national covenanting there is, on the part of the covenanters, a formal and solemn acceptance of a three-one God in Christ as their God. As God takes hold of, and gives Himself to His people, in the covenant of grace, so there must be a faith's approbation of that covenant, or a formal and solemn acceptance of a three-one God in Christ as their God, of God the Father as their Father, of God the Son as their Saviour, of God the Holy Ghost as their Sanctifier, Comforter, Friend, in their covenant of duty. Such acceptance of God is included in the covenanting at Sinai. In entering into their covenant with God, the Israelites, in the most solemn manner, accepted of the Lord as the God who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, and in the most solemn manner declared that they received Him both as their Sovereign and covenant God, as "the Lord," and as the "thy God." It is included in the covenanting specified in Zech. xiii. 9. And such acceptance of God must be included in all the covenanting that is acceptable to Him in all ages. For unless men are enabled cordially to receive a three-one God as revealed in Christ, He will not and cannot say of them, It is My people, nor enable them to say of Him, The Lord is my God. Some say that in thus accepting of a three-one God in Christ, covenanters do nothing more than genuine saints do, when they are enabled to accept of, and close with, Christ as their only and all-sufficient Saviour. In one sense this is true. But, at conversion, we accept of, and close with, Christ in our individual, whereas, in national covenanting, we accept of and close with Him in our corporate and national capacity. True. But, when you have been enabled to accept of and close with Him in your individual, why seek to accept of and close with Him in your national capacity? Why not be satisfied with the acceptance of Him you have already been enabled to make? Because, by doing so, we would neglect a plainly commanded duty, and deprive ourselves of a highly distinguished privilege. Every genuine Israelite that covenanted at Sinai, and in the plains of Moab, had already, as an individual, accepted of and closed with the Lord as his God. But, so far was God from being satisfied with this, that He asked the Israelites not merely in their individual, but in their public and corporate capacity, to accept of and close with Him anew. Accordingly, in Deut. xxvi. 17-19, Moses says to the Israelites, who had, in their

national capacity, given themselves in covenant to God—"Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God." . . . "And the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be His peculiar people, as He hath spoken." In other words, the Lord declared that, through national covenanting, the Israelites enjoyed a national exaltation, praise, honour, and blessing, that could not otherwise have been obtained. How clear is it, therefore, that national covenanting is the true foundation of great and permanent national blessings. 2. In national covenanting there must be, on the part of the covenanters, a formal and cheerful surrender of themselves to God in a covenant of duty. In national covenanting, as in marriage, there must be a mutual surrender. God must cheerfully give Himself to the nation in the covenant of grace, and the nation must, by faith, as cheerfully and in a constitutional manner give itself to God in a covenant of duty. What we have already said shows that there can be no doubt as to the cheerfulness with which God gave Himself to Israel, and promises to give Himself in covenant to Christian nations in all ages. But whilst God cheerfully gave Himself, as the covenant God, to Israel, He was careful to see that, by faith, Israel formally and cheerfully gave himself, as a covenant people, to Him. In Exod. xiii. 3, 8, we are told that "Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, If ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine. And ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel. And Moses came, and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord." With this full consent on the part of the people the Lord was not yet satisfied. Accordingly, in chap. xxiv. 3, we read: "And Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments; and all the people answered with one voice and said, All the words which the Lord hath said will we do." In ver. 7 we read again—"And he (Moses) took the Book of the Covenant and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient." After the covenant had been read for the third time, and the people had for the third time given their consent to marry the Lord on the terms proposed, it is added, "And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words." How clearly do these facts show that it was with a full knowledge of what they were doing, and with the full consent of all the people, that the Israelites gave themselves in covenant to God at Sinai. (*Original Secession Magazine.*)

Ver. 6. *My people have forgotten their resting-place.—Cannot you rest?*—God has made Himself the resting-place for the human soul; and unless we fix our heart upon Him we may rest, but it is only for a time. The rest which God provides for us is a rest which satisfies us, and it is a rest which we can always have, a rest which "remaineth," and which cannot be taken away from the people of God. 1. Many people are weary and very far from restful on account of business cares. You see continually in the newspapers that not only are there many bankruptcies and liquidations, and such like unpleasant occurrences, but the market reports tell us that trade is very unprofitable. Whatever happens, make the best of it. Don't wear away your soul in mourning and repining as if your soul were chained to a perpetually revolving grindstone. Look to the bright side of things. Do the best you can, and do not fear the worst is sure to happen. Remember that God still lives and cares for you. "Trust in the Lord and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." It is a severe trial of faith in God when death removes the bread-winner from a family. Ah! at such a time of bereavement there is no consolation excepting from trust in God's providential care. He is the Father of the fatherless and the Friend of the widow. Likewise, many a Christian man is ready to say in the desolateness of his sorrow, "I have to tread my path alone!" He does not say that God is dead, but he acts as if he thought so. To doubt the superintending care and consolation of God is practical atheism. When we are in trouble, that is the very time we ought to cast all our care upon Him, for "He careth for us." 2. Then, some may be much troubled because of something going wrong in your family.

You may have an undutiful and wicked son or daughter. A man said to me some time ago, "My heart is almost broken!" I asked, "What is the matter?" He answered, "My son — has become an infidel! I would rather have given my life!" Is there no resting-place in such a time of trouble? Yes; there is. Take up your Bible again, and read what God did "for David's sake," how the children of David and their descendants were blest and kept from great evil "for My servant David's sake." "The prayer of faith shall save the soul." 3. Some of the sharpest troubles experienced in this troublesome world come from misplaced or unrequited affection—what Shakespeare calls in his forcible way "the pangs of despised love." Our only course in this, as in every other heart-breaking matter, is to "take it to the Lord in prayer," trusting in Him, and leaving in His care all the responsibility of one's life. 4. It may be that your trouble is a sinful disposition. You feel that you cannot help yourself. But God can give you relief and rest if you trust in Him. As Jesus restored to health the man who was sick of the palsy, so God can restore your soul by heavenly grace. Lastly, I wished to give you an assurance of rest in God's paradise. (*W. Birch.*)

The soul's resting-place.—I. THE HUMAN SOUL NEEDS A RESTING-PLACE. 1. This is true of the soul in innocence. As a creature he could not but be dependent. Without unquestioning trust in God, safety and happiness were impossible to man even before the fall. 2. How much more true is this since man has become a sinner. His nature is utterly weary. The cares and anxieties of life are wearing away his strength, and there is nothing binding him to earth but the fear of death. The past is guilty, the future is hopeless, and so the present is restless. II. JESUS CHRIST IS THE RESTING-PLACE THE SOUL NEEDS. 1. In Christ we have full redemption. No anodynes of earth can give the soul the rest that the blood of Christ can. 2. In Him we also have regeneration. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." A new centre has been given to his heart, a new aim to his life, a new joy to his experience. 3. He gives repose to the intellect. Christ is "the truth," and through confidence all mysteries are accepted as unquestioningly as a child accepts the statement of its parent. Jesus Christ alone brings to the soul the element of certainty, and, worn out by vain flights, it folds its weary wings and rests with quiet thankfulness on this tree of knowledge, which is also the tree of life. 4. He also gives repose to the affections of the soul. Earthly objects prove disappointing or fall away from us, or are torn from us and leave the soul all palpitating with agony, but no power can separate from the love of God in Christ Jesus. III. THIS RESTING-PLACE OF THE SOUL IS SOMETIMES FORGOTTEN EVEN BY THOSE WHO HAVE KNOWN AND ENJOYED IT. A Christian may frequently have his peace in Christ disturbed. At moments he may be walking through darkness. Job was a true man of God even when he was crying out, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!" True, a Christian is not justified in being in this distressed state of mind. He ought to know better, &c. 1. When he falls into perplexity, doubting whether he is forgiven or not. 2. When he depends upon merely human and earthly resources. 3. When he loses his confidence in the midst of affliction. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

Vers. 17-20. **Israel is a scattered sheep.**—I. VIEW GOD'S PEOPLE, THE SPIRITUAL ISRAEL, AS SCATTERED SHEEP (ver. 17). 1. They were sheep going astray. Scattered over the world. 2. Marked, noted, contemplated by the Divine eye, the Divine foreknowledge, the Divine purpose. 3. Found in different regions of the earth, yet advancing to one heavenly home—the better country. II. VIEW THE PEOPLE OF THE MOST HIGH, THE SPIRITUAL ISRAEL, AS A FORGIVEN PEOPLE (ver. 20). 1. Divine forgiveness. 2. A forgiveness dependent upon a Divine redemption. 3. A forgiveness is righteousness. 4. A complete forgiveness. 5. A forgiveness, and more than forgiveness. Inseparable from justification, acceptance in a righteousness of God, unto all and upon all them that believe. 6. A forgiveness never separate from sanctification. III. VIEW THE CHOSEN OF THE MOST HIGH, THE SPIRITUAL ISRAEL, AS ASSAILED AND PERSECUTED BY LION-LIKE FOES (ver. 17). 1. They who are effectually called, and set apart for God, are exposed at once to special enmities. All the enemies of Gospel truth, holiness, spirituality, godliness are their enemies. 2. The enemies of the spiritual Israel are formidable, but vincible. 3. The days of open persecution have emphatically illustrated the ferocity of anti-Christian persecution. 4. The foes of the spiritual Israel are vanquished foes. Christ hath already overcome them. They have all been vanquished in principle. 5. The spiritual Israel hath mighty resources

engaged, mighty friendship, and support pledged on its behalf. In Isa. xxxi. Jehovah compares Himself to a lion in the succour and defence of His Zion (Isa. xxxi. 4). IV. VIEW THE SPIRITUAL ISRAEL AS A RESERVED INHERITANCE FOR CHRIST (ver. 20). 1. Purchased and redeemed in order to be reserved. 2. Effectually called and regenerated in order to be reserved. 3. Separated from the world in order to be reserved. 4. Reserved, that the Saviour may take delight in them. 5. Reserved, as the gift of the Father to the Son. 6. Reserved to be witnesses for God and His Christ. 7. Reserved as first-fruits to God and to the Lamb. 8. Reserved to inherit exceeding riches of grace, and ultimate riches of glory. V. VIEW THE PEOPLE OF THE MOST HIGH, THE SPIRITUAL ISRAEL, AS FEEDING IN THE PASTURES OF GRACE UNDER THE "GREAT SHEPHERD OF THE SHEEP" (ver. 19). I. The Shepherd of this fold is mightier than all the devouring lions that can threaten His redeemed. He can curb them at His pleasure. The Shepherd of this fold is wiser than all the opponents of His Church. Neither might nor craft can defeat the purposes of His grace. (*D. R. Morris.*) **The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none.—Sin completely removed.**—I. SIN IS COMPLETELY REMOVED, IN THAT THE GUILT OF IT IS ALL FORGIVEN, AND THE PUNISHMENT DUE TO IT ENTIRELY REMITTED. II. SIN IS COMPLETELY REMOVED, IN THAT THE SINNER IS PERFECTLY RESTORED TO THE LOVE AND FAVOUR OF GOD. III. SIN IS COMPLETELY REMOVED, IN THAT THE PARDONED SINNER OBTAINS A BLESSED RESTORATION OF CHARACTER, STATE, AND HOPE. IV. THE WAY IN WHICH SO COMPLETE A PARDON AND RESTORATION OF GUILTY SINNERS IS EFFECTED. V. THIS COMPLETE FORGIVENESS OF SIN IS ALONE WORTHY OF GOD, AND SUFFICIENT FOR MAN. VI. THIS COMPLETE FORGIVENESS IS NECESSARY FOR US ALL, AND OUGHT TO BE MOST EARNESTLY SOUGHT BY US ALL. (*Essex Remembrancer.*)

Ver. 34. **Their Redeemer is strong, the Lord of hosts is His name.—The kinsman Redeemer.**—Among the remarkable provisions of the Mosaic law there were some very peculiar ones affecting the next-of-kin. The nearest living blood-relation to a man had certain obligations and offices to discharge, under certain contingencies, in respect of which he received a special name; which is sometimes translated in the Old Testament "Redeemer" and sometimes "Avenger" of blood. What the etymological signification of the word may be is, perhaps, somewhat doubtful. It is taken by some authorities to come from a word meaning "to set free." I. THE QUALIFICATIONS AND OFFICES OF THE KINSMAN-REDEEMER. The qualifications may be all summed up in one—that he must be the nearest living blood relation of the person whose Goel he was. He might be brother, or less nearly connected, but this was essential, that of all living men, he was the most closely connected. That qualification has to be kept well in mind when thinking of the transference of the office to God in His relation to Israel, and through Israel, to us. Such being his qualification, what were his duties? Mainly three. The first was connected with property. One great purpose steadily kept in view in all the Mosaic land laws was the prevention of the alienation of the land from its original holders, and its accumulation in a few hands. The obligation on the next-of-kin to buy back alienated property was quite as much imposed on him for the sake of the family, as of the individual. The second of his duties was to buy back a member of his family fallen into slavery (Lev. xxv. 39). The last of the offices of the kinsman-redeemer was that of avenging the blood of a murdered relative. The law of blood-feud among the Hebrews was all in the direction of restricting the "wild justice of revenge," and of entrusting it to certain chosen persons out of the kindred of the murdered man. The savage vendetta was too deeply engrained in the national habit to be done away with altogether. All that was for the time possible was to check and systematise it, and this was done by the institution in question, which did not so much put the sword into the hand of the next-of-kin as strike it out of the hand of all the rest of the clan. II. THE GRAND MYSTERIOUS TRANSFERENCE OF THIS OFFICE TO JEHOVAH. This singular institution was gradually discerned to be charged with lofty meaning and to be capable of being turned into a dim shadowing of something greater than itself. You will find that God begins to be spoken of in the later portions of Scripture as the Kinsman-Redeemer. I reckon eighteen instances, of which thirteen are in the second half of Isaiah. The reference is no doubt mainly to the great deliverance from captivity in Egypt and Babylon, but the thought sweeps a much wider circle and goes much deeper down than these historical facts. There was in it some dim thought that

though God was separated from them by all the distance between finitude and infinitude yet they were nearer to Him than to anybody else; that the nearest living relation that these poor persecuted Jews had was the Lord of hosts, beneath whose wings they might come to trust. Therefore does the prophet kindle into rapture and triumphant confidence as he thinks that the Lord of hosts, mighty, unspeakable, high above our thoughts, our words, or our praise, is Israel's Kinsman, and, therefore, their Redeemer. How profound a consciousness that man was made in the image of God, and that, in spite of all the gulf between finite and infinite, and the yet deeper gulf between sinful man and righteous God. He was closer to a poor struggling soul than even the dearest were, must have been at all events dawning on the prophet who dared to think of the Holy One in the Heavens as Israel's Kinsman. III. WE HAVE THE PERFECT FULFILLMENT OF THIS DIVINE OFFICE BY THE MAN CHRIST JESUS. He is nearer to each of us than our dearest are. He loves us with the love of kindred, and can fill our hearts and wills, and help our weakness in better, more inward ways than all sympathy and love of human hearts can do. Between the atoms of the densest of material bodies there is an interspace of air, as is shown by the fact that everything is compressible if you can find the force sufficient to compress it. That is to say, no particle touches another in the material universe. And so in the spiritual region there is an awful film of separation between each of us and all others, however closely we may be united. We each live on our own little island in the deep "with echoing straits between us thrown." The solemn consciousness of personality, of responsibility unshared by any, of a separate destiny parting us from our dearest. Arms may be twined, but they must be unlinked some day, and each in turn face the awful solitude of death, as each has really faced that scarcely less awful solitude of life alone. But "he that is joined to the Lord is one flesh," and our kinsman, Christ, will come so near to us, that we shall be in Him, and He in us, one spirit and one life. He is our nearest relation, nearer than husband, wife, parent, brother, sister, or friend. He is nearer to you than your very selves. He is your better self. This is His qualification for His office. Because He is man's kinsman, He buys back His enslaved brethren. The bondage from which "one of his brethren" might "redeem" the Israelite was a voluntary bondage into which he had "sold himself." And such is our slavery. None can rob us of our freedom but ourselves. The world and the flesh and the devil cannot put their chains on us unless our own will hold out our hands for the manacles. And, alas! it is often an unsuspected slavery. "How sayest thou, ye shall be made free? We were never in bondage to any man," boasted the angry disputants with Christ. And if they had lifted up their eyes they might have seen from the Temple courts in which they stood, the citadel full of Roman soldiers, and perhaps the golden eagles gleaming in the sunshine on the loftiest battlements. Some of us are just as foolish, and try as desperately to annihilate facts by ignoring them, and to make ourselves free by passionately denying that we are slaves. But "he that committeth sin is the slave of sin." Did you ever try to kill a bad habit, a vice? Did you find it easy work? Was it not your master? You thought it was a chain no stronger than a spider's web that was round your wrist till you tried to break it; and then you found it a chain of adamant. Many men who boast themselves free are tied and bound with the cords of their sins. Dreaming of freedom, you have sold yourself, and that "for nought." Is that not true, tragically true? What have you made out of sin? Is the game worth the candle? Will it continue to be so?—"And ye shall be redeemed without money, for Jesus Christ laid down His life for you and me, that by His death we might receive forgiveness and deliverance from the power of sin." And so your Kinsman, nearer to you than all else, has bought you back. (*A. MacLaren, D.D.*) *Another pleads for us*:—Says Charles Garrett: "During the cotton famine I went to many a man in need and said: 'Why don't you go to the committee and get what you require?' And the reply was, 'I can't, I have never asked for help in my life. If I were to try to speak for myself I should be choked. I can't do it; I'll starve first.' And I have said, 'I don't want you to speak. I only want you to come. I will do all the talking,' and at the appointed time he has come, and I have said, 'This is the person of whom I spoke,' and they at once relieved him."

CHAPTER LI.

VER. 5. *For Israel hath not been forsaken, nor Judah of his God.—Israel and Judah not forsaken:*—You would think, according to the teaching of some, that Christ's members kept lopping off something like the limbs of lobsters, and that new ones were constantly growing. There is nothing in Scripture to warrant such a notion as that. You remember Mr. Bunyan's parable of a child who is in a room, and a stranger comes in, and says, "Come hither, child, I will cut off thy finger." "No," says the child. "Yes, but I will; I will take off your little finger. Here is a knife, I will cut off your little finger." "No," again says the child, and begins to cry. "Oh, but," says the stranger, "that is a poor little finger that you have. I will cut it off and I will buy you a gold finger, such a brave gold finger. I will put it on your hand instead of your little finger." "Oh," says the child, "but it would not be my finger; I cannot lose my little finger." Whereupon Mr. Bunyan says, "If Christ could have better people than those He has, He would not make the change," for, saith He, "they are not My people; they are not a part of My own living self." So the Lord Jesus would not change you for a golden saint, for one much better than you are. That new finger would not be what the Father gave him, nor what He bought with His precious blood. "Thou shalt not be forgotten of Me," means that God will never cease to love His servants. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *God's people not forgotten or forsaken:*—Before the siege of Paris Gustave Doré had nearly finished one of his greatest paintings, one of the finest pictures which has ever been produced. Having to fly from the city, on a sudden, as the Germans were coming up, he hid his picture in a cellar, down under a heap of rubbish. When the siege was over, Doré came back to Paris, and of course when he returned he had forgotten all about his picture, had he not? Not he; he had taken too much trouble with it to forget it. He knew the value of it, and he knew where he had put it. He did not have to go up and down the house and say to the people, "Do you know where my picture is?" No! he never forgot where he had himself put it, so he found it where it was hidden, brought it out to the light of day, and finished it. Now, in a far higher sense than that, God will have respect unto the works of His own hands. The very bodies of the saints, though they were hidden away for a while in the rubbish of the earth, He will fetch out, and He will complete the works of grace which He has begun upon each one of them. The Lord hath formed us to be His servants, we shall not be forgotten of Him. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 6. *Flee out of the midst of Babylon.—Fleeing from the city of destruction:*—And now the trembling pilgrim, with fixed resolution, having a glimpse of the light and a definite direction, begins to run; it is unutterable relief to his perplexities to run towards Christ, though as yet he sees Him not. But now the world clamours after him, yea, the dearest ones in it try to stop him, but the fire in his conscience is stronger than they; he stops his ears and runs without looking behind, and stays not in all the plain, but runs as swiftly as his burden will let him, crying, "Life, life, eternal life!" (*Lectures on Pilgrim's Progress, C. H. Cheever.*)

Ver. 15. *He hath made the earth by His power, He hath established the world by His wisdom.—The being of God proved from the frame of the world:*—The attentive observation of this world, or visible frame, is not only a worthy employment of our thoughts, but even a considerable duty not to be neglected by us. For it is that which affords most cogent and satisfactory arguments to convince us of, and to confirm us in, the belief of that truth which is the foundation of all religion and piety, the being of one God, incomprehensibly excellent in all perfections, the maker and upholder of all things; it also serves to beget in our minds affections toward God, suitable to those notions; a reverent adoration of His unsearchable wisdom; an awful dread of His powerful majesty; a grateful love of His gracious benignity and goodness. 1. View we first, singly, those things which are most familiar and obvious to our senses. First, those plants we every day do see, smell, and taste: Have not that number, that figure, that order, that temperament, that whole texture of parts we discern in them, a manifest relation to those operations they perform? Whence, then,

I inquire, could that fitness proceed ? from chance, or casual motions of matter ? But is it not repugnant to the name and nature of chance, that anything regular or constant should arise from it ? Are not confusion, disparity, deformity, unaccountable change and variety, the proper issues of chance ? It is not, therefore, reasonable to ascribe those things to chance : to what then ? will you say, to necessity ? If you do, you only alter the phrase ; for necessary causality is but another name for chance ; they both are but several terms denoting blindness and unadvisedness in action ; both must imply a fortuitous determination of causes, acting without design or rule. These effects must therefore, I say, proceed from wisdom, and that no mean one, but such as greatly surpasses our comprehension, joined with a power equally great : for to digest bodies so very many, so very fine and subtle, so divers in motion and tendency, that they shall never hinder or disturb one another, but always conspire to the same design, is a performance exceedingly beyond our capacity to reach how it could be contrived or accomplished ; all the endeavours of our deepest skill and most laborious industry cannot arrive to the producing of any work not extremely inferior to any of these, not in comparison very simple and base ; neither can our wits serve to devise, nor our sense to direct, nor our hand to execute any work, in any degree like to those. And if we have reason to acknowledge so much wisdom and power discovered in one plant, and the same consequently multiplied in so many thousands of divers kinds ; how much more may we discern them in any one animal, in all of them ? Who shaped and tempered those hidden subtle springs of life, sense, imagination, memory, passion ; who impressed on them a motion so regular and so durable, which through so many years, among so many adverse contingencies assailing it, is yet so steadily maintained ? Thus doth commonsense from these sort of beings, whereof there be innumerable exposed daily to our observation, even singly considered, deduce the existence of a wisdom, power, and goodness unconceivably great ; and there are probably divers others (stones, metals, minerals, &c.) no less obvious, even here on the earth, our place of dwelling, which, were our senses able to discern their constitution and texture, would afford matter of the same acknowledgment.

2. But if, passing from such particulars, we observe the relation of several kinds of things each to other, we shall find more reason to be convinced concerning the same excellent perfections farther extending themselves. Is there not, for instance, a palpable relation between the frame, the temper, the natural inclinations or instincts of each animal, and its element or natural place and abode ; wherein it can only live, finding therein its food, its harbour, its refuge ? Is not to each faculty within an object without prepared, exactly correspondent thereto ; which were it wanting, the faculty would become vain and useless, yea sometime harmful and destructive ; as reciprocally the object would import little or nothing, if such a faculty were not provided and suited thereto ? As for example, what would an eye signify, if there were not light prepared to render things visible thereto ? and how much less considerable than it is would the goodly light itself be, were all things in nature blind, and incapable to discern thereby ? What would the ear serve for, if the air were not suitably disposed in a due consistency, and capable of moderate undulations distinguishable thereby ? The like we might with the same reason inquire concerning the other senses and faculties, vital or animal, and their respective objects, which we may observe with admirable congruity respecting each other. So many, so plain, so exactly congruous are the relations of things here about us each to other ; which surely could not otherwise come than from one admirable wisdom and power conspiring thus to adapt and connect them together ; as also from an equal goodness, declared in all these things being squared so fitly for mutual benefit and convenience. Well, then, is it to a fortuitous necessity (or a necessary chance) that we owe all these choice accommodations and pre-eminences of nature ? must we bless and worship fortune for all this ? did she so especially love us, and tender our good ? was she so indulgent toward us, so provident for us in so many things, in everything ; making us the scope of all her workings and motions here about us ? Oh, brutish degeneracy ! Are we not, not only wretchedly blind and stupid, if we are not able to discern so clear beams of wisdom shining through so many perspicuous correspondences ; if we cannot trace the Divine power by footsteps so express and remarkable ; if we cannot read so legible characters of transcendent goodness ; but extremely unworthy and ungrateful, if we are not ready to acknowledge, and with hearty thankfulness

to celebrate all these excellent perfections, by which all these things have been so ordered, as to conspire and co-operate for our benefit? 3. Yea, all of them join together in one universal consort, with one harmonious voice, to proclaim one and the same wisdom to have designed, one and the same power to have produced, one and the same goodness to have set both wisdom and power on work in designing and in producing their being; in preserving and governing it: for this whole system of things what is it, but one goodly body, as it were, compacted of several members and organs; so aptly compacted together, that each confers its being and its operation to the grace and ornament, to the strength and stability of the whole; one soul (of Divine providence) enlivening in a manner, and actuating it all? We may perhaps not discern the use of each part, or the tendency of each particular effect; but of many they are so plain and palpable, that reason obliges us to suppose the like of the rest. Even as a person whom we observe frequently to act with great consideration and prudence, when at other times we cannot penetrate the drift of his proceedings, we must yet imagine that he hath some latent reason, some reach of policy, that we are not aware of; or, as in an engine consisting of many parts, curiously combined, whereof we do perceive the general use, and apprehend how divers parts thereof conduce thereto, reason prompts us (although we neither see them all, nor can comprehend the immediate serviceableness of some) to think they are all in some way or other subservient to the artist's design: such an agent is God, the wisdom of whose proceedings being in so many instances notorious, we ought to suppose it answerable in the rest; such an engine is this world, of which we may easily enough discern the general end, and how many of its parts do conduce thereto; and cannot therefore in reason but suppose the rest in their kind alike congruous, and conducive to the same purpose. If the nature of any cause be discoverable by its effects; if from any work we may infer the workman's ability; if in any case the results of wisdom are distinguishable from the consequences of chance, we have reason to believe that the Architect of this magnificent and beautiful frame was one incomprehensibly wise, powerful, and good Being; so that "they are inexcusable, who from hence do not know God"; or knowing Him do not render unto Him His due glory and service. (*Isaac Barrow, D.D.*)

Ver. 27. Thus saith the Lord: Set ye up a standard in the land.—*The standard of the Cross, a rallying-point for the people*:—"Set ye up a standard," plain, obvious to be seen; a standard, high, on a mountain top, so as to be a rallying-point for the people in the battle of the Lord. A message, this, to fire the hearts of men, to steep them to the full in the sense of life's solemnity. The appeal of the prophet had reference, in the first instance, to the assault of the Persian armies upon the fortress city of Babylon. Cyrus was employed (to use the language of the prophet elsewhere) as the very "battle-axe" of God; who was to do God's work in delivering the Jews from their captivity, and rebuilding for their use His Temple at Jerusalem. It is the commission of the Lord God to His Church in every age; to lift up the ensign of the Cross, the banner of Christian conflict, the talisman of victory, the rallying-point of all true hearts in the battle of the Lord, against the power of evil that is abroad in our midst. If there is one lesson more emphatically taught than any other by the facts of our present-day experience, it is the lesson that in Christianity alone lies, after all, the true and ultimate hope of the world; that the standard of the Gospel is the only true measure of our social reforms and of our personal or political ideals. 1. There is a power in our midst to-day—a power so imperious that a man may well be excused for holding it to be well-nigh irresistible—the power of public opinion. Are we not apt to forget that this potent engine of our modern life is one whose motive force may, and should be, in a Christian country, spent always in the cause of God, and of His Christ? It is an engine which, if it be informed by hearts aglow with the Spirit of Christ, and guided by hands that are exercised in deeds of truth and love, may well work miracles before our eyes. Then, may not our Church expect of all her sons that each one of them should realise his personal responsibility in this respect? 2. What a motto is this for our national and imperial politics! What a "programme" is here set forth for any Government, under whatever accidents of political party! "Set ye up a standard in the land"; a standard of righteousness and of good faith in matters of international law, or the observance of international treaties. 3. May not this be taken, again, as a potent watchword at our parliamentary elections?

Can we not, each one of us, deal at any rate with our own vote as with a serious trust? Can we not raise over our polling-booths a standard of principle rather than party? Can we not muster courage to demand fair play for all; to denounce the use of unworthy weapons in the process of electioneering—the weapons of declamation and mob-flattery, of slander and personal abuse, of more brute-force obstruction, and of secret bribery, boycotting, or cowardly intimidation? “Set up a standard in the land.” What nobler principle for our legislation itself? A standard of mercy and unselfishness, of wise and intelligent sympathy, in dealing with the needs of the many; a standard of absolute impartiality, strict and entire justice, in legislating for the uneducated and the helpless classes of our population. 4. So, too, with respect to other matters of less distinctly political interest. There is room, surely, for a higher standard in questions of pressing social gravity, such as, for example, the subject of national education. Here, at any rate, the Church is pre-eminently bound to hold aloft the ideal of that which alone is worthy of the name of education. Or, turning again to such facts as are revealed by our criminal statistics, in view of the open sore of our national intemperance; or of the not less terrible though secret cancer of our national impurity, can we not, as carrying the Cross of our dear Lord’s self-denial on our foreheads, can we not do something towards setting up a standard in our homes, in our streets, in our business, and in our amusements,—a standard of sobriety and of purity? 5. So, again, in our very amusements. It rests with you, of the English Church laity, to “set up a standard in the land.” It is for you, who are the patrons of the English stage, to pronounce with no faltering accent that the drama—whether grave or gay—no more necessitates the stimulus of an immoral plot, or the adjuncts of a vicious art, than the pen of a Macaulay, a Tennyson, or a Browning, need defile itself with the innuendoes of a Wycherley or the coarseness of a Congreve. 6. And once again, in reference to those forms of sin to which as a great commercial people we are especially prone. Have we not enough knowledge of a sound political economy to see that all the remedies which Parliament can propose will never touch the root of the evil we deplore? that what is wanted is not so much the mere readjustment of taxation, still less the forcible redistribution of our wealth, as the introduction of a higher standard into our commercial transactions; the standard of a fairer co-operation between the capitalist and the workman—of a more just and upright dealing between tradesman and customer—of a closer sympathy between master and servant, between producer and consumer: a standard of hard, but not slavish, honest, and conscientious work—a standard of fair working hours and fair working profits; a standard of just prices and honest weights and measures; a standard of thrift and temperance and industry, that will condemn idleness and dishonesty in the workman, the producer, but which will not excuse indolence and selfishness and unbridled luxury in the consumer; a standard which denounces all trade adulterations, all lying labels, all imitation brands, all false advertisements, and other similar forms of commercial ostentation and inequity; a standard, moreover, which declares such sins to be as sinful among the warehouses of the city as in the village shop, and pronounces the vices of the west to be at least as criminal as the crimes of the east. Lift up your hearts, then, comrades in the sacred battlefield of right and wrong! Look to that warrior Christ who leads us on. (*H. B. Outley, M.A.*)

Ver. 50. *Let Jerusalem come into your mind.—Sacred memories:—*The captives in Babylon are charged to remember Jerusalem, because the temple of their God was there; to keep them from settling down in Babylon. I. THERE IS A JERUSALEM HERE BELOW WHICH SHOULD COME INTO OUR MIND. The Church of the living God is our holy city, the city of the Great King, and we should have it in mind—1. To unite with its citizens. Join with them in open profession of faith in Christ, in Christian love and mutual help, in holy service, worship, communion, &c. 2. To pray for its prosperity. Our window, like that of Daniel, should be opened towards Jerusalem. 3. To labour for its advancement. Remember it in the allotment of money, use of time, employment of talents, exercise of influence, &c. 4. To prefer its privileges above earthly gain. Consider these privileges in our choice of our residence, occupation, &c. 5. To act consistently with her holy character. God’s people must not degrade His name and cause by living in sin. 6. To lament its declensions and transgressions (Luke xix. 41; Phil. iii. 18). II. THERE IS A JERUSALEM ABOVE WHICH SHOULD COME

INTO OUR MIND. 1. Let the believer's thoughts often go thither, for Jesus is there, our departed brethren are there, our own home is there, and thither our hopes and desires should always tend. It should be upon our minds—(1) In our earthly enjoyments, lest we grow worldly. (2) In our daily trials, lest we grow despondent. (3) In our associations, lest we idolise present friendships. (4) In our bereavements, lest we grieve inordinately. (5) In old age, that we may be on the watch for the home-going. (6) In death, that visions of glory may brighten our last hours. (7) In all seasons, that our conversation may be in heaven. 2. Let the unconverted permit such thoughts to come into their mind, for they may well inquire of themselves thus—(1) What if I never enter heaven? (2) Shall I never meet my godly relatives again? (3) Where then must I go? (4) Can I hope that my present life will lead me to heaven? (5) Why am I not taking the right path? (6) Unbelievers perish: why am I one of them? Do I wish to perish? (7) How can I hope to enter heaven if I do not so much as think about it, or the Lord who reigns in it? (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Longing for heaven*:—It may be a sin to long for death, but I am sure it is no sin to long for heaven. (*Matthew Henry, D.D.*) Blessed are the home-sick, for they shall come at last to the Father's house. (*Heinrich Stillings.*) *Heaven neglected*:—John Eliot was once on a visit to a merchant, and finding him in his counting-house, where he saw books of business on the table, and all his books of devotion on the shelf, he said to him, "Sir, here is earth on the table, and heaven on the shelf. Pray don't think so much of the table as altogether to forget the shelf." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Jerusalem to be enshrined in memory and heart*:—But these captive Jews were not to be despairing Jews. In seventy years their captivity was to end. Meantime, as a resource against discouragement, against the infecting Babylonian evil with which they were to be surrounded, Jeremiah commands these Israelites, "And let Jerusalem come into your minds." Think of what she has been; think of what restored Jerusalem is to be; remember that you are really citizens, not of this Babylon, but of God's Jerusalem; and as citizens of this Jerusalem, even though you be in Babylon, endure, hope, live. Everywhere in Scripture the earthly Jerusalem is the symbol of the heavenly. We have right to generalise. From the fact that whatever God says is to be in this world comes to be, we have reason to believe that whatever God says concerning the other world certainly is. When the Scriptures tell me that the earthly Jerusalem points to a heavenly Jerusalem, because I find God's Word so true about everything in this world, I have right to believe it true about things in that; I have right to believe that there is a heavenly Jerusalem. So let the heavenly Jerusalem come into your minds. 1. Let Jerusalem come into your mind when it seems to you as though life were not worth the living. There is a better life beyond, for which this is preparation. 2. Let Jerusalem come into your mind when you seem to yourself specially baffled. 3. Let Jerusalem come into your mind when the fight with sin is sore and weary. 4. Let Jerusalem come into your mind when death seems complete victor. This is the greatest of questions for each one of us, Have we any title in that Jerusalem? Can we let it come into our minds as our own? (*Homiletic Review.*) *Quickened memories for God's house and worship*:—Jerusalem should come into our mind so that we should prefer its privileges to earthly gain. Whenever we are about to make a settlement in any place, and have the choice of residence left to ourselves, the first matter we have to consider is the religious advantages and disadvantages. I admire the action of that Jew who, when he was about to select a city in which he would pursue his business, asked his friend the rabbi, "Is there a synagogue in such and such a place?" The rabbi replied, "No." So the Jew said, "Then I will not go to live there, for I will not settle in any place where there is no synagogue, for I must gather with my people for the worship of God." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The first place in our thought to be given to Christ's Church*:—The Church of God should come into our minds as spontaneously as the recollection of our wife or mother. When we look at a map of any country, we should think of how the cause of God prospers in that region. If we make a profit in business, one of our first thoughts should be, "Now I can do something more for the work of the Lord." When the newspaper is read, it should be in relation to the progress of the kingdom of God. This one thing should tinge all other things with its own colour, and draw all other thoughts into its net. The cause of Christ should be an all-absorbing maelstrom, into which all our thoughts and pursuits should be drawn. A man of one idea sees the universe by the light of it, and he who loves the Church of God with all

his heart will do the same. How can we say, "Lord, remember me," to Christ in heaven, if we do not remember His Church on earth? *Looking heavenward* :—These words were addressed to the exiled Jews in Babylon, in view of their enfranchisement, and their return to their own country. A four months' journey lay before them, a road infested by savage men and marked by many discomforts had to be trodden, and hence this counsel was given to hearten and comfort the pilgrims. Let the dear place shine before your eyes, let its spell be upon your hearts, and this will relieve the tedium of the journey, make you brave to face the foe, keep you from fainting, and secure the success of your journey. The text is relevant to all times, and especially if we think of the heavenly instead of the earthly Jerusalem. Jesus was always reminding His hearers of the upper universe. Paul admonishes us to "Seek those things which are above." And again and again we are reminded of our fugitive life in this world—we are "strangers," "sojourners," "pilgrims," and are urged to look upward. In recent years there have been those who have disparaged everything in the nature of other-worldliness. I think it was George Eliot who set this modern fashion of condemning attention to the celestial world, but her life was a sad, suggestive commentary on her loss of faith. But George Eliot has had not a few followers in her anti-heavenly propaganda. Rationalists, Agnostics, and Socialists have vetoed the other-worldly life. There was little need for this adjuration. Heaven is one of the most neglected subjects in present-day preaching. The Sunday is not more restful and healing because given up to the consideration of secular subjects; character is not more refined, ethereal, and blessed because men look down instead of up; the world is not richer but poorer for ignoring the Ideal, the Mystical, the Transcendental, the Divine. The grandest souls of the past—noble-tempered, fine-charactered men and women of majestic mien—are thus described: "They looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God." There are three or four reasons why we should earnestly cultivate this other-worldly disposition. I. IT IS NECESSARY FOR OUR SALVATION. The Christian life is one of perpetual peril. We are menaced from every quarter. The microbe is ever on our track, and we need to be on our guard to ward off our foes. But the perils of our body are as nothing compared with our soul-perils. Our danger arises from this present evil world. It is always near us, appealing to us, setting its snares, offering us its bewildering and beguiling baits. It comes, too, in such subtle forms, in the form of a fair-faced friend; it can make use of such attractive things, and sometimes souls are ensnared before they are aware of it. Think of a man living daily in some social circles with their artificialities, their unrealities, white lies, lamentable hypocrisies; or in the world of politics with its "understandings," trickeries, untruths; or in the world of business with its corners, monopolies, injustices, sharp practice! What does it mean? Full often the dulling of the mind, the paralysis of the conscience, ay, it means the heart loses its freshness, and the life its whiteness. And, mark you, it is not that one need voluntarily yield himself up to these blighting phenomena—not to resist is to suffer. Then, what can be done to break the spell of this present world, and ensure our salvation? Let Jerusalem come into your mind, suffer the better world to overshadow the worse world, get into God's own climate, cultivate the heavenly vision. Fetch heaven's light down to earth. Fetch the fresh air of the eternal hills down to this stifling, stagnant scene. Fetch the music of heaven down to this terrestrial sphere. The better saves from the worse. Its glory will be glory no longer, its unreality will be sighted, and he will be saved. It is the far-off look that is needed, a vision of the eternal things which is our salvation. Sir Redvers Buller has told us that in the late war the Boers fought better than our own soldiers, because they had better eyesight, and could see much farther, and no doubt the reason why many Christians are overtaken by spiritual calamities is because they cannot see afar off, they do not lift up their eyes on high. Let us accustom our eyes to see the glories of the New Jerusalem. II. IT IS NECESSARY FOR OUR AMPLIFICATION. Familiarity with the world does not broaden men, but narrows them. "Born a man and died a grocer," says the epitaph, and the shrinkage of a soul is one of the painfullest features of life. Many people feel they are sadly caged up, with no poetry, romance, interests, change in their lives. Well, what are we to do? How to make life broader? Thank God, we have an answer—annex heaven. "Reinforce," says one, "this world with the world which is to come. What do they do in an inland state that is surrounded by other countries, and cramped in on

every side? They fight to get down to the sea. Give a country only a few miles, and it is satisfied. Why? Because it will build a harbour there, and it will make ships there, and the enterprising spirits of the nation will man the ships, and the ships will go to the ends of the earth, carrying out such poor things as they have to send, but bringing home untold treasures. That single harbour holds the whole earth in its grasp." It is even so in our spiritual life. When I am linked with the skies, when I do commerce with heaven my life cannot be petty, narrow, insignificant. I am not lost in my trade, business, profession, nor does my soul undergo any shrinkage. Nay, I do my buying and selling, my getting and spending, in the eyes of heaven. A literary lady who went to consult an oculist about her eyes was told that her eye-weariness and brain-jadedness would pass away if she would now and then pause from her work, and sight the glorious hills in the distance, and she found it so. Is not this what we sorely need to save our life from getting cramped by what is sordid and petty—pauses to look away from life's manifold engagements to the bright-topped hills of immortality? It is ours, like the apostle at Patmos, to see the fair city of our King, to fraternise with the denizens of the skies, to consort with God Himself, and to do this is to find the grandest emancipation. III. IT IS NECESSARY TO OUR CONSOLATION. He was a wise professor who used to say to his students when going to preach. "Never fail in any service to have at least a word of comfort." There is a sore, if not a broken, heart in every religious assembly. Existence were a poor mockery if this world were all. To how many life is just one long bitter struggle. Think of those, the bruised and broken, who are on their back all their days; think of those who, through no fault of their own, are face to face with poverty most of their time; think of those who have been overtaken by a black bereavement with tragic suddenness; think of those who are left orphans when young, and are at the mercy of an unfeeling world; think of those who have secret trials—trials of which they never whisper even to their dearest friends; think of those who, in trying to live the Christian life, are sorely buffeted! Where is the compensation? This: "Let Jerusalem come into your mind." Think of it as the place where all life's wrongs will be ended, where the weary-footed will lay aside their sandals, and the weary-hearted will find sweet rest, where the homeless will find a home, where the broken circles will be re-formed, and where the miseries of a lifetime will be forgotten in the first moment of hallowed bliss. IV. IT IS NECESSARY TO OUR INSPIRATION. One of our primary needs is inspiration, we so soon begin to flag and lose heart. It is needful for the maintenance of our ideals, for the shaping of a holy character, to keep us steadfast in the midst of strife and sorrow. It is painful to note how that when men forget the heavenward look, they drift from the golden life, part with their noble dreams, sink beneath their troubles, and fall into bondage to a sensuous life. There are wrecks on all sides of us—Demases who have loved this present world. "We surmount the flesh by ascending with Christ to the realm of the spirit. In those who are occupied with Christ and His kingdom, who 'set their mind on the things above where Christ is,' carnal passions cease to be nourished, the former channels of thought and desire are left bare and dry, the man's soul is caught by a keener excitement and a mightier current, he is drawn into the orbit of the Sun of Righteousness. He is absorbed in the great and entrancing things of God, and the old frivolities can no longer divert him." The same is true of every other phase of our earth-life. This was the temper of Moses, and it heartened him for the most prodigious tasks. "He looked for the recompense of the reward." This was the temper of the old-world pilgrims, "they desired a better country, that is a heavenly." The saints of God, the men for whom duty, religion, faith, love, character, possess their full meaning, are known by this far-away look, this detachment of spirit. At the bottom of their souls is a Divine home-sickness for the Eternal—and this made them spiritual stalwarts. This, also, was the temper of Jesus. Never for a moment did He forget the Father, the will, the home, the friendship and fellowship of the Father, "I speak unto you the things that I have seen with the Father," "I go to My Father." And a share of His glory He assured to all His faithful followers. I have read somewhere of a bewildered party on a mountain. Pressing on in the blinding snow, the track lost and the cold increasing, one of them at last in sheer fatigue sank down to die. His friends coaxed him, urged him, expostulated with him so as to get him forward, but all to no purpose. But some one took from his pocket a picture of wife and children, and showed it to him. That was enough; what coaxing

and threats failed to effect was done in an instant by that vision of the far-off home. He at once threw off the death-drowse that was so surely embracing him, and rousing himself with the new power that came from that vision, he pushed forward with his friends to a place of safety. And our Divine Leader, when we are flagging and wearying, gives us pictures of the heavenly home to hearten us. (*J. Pearce.*)

CHAPTER LII.

VER. 11. *He put out the eyes of Zedekiah.—Zedekiah the prisoner:—*Here is no mystery. A wicked man, unfaithful to a very sacred trust, ending his days in darkness and a prison (Psa. xxxvii. 35). The son of the good Josiah, whose name suggests thoughts of early piety and godly patriotism, degenerate, idolatrous, and in the end eyeless and captive, pining away years of monotonous misery in a Babylonish dungeon—it is all according to that law which God has stamped on the world, “Your sin will find you out.” It has been said of him that he was a man “not so much bad at heart as weak in will.” “He was one of those unfortunate characters,” it has been said, “frequent in history, like our own Charles I. and Louis XVI. of France, who find themselves at the head of affairs during a great crisis, without having the strength of character to enable them to do what they know to be right, and whose infirmity becomes moral guilt.” That he was weak in will and purpose we see in the manner in which he surrendered Jeremiah to the princes who sought his life (Jer. xxxviii. 3). But he was “bad at heart” likewise. His heart was not right towards the Lord God of his father—self and the world and idols were the objects of his affection, and after them he would go. Warning succeeded warning in vain. For eleven years the struggle lasted between this wicked prince and the voice which came to him from the God of heaven. And the Jerusalem of his day may be described as the Sodom of an earlier day—

Long warned, long spared, till her whole heart was foul,
And fiery vengeance on its clouds came nigh.

Vengeance came in another form than that in which it fell on those cities over whose ashes the waves of the Dead Sea now roll, and yet scarcely less terrible. The Babylonian siege lasted sixteen months (liii. 4), and the miseries of Jerusalem were only less than those endured in the siege by the Roman Titus, seven centuries after. The calamities which befell the royal family are recorded with an undisguised bluntness (vers. 8–11). What a catalogue of horrors! But all in keeping with the character of the people. They had been described to the very life at an earlier stage of the ministry of Jeremiah (vi. 22, 23). This witness is true. The very stones, stones carved with their own hands, have been disinterred from the grave of ages, to bear testimony to the truth of the histories and prophecies of the Bible. Instead of being ashamed of the barbarities in which they indulged, the Assyrians (and in this we need make no distinction between the Assyrians and the Chaldeans) gloried in them, and employed the arts of sculpture and painting to perpetuate the memory of their cruel deeds. On the relics of their civilisation, now exhibited in our own museums and places of public resort, we find cities which have surrendered represented as given up to indiscriminate slaughter and the flames. The kings themselves took part in perpetrating the cruelties which are brought to light by recently discovered sculptures. On one of these sculptures a king is represented as thrusting out the eyes of a kneeling captive with his own spear, and holding with his own hand the cord which is inserted into the lips and nostrils of this and two other prisoners. The spirit which possessed the Assyrians and Babylonians may be traced through later ages in the same lands. One of the best of the Roman emperors, Valerian, was taken prisoner in battle in the third century by a Persian king, who detained him in hopeless bondage, and paraded him in chains, invested with the imperial purple, as a constant spectacle of fallen greatness, to the multitude. Whenever the proud conqueror mounted his horse, he placed his foot upon the neck of the Roman emperor. “Nor was this all; for when Valerian sank under the weight of his shame and grief, his corpse was flayed, and the skin, stuffed with straw, was preserved for ages in the most celebrated temple of Persia.” Would that such things as these could be told only of Eastern

lands! But Western story is full of them likewise. The conflicts of the Moors and so-called Christians in Spain, from the eighth century, the age of Moorish conquest, to the sixteenth, the age of their final expulsion from Europe, contains histories of cruelty, perhaps, to be rivalled nowhere else—cruelty in which the so-called Christian luxuriated as much as his Moslem enemy. This spirit attained its highest point of intensity and barbarity in the same land in the Inquisition, strangely called the Holy Office, by which sheer torture was invoked to root out Judaism, and every form and shade of Christianity except that of the Roman Church. The appliances of rude barbarians, like American Indians, and of civilised barbarians, like Assyrians and Chaldeans, are not to compare with the appliances which the Inquisition perfected through its ages of murder. But to return to the Babylonish cruelties on the person and family of the Hebrew king. “The King of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes.” How many or how old they were, we are not told. The father being now only two-and-thirty years old, his sons must have been boys. And ungodly as the father was, there is no sign in his life of any want of natural affection, while there is sign of his sensibility to the sufferings of others. To put his sons to death before his eyes was an act of wanton cruelty, designed to give him the utmost possible pain. Then were put to death the princes of Judah, who must now recall with bitterness, if not with repentance, their long and obstinate resistance to the Divine counsels, and their own hard-hearted attempt on the life of the prophet Jeremiah. His sons dead, and the princes dead, the king himself must now submit to the cruel sentence of his conqueror—a sentence more barbarous than death itself. His eyes were put out. The process is revealed to us in a bas-relief, to which I have already referred, in which the conquering king is digging out the eyes of the conquered king with a spear. The King of Babylon may have done this with his own hands to the King of Judah, or by the hands of another. In either case the conquered had no alternative but to submit. And thus blinded he is carried to the prison on the banks of the Euphrates in which he must end his days. Two predictions were thus fulfilled—one by Jeremiah xxxii. 5, addressed to the king in person, and one by Ezekiel xii. 13, who was with the captives which had been carried to Babylon some years before. The Word of the Lord was not broken. The King of Judah saw the King of Babylon’s eyes with his eyes, but it was the last vision which his eyes saw. The city of Babylon he saw not, though he was doomed to be imprisoned in it and to die there. When Zedekiah reached Babylon, there was already a King of Judah imprisoned there. His nephew, the son of his elder brother Jehoiakim, had been dethroned, as we have seen, after a brief reign of three months and ten days, and had been carried into exile with many of his princes and subjects (Jer. xxix.). That he was still alive when his uncle and successor, blind and childless, arrived in the city of their enemy, we know—for the last sentences of the Book of Jeremiah tell us what befell him many years later. One wonders whether the two dethroned Kings of Judah, uncle and nephew, ever met in the land of their imprisonment, and had opportunity of talking over the events which had involved them in so great a disaster. If they had, did they curse the God of their fathers, or did they learn, as some of these fathers had done in the day of their adversity, to humble themselves and seek forgiveness? Their great predecessor, Solomon, in dedicating the temple which Babylon had now laid waste, had prayed (1 Kings viii. 46–50). Imagine Jehoiakim reading these words out of the book of the law to his blind uncle Zedekiah. Imagine them recalling the history of the great-grandfather of the elder of them—how Manasseh had done evil exceedingly; how the King of Assyria had bound him with fetters and carried him to Babylon; and how, when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord (2 Chron. xxxiii. 12). Thus encouraged to repent and seek forgiveness, the royal prisoners may have bent the knee together before the throne of the heavenly grace, and pled the promises which had been given so often to the penitent. And if they presented thus the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart in their prison-house, we know that mercy was not withheld. We find one little word which encourages hope. “There shall he be till I visit him, saith the Lord” (xxxii. 5). God visits men with judgment; but this He had done to Zedekiah before he reached his prison in Babylon. God visits men with favour, with compassion, with restoring mercy: was it thus He said He should visit Zedekiah in Babylon? I doubt not that the words “until I visit him” were meant to be indefinite and obscure, but were meant at the same time to give assurance to the king that in Babylon he should not be beyond the reach of God, whether for good or evil.

"Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide in secret places, that I shall not see him, saith the Lord?" (Jer. xxiii. 23, 24.) Jehovah was a God at hand in Jerusalem, but equally a God in Babylon afar off. The throne of Judah was exposed to His eye, but equally so the most secret place in the Babylonish prison. And God would visit Zedekiah in his exile and prison. This assurance might be a terror or a joy. If the king hoped that, being in Babylon, he was now away from the presence of Jehovah and under the rule of other gods, and had nothing more to fear, let him know that Jehovah should visit him even there. If he feared that, being in Babylon, he should be beyond the reach of the mercy of the God of his fathers, let him know, to his heart's joy, that Jehovah should visit him even in that far-off land. (*J. Kennedy, D.D.*)

Vers. 31-34. *Lifted up the head of Jehoiachin.*—*Jehoiachin's change of fortune.*—What changes may occur in life: who can tell what we may come to? After thirty-seven years there arose a king who took a fancy to Jehoiachin, and made quite a favourite of him in the court. Good fortune is often tardy in coming to men; we are impatient, we want to be taken out of prison to-day, and set among kings at once, and to have all our desires gratified fully, and especially at once. See what has befallen Jehoiachin. For the first time for seven-and-thirty years the man of authority has spoken kindly to him. Kind words have different values at different times; sometimes a kind word would be a fortune—if not a fortune in the hand, a fortune in the way of stimulating imagination, comforting disconsolateness, and so pointing to the sky that we could see only its real blue beauties, its glints of light, its hints of coming day. When we have an abundant table, what do we care for an offered crust? that crust may be regarded by our sated appetite as an insult: but when the table is bare, and hunger is gnawing, and thirst is consuming, what then is a crust of bread, or a draught of water? More men hunger for kind words than for bread. There is a hunger of the heart. Here is an office we can all exercise. Where we cannot give much that is described as substantial we can speak kindly, we can look benignantly, we can conduct ourselves as if we would relieve the burden if we could: thus life would be multiplied, brightened, sweetened, a great comforting sense of Divine nearness would fall upon our whole consciousness, and we should enter into the possession and the mystery of heavenly peace. See what fortune has befallen Jehoiachin! After thirty-seven years he is recognised as king and gentleman and friend, and has kind words spoken to him in a kind of domestic music. Was not all this worth living for? What have we been doing in thus dwelling upon the good fortune of Jehoiachin? We have been playing the fool. We have been reckoning up social precedences, better clothes, and abundance of food; and we have been adding up how much the man must have worn and eaten and drunken within the twenty-four hours, and all the while the king looking at him benignantly, speaking to him as an equal, dealing out to him kind words,—the whole constituting an ineffable insult. Yet how prone we are to add up circumstances, and to speak of social relations as if they constituted the sum-total of life. Now look at realities. Jehoiachin was in his heart a bad man. That is written upon the face of the history of the kings of Judah, and not a single word is said about his change of heart; and bad men cannot have good fortune. He has been taken out of prison in the narrow sense of the term, his head has been lifted up, a place of precedence has been accorded him at the royal table, and his bread and water have been made sure for the rest of his days: what a delightful situation! No. Jehoiachin at his best was only a decorated captive; he was still in Babylon. That is the sting. Not what have we, but where are we, is heaven's piercing inquiry. Not how great the barns; state the height, the width, the depth, the cubic measure of the barns; but, What wheat have we in the heart, what bread in the soul, what love-wine for the spirit's drinking? (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *A captor's magnanimity and generous dealing.*—At the battle of Poitiers the Black Prince defeats and captures the French King John II. That night the Prince of Wales (the Black Prince) made a supper in his lodging for the French king and to the great lords that were prisoners. "And always the prince served before the king, as humbly as he could, and would not sit at the king's board, for any desire that the king could make, and exhorted him not to be of heavy cheer, for that King Edward, his father, should bear him all honour and amity, and accord with him so reasonably that they should be friends ever after." . . . This scene, so gracefully performed by him who, a few hours before, was

"courageous and cruel as a lion," was in perfect accordance with the system of chivalry. (*Knight's England.*) **And spake kindly unto him.**—*Kindness* :—To be kind is "to be disposed to do good to others, and to make them happy"; and kindness is "that temper or disposition which delights in contributing to the happiness of others." I. Much depends on OUR SPIRIT AND DISPOSITION—well-nigh everything; for a kindly spirit or disposition will always be finding ways of showing itself. II. **BE KIND IN YOUR THOUGHTS ONE TO ANOTHER.** To have pure streams you must have a pure fountain; and if we think unkindly of people, we shall not be likely to speak or act kindly towards them. Some people rob their own hearts of peace and sweetness, and destroy in themselves all nobility of character, because they have got into the sad, sinful habit of always looking for the faults and failings of others, and attributing to them wrong motives. III. **BE KIND IN YOUR SPEECH ONE TO ANOTHER.** Words are little things and soon spoken, but they carry much with them. They have power to give great joy or bitter sorrow; they may nestle in the heart a very benediction, cherished to the dying day as an inspiration to all that is good; or they may rankle in the breast, fostering a bitterness which goes down to the grave. "Kind words can never die." IV. **DO KIND ACTS ONE TO ANOTHER.** Every day brings opportunities. Keep a look-out for them. (*R. M. Spoor.*) **Every day a portion.**—*The daily portion* :—If the King of Babylon did thus for a captive king, his prisoner, will your Heavenly Father do less for you? He created you to need the daily portion, and cannot be oblivious of His own constitution of your nature. You wind up your watch each day, because you know that otherwise it will stop; and God will not be less thoughtful of your constant need of reinforcement. His faithfulness guarantees that there always will be the portion of good for the body; always the portion of love and light for the soul; always the portion of Holy Spirit quickening for the spirit. It is easier to die once than to live always. It is not easy to meet the continual demand of recurrent duty; not easy to live a full and strong life, that never dips below the horizon, or sinks in the fountain-basin. But it is possible, when the soul has learnt to leave all care with God, waiting on Him for the supply of all its needs, and esteeming that He is the only really satisfactory portion we need. "Neither prison walls, nor locks, nor the cruelty of man," said some imprisoned suffering soul, "can obstruct the issues of the Lord's love nor the manifestation of His presence, which is our joy and comfort, and carries us above all sufferings, and makes days and hours and years pleasant to us; which pass away as a moment, because of the enjoyment of seeing Him with whom a thousand years is but as one day." Those who can trust God in these directions are not only abundantly satisfied of His great goodness, but are able to send portions to others. Like the disciples, they share out their slender supplies and get twelve baskets full in return. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) **All the days of his life.**—*A good income for life* :—This paragraph describes the providential dealings of the Lord with Jehoiachin by the instrumentality of Evil-merodach, the son of Nebuchadnezzar, who was then King of Babylon; yet the successive items of those dealings are so expressive that they seem almost to force themselves upon the mind in a spiritual form, and therefore I shall accommodate those items to spiritual things. I. **THE DEALINGS OF THE LORD AS HERE SET BEFORE US**, with Jehoiachin, king, as he should have been, of Judah, but for thirty-seven years a captive. Now, however, the time came for him to be released. First, then, "Evil-merodach, King of Babylon, lifted up the head of Jehoiachin," that is, gave him a hope of deliverance. This is the first item. Now it is sin "which hath brought us down," and when a sinner is made acquainted with his state as a sinner, he feels then that his heart and soul are bowed down, and he can in no wise lift up himself. Faith brings in the Redeemer in His perfection; there is an end to our sin and our folly; by faith in Him we may lift up our heads and meet the smiles of heaven; we shall meet, by faith in Him, the approbation of heaven, the light of Jehovah's countenance; we shall thus meet our great Creator as our covenant God, dwelling between the cherubim, and He will shine forth. Here, then, we may say with David, "Thou art my glory, and the lifter up of mine head." If, then, we would lift up our heads, it must be by Jesus Christ; that is, by His wisdom, not by our own; except that our wisdom consisteth in the feeling our foolishness, and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as that way in which we may rise, and do at times rise as eagles; run, and are not weary; walk, and shall not faint. Second, he brought him forth out of prison. Here we have another Gospel blessing to go with us all the days of our life. Jesus Christ came into the prison of our law responsibility;

He became a debtor to do the whole law; and He hath preceptively, actively, and passively magnified the law. He has gone to the end of our law responsibility, and has suffered all that sin has entailed. He has done a great deal more spiritually than Evil-merodach, King of Babylon, did literally. He brought forth Jehoiachin out of prison, but our Jesus Christ has destroyed our prison; there is no prison left. The Son of God has made you free; let us stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and that all the days of our lives. So, then, He lifts up our heads, and we are free. The next thing the king did was a very wonderful thing, an extraordinary, out-of-the-way, uncommon thing—an unheard-of, an unseen thing almost. And what was that? Why, "spake kindly unto him" all the days of his life. So our God. He spake kindly unto us when He called us by His grace, and He has spoken kindly unto us ever since, and He will speak kindly unto us all the days of our life; and there will be no danger afterwards, because no manner of cause will exist after the end of this life for there to be anything but kindness. The law of kindness is the mightiest power in existence; it will do what nothing else can. But, fourth, Jehoiachin's throne was set "above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon." How expressive is this! The Christian has a higher throne than the highest men in this world. Then, fifth, "he changed his prison garments." So the Lord has promised to give His people the oil of joy for mourning; the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. But in the last place—and all these things put together seem to amount to perfection itself—"he did continually eat bread before the king all the days of his life." So we are brought before God and into the presence of God, and as long as Jesus Christ remains in the presence of God, so long shall His people remain. Jehoiachin was associated in eating with the king; that is to say, he partook of the same food, or he delighted in the same things, the same provisions, the same pleasant fruits. Now the things the people of God live upon are the testimonies of the Gospel in Christ. II. THE DURATION OF THESE BLESSINGS. First, then, his head was lifted up all the days of his life. Look at it, Christian, what a good life you have before you! You have the Holy Spirit to keep you believing in Jesus Christ; the day will never come when you shall not lift up your head to God. You have before you Jesus Christ, the lifter up of your head; the day will never come when He will cease to love you. "Having loved His own, He loved them unto the end." You have God the Father, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Ah, then, let me say, if circumstances of affliction or adversity should be such that you can lift up your head nowhere else you can lift up your head there; there is a God that will sustain, that will bear, that will carry to old age, to hoar hairs, and will deliver. And so he was brought out of prison; and we are made free all the days of our life. There never will be when we shall not have liberty in Christ; there never will be when we are not free there. There we may lift up our heads, because the Saviour has put down into eternal silence everything that is against us. And the king spake kindly unto him all the days of his life. Circumstances are like the clouds—not in one shape, nor in one form, nor one height, nor one colour, nor one position, for a day, or half a day, or half an hour sometimes; but the glorious truths of the Gospel—His kindness—still the same. And he set his throne above the kings of Babylon all the days of his life. I want a religion that places my foot upon the lion, upon the adder, upon the young lion, upon the dragon, and enables me to trample the whole under foot. Here, then, is a God that lifts up your head for life, that sets you free for life, speaks kindly to you all the days of your life, will keep you enthroned all the days of your life; you shall reign like a king, and your throne unshaken stands; you shall wear the royal robe all the days of your life, and be sustained all the days of your life. What more can you want? III. SEVERAL SCRIPTURES BY WHICH THESE THINGS ARE VERY STRIKINGLY AND BEAUTIFULLY EXEMPLIFIED. I will notice three different Scriptures where we have the words of our text named, "All the days of his life." David upon this subject saith, "Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." What goodness and mercy? First, pastoral goodness and mercy. "He maketh me to lie down," not in dry, but "in green pastures," new covenant promises; "He leadeth me beside the still waters," the deep mysteries of His wondrous kingdom; pastoral kindness, and restorative and directive goodness and mercy. "He restoreth my soul." I am sick, wretched, and miserable; He restores me to health; cast down, weary, everything against me; He restores me again. "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness," paths of faith, righteousness of faith; "for His name's sake"; directive and restorative

goodness and mercy. Also accompaniment goodness and mercy. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." And then comes provisional goodness and mercy; "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." Go from the 23rd to the 27th Psalm. "One thing have I desired of the Lord"; "that will I seek after." To be so good and pious that all the world should admire you? No, that is self-righteousness; no, "that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life." Well, what are you going to do? "To behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple. For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion"; His royal pavilion, the place of His royal authority; and if I have God on my side in His sovereign authority, who can be against me? "In the secret of His tabernacle shall He hide me"; where the mercy-seat is, that is where I like to be, He shall set me upon a rock. And what then? "Now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me; therefore I will offer in His tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the Lord." One more Scripture upon this subject. Zacharias, in the 1st of Luke, saith, "That we might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life." Here carefully note how Zacharias comes into possession of that holiness and that righteousness by which he knew he should serve the Lord acceptably all the days of his life. He saith, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed His people," "and hath raised up an horn of salvation." Oh, then, if you are going to get this holiness by faith in Christ's eternal redemption, I will come with you. "As He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began." So here is redemption, and here is salvation. Well, that redemption brings holiness, and brings in everlasting righteousness. Salvation brings holiness, and brings in everlasting righteousness. "To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant; the oath which He sware to our father Abraham," saying, "In thee and in thy seed," Christ Jesus, "shall all the families of the earth be blessed." So, then, Zacharias got this holiness and righteousness by faith in the redemption, salvation, mercy, and covenant of Christ, and the oath of God. Now, in conclusion, if you lose sight of all the rest, do pay attention to the spirit in which Zacharias desired all the days of his life to serve God. I do not think there is any Scripture more expressive of the feeling of the right-minded than that there given. "That He would grant unto us," &c. How different this from the spirit in which people suppose that they do God a great favour, and that they merit great things at His hands, by a little formal service! But Zacharias looked at being admitted into the faith, the service of faith, the service of that faith that receives Christ as the end of sin, and thereby you serve God in Christ as your sanctification and your justification—Zacharias looked upon that as a Divine grant; "that He would grant unto us to serve Him in holiness and in righteousness all the days of our life." (*Jas. Wells.*)