

THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.

**THE LAMENTATIONS OF
JEREMIAH.**

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OR

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

BY

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THE LAMENTATIONS OF
JEREMIAH.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH.

THE TITLE OF THE BOOK.—We are so familiar with the title which implies Jeremiah's authorship that it would surprise most readers of the English Bible to learn that, as the Book stands in the Hebrew text, it is absolutely anonymous. Its only title there is, as with Genesis and Exodus, the opening word of the Book (*Echah*). (*Dean Plumptre*.) The title in the versions is taken from the general nature of the contents; thus the LXX called these poems *θρήνοι*, *Threni*, i.e. Dirges, and the Syr. and Vulg., *Lamentations*. In the Hebrew Bible the Lamentations are arranged among the Cethubim, or holy writings, because of the nature of their contents: the Lamentations as being lyrical poetry are classed not with prophecies, but with the Psalms and Proverbs. This classification is probably later than the translation of the LXX, who have appended the Lamentations to Jeremiah's prophecy, inserting between them the apocryphal book of Baruch, and in fact counting the three as only one book. (*Dean Payne Smith*.) The fuller title, *Lamentations of Jeremiah*, is found in the Syriac and in some MSS. of the LXX, but is not so old as the shorter form. (*Chambers's Encyclopædia*.)

THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE BOOK.—The tradition which attributes the authorship to Jeremiah can be traced to a note prefixed to the LXX translation ["and it came to pass, after Israel was led into captivity, and Jerusalem laid waste, that Jeremiah sat weeping, and lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem, and said . . ."]. Perhaps, indeed, this tradition is already implied in 2 Chron. xxxv. 25, in which case the supposed reference to Josiah must be sought in Lam. iv. 20. The internal evidence is rather against the attribution of the Book of Lamentations to the prophet. Nägelsbach, following Ewald, has shown how completely different is its style from that of Jeremiah; some of the indications that were at one time supposed to make for his authorship disappear on closer examination, and the anticipated restoration of Israel is somewhat dissimilar in the two works. (*Chambers's Encyclopædia*.) It is admitted generally that the elegies must have been written by one or more persons in or near the times in which Jeremiah lived. The situation is indicated, e.g., in chap. ii. 9, iv. 20; the city in ruins and the king in captivity; and the whole burden of the Book is the outpouring of grief under a crushing present calamity. The "ninth of Ab" is a dark day in the Jewish calendar; and no book in the Old Testament Canon exhibits more pathetically than this the patriotic attachment of the race to their city and land, and the intense emotion which was excited by the ruin that came upon the people through their unfaithfulness. (*James Robertson, D.D.*)

THE FORM AND CONTENTS OF THE BOOK.—The Book consists of five elegies or lamentations, each occupying a chapter, and all referring to one subject, the destruction of Jerusalem, which it dwells upon and presents from different sides. 1. The "lament" or elegy was a well-known form of composition (see Amos v. 1, 2; Isa. xiv. 4-21; 2 Sam. i. 17-27, iii. 33, 34; Jer. ix. 10, 17-21; Ezek. xxvi. 17, 18, and observe the frequency and impressiveness of the *How!*) 2. The different aspects of the great common theme are in a manner indicated in the opening verse of each chapter, thus: (i. 1) "How doth the city sit solitary!"—the desolation of Jerusalem; (ii. 1) "How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger!"—the cause of the calamity, God's anger; (iii. 1) "I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of His wrath"—the nation personified takes the affliction to heart; (iv. 1) "How is the gold become dim!"—contrast between the present and the past; (v. 1) "Remember, O Lord, what is come upon us,"—the nation's appeal to the nation's God. 3. The literary form of these five elegies has been artistically constructed. It will be observed that each of the chapters, except iii., consists of twenty-two verses, and that chap. iii. contains three times twenty-two, or sixty-six verses. Now, there are twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet; and all the chapters, except the last, are alphabetical—i.e. the verses are made to begin in succession with the successive letters, one verse being given to each letter in chaps. i., ii., and iv., and three successive verses to one letter in chap. iii. Chap. v., though not alphabetical, is made to consist of twenty-two verses. The length of the line and of the verse (what in an English poem we should call the metre) varies also in the different chapters, as may be perceived in the arrangement of the R.V. (James Robertson, D.D.) Our estimate of the excellence of the poems thus written will depend on our insight into the working of strong emotions on the poetic temperament, on our power of throwing ourselves into mental sympathy with such a one as Jeremiah. A superficial and pedantic criticism finds it easy to look down on the alphabetic structure as indicating a genius of an inferior order, and the taste of a degenerate age (so De Wette, *Comment. über die Psalm.*, p. 56, and even Ewald, *Poet. Buch.*, i. p. 140), or to allow condescendingly that they are "not without a certain degree of merit in their way" (De Wette, as above). A wider induction from the literature of all nations and ages leads, however, to a different conclusion. The man in whom the poetic gift is found fears, it would seem, to trust himself to an unregulated freedom. He accepts the discipline of a self-imposed law just in proportion to the vehemence of his emotions. The metrical systems of Greek and Latin poetry, with all their endless complications, hexameters, elegiacs, lyrics, the alliterative verse of Anglo-Saxon writers, the rhymes of mediæval Latin and of modern European poetry in general, the rigid structure of the sonnet, as seen in the great Italian poets and their imitators, the *terza rima* of the "Divina Commedia," and the yet more artificial structure of the *canzoni* and *ballate* of Dante, the stanzas of the "Faerie Queen," are all instances of the working of the same general law of which we find a representative example in the *Lamentations*. There are, of course, instances enough in all literature of the form without the spirit, but enough has been said to show that the choice of an artificial method of versification such as this does not necessarily imply anything weak or artificial in the genius of the writer. In the absence of rhyme and of definite metrical laws in Hebrew poetry it was natural that it should be chosen as supplying at once the restraint and the support which the prophet needed. The alphabetic structure had also another advantage as a guide to memory. If, as seems probable, the *Lamentations* were intended to be sung, as in fact they were sung by those who mourned then, or in later times, for the destruction of Jerusalem, then it is obvious that the task of the learner would be much easier with this mnemonic help than without it. (Dean Plumptre.)

THE UNITY OF THE BOOK.—While there is comparative agreement amongst modern critics that Jeremiah is not the author, there has been much diversity of opinion as to the number of authors whose work is to be traced in the Book. W. R. Smith argued strongly that the Book is a unity, but the prevailing tendency at present is decidedly adverse to this opinion. It is pretty generally agreed that at least chap. iii. is by a different and later hand than the rest. (J. A. Selbie, M.A.) *Liturgical use*:—The Book of Lamentations has always been much used in liturgical services as giving the spiritual aspect of sorrow. It is recited

in the Jewish synagogues on the 9th of Ab, the day on which the temple was destroyed. In the Church of England the whole of chap. iii. and portions of chaps. i., ii., and iv. are read in Holy Week. For this choice two chief reasons may be given : the first, that in the wasted city and homeless wanderings of the chosen people we see an image of the desolation and ruin of the soul cast away because of sin from God's presence into the outer darkness ; the second and chief, because the mournful words of the prophet set Him before us who has borne the chastisement due to human sin, and of whom we think instinctively as we pronounce the words of i. 12. (*Dean Payne Smith.*)

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LAMENTATIONS.

CHAPTER I.

VER. 1. That was full of people!—*Reverses of fortune* :—The picture in this verse is strong by contrasts : solitary, and full of people ; a widow, once a queen great among the nations ; a princess receiving homage, now stooping in the act of paying tribute to a higher power. No nest is built so high that God's lightning may not strike it. To human vision, it certainly does appear impossible that certain estates can ever be turned to desolation ; the owners are so full of health and high spirits, and they apparently have so much reason to congratulate themselves upon the exercise of their own sagacity and strength, that it would really appear as if no bolt could shatter the castle of their greatness. Yet that castle we have seen torn down, until there was not one stone left upon another. We are only strong in proportion as we spend our strength for others, and only rich in proportion as we invest our gold in the cause of human beneficence. The ruins of history ought to be monitors and guides to those who take a large view of human life. Is not the whole of human history a succession of ruins ? Where is Greece ? Rome ? proud Babylon ? the Seven Churches of Asia ? We do not despair when we look at the ruins which strew antiquity ; we rather reason that certain institutions have served their day, and what was good in them has been transferred into surviving activities. In the text, however, we have no question of ruin that comes by the mere lapse of time. Such ruin as is here depicted expresses a great moral catastrophe. Judah did not go into captivity because of her excellency or faithfulness ; she was driven into servitude because of her disobedience to her Lord. What was true of Judah will be true of every man amongst us. No man can sin, and prosper. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Changes in the outward estate of the Church* :—1. God often alters the outward estate of His Church in this world. (1) That He may daily declare Himself the disposer and governor of all things. (2) To take from us all occasions of promising ourselves any certainty here. Therefore let us prepare ourselves to all conditions (Phil. iv. 11, 12) ; settle our affections on heaven and the things that lead thereto. 2. It is our duty to strive with ourselves to be affected with the miseries of God's people (2 Chron. xi. 23, 29). For we are fellow-members of one body, whereof Christ is the Head (1 Cor. xii. 25, 26). (1) This reproves those who seek only their own good. (2) It teaches us to put on tender compassion and labour to profit the whole Church and every member thereof. 3. God sometimes giveth His Church an outward estate that flourisheth both in wealth and peace. (1) That He may give His people a taste even of all kinds of earthly blessings (Deut. xxviii. 2 ; Psa. lxxxiv. 11). (2) That they may have all opportunity to serve Him, and every kind of encouragement thereto. 4. The outward flourishing state of God's Church lasts not always, but is often changed into affliction and adversity. 5. God often changes the condition of His servants in this life from one extreme to another. Joseph ; Job ; Israel. (1) That His mighty power may appear to all. (2) That we may learn to ascribe all to Him. 6. It is a great blessing of God for a nation to be populous (Gen. xii. 2). 7. God often makes His people in their prosperity most admired of all. (1) That He may show Himself to love His servants. (2) That the godly may know that godliness is not

without reward. (3) That the wicked may have all excuse taken from them, in that they are not allured by such notable spectacles of God's love to them that fear Him. 8. God often humbles His servants under all His foes and their adversaries, because of their disobedience to His word (Deut. xxviii. 30). (1) This shows us how great God's anger is for sin. (2) This teaches us not to measure the favour of God towards ourselves or others by the blessings or adversities of this life. (*J. Udall.*) **How is she become as a widow!—Desolation.**—It would not be just to read into the image of widowhood ideas collected from utterances of the prophets about the wedded union of Israel and her Lord; we have no hint of anything of the sort here. Apparently the image is selected in order to express the more vividly the utter lonesomeness of the city. It is clear that the attribute "solitary" has no bearing on the external relations of Jerusalem—her isolation among the Syrian hills, or the desertion of her allies, mentioned a little later (ver. 2); it points to a more ghostly solitude, streets without traffic, tenantless houses. The widow is solitary because she has been robbed of her children. And in this, her desolation, "she sits." The attitude, so simple and natural and easy under ordinary circumstances, here suggests a settled continuance of wretchedness; it is helpless and hopeless. The first wild agony of the severance of the closest natural ties has passed, and with it the stimulus of conflict; now there has supervened the dull monotony of despair. It is a fearful thing simply to sit in sorrow. The mourner sits "in the night," while the world around lies in the peace of sleep. The darkness has fallen, yet she does not stir, for day and night are alike to her—both dark. In this dread night of misery her one occupation is weeping. The mourner knows how the hidden fountains of tears which have been sealed to the world for the day will break out in the silent solitude of night; then the bravest will "wet his couch with his tears." The forlorn woman "weepeth sore"; to use the expressive Hebraism, "weeping she weepeth." "Her tears are on her cheeks"; they are continually flowing; she has no thought of drying them; there is no one else to wipe them away. This is not the frantic torrent of youthful tears, soon to be forgotten in sudden sunshine, like a spring shower; it is the dreary winter rain, falling more silently, but from leaden clouds that never break. The woe of Jerusalem is intensified by reason of its contrast with the previous splendour of the proud city. This thought of a tremendous fall gives the greatest force to the portrait. It is Rembrandtesque; the black shadows on the foreground are the deeper because they stand sharply out against the brilliant radiance that streams in from the sunset of the past. The pitiablelessness of the comfortless present lies in this, that there had been lovers whose consolations would now have been a solace; the bitterness of the enmity now experienced is its having been distilled from the dregs of poisoned friendship. Against the protests of her faithful prophets Jerusalem had courted alliance with her heathen neighbours, only to be cruelly deserted in her hour of need. It is the old story of friendship with the world, keenly accentuated in the life of Israel, because this favoured people had already seen glimpses of a rich, rare privilege, the friendship of heaven. This is the irony of the situation; it is the tragic irony of all Hebrew history. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*)

Ver. 2. She weepeth sore in the night.—Lonely sorrow.—1. According to the measure of God's correcting hand upon us, must our grief be. (1) Because God is sure to be (at the least) so angry as His rods are heavy. (2) Our sins do cause Him to afflict us, which we must repent of according to the measure of God's anger against them appearing by His smiting of us. This reproves them that remain unrepentant, when the correcting hand of God is upon them. It teaches us to increase in sorrow and lamentation, seeing the trouble of the Church in general, and our own crosses in particular are daily increased. 2. Weeping for sin and its punishment is such a sign of true repentance as we must labour to show forth, especially in time of calamity. (1) Because the heart appeareth then to be truly affected when it breaketh into tears. (2) The godly have always been brought thereunto (Joel ii. 12). This reproves our corruption, that can easily be brought to weep for a worldly loss, but hardly for our sins. We must labour against this with all diligence, carefully using all the means of grace. 3. It is a grievous plague to lack comforts in affliction; the contrary whereof is a great blessing. (1) Because the comfortable words and deeds of others will mitigate the sense of the misery. (2) It adds to the grief to be left alone in it.

4. It is an intolerable grief to have friends become foes. (1) Because we put great trust in our friends, and promise ourselves much assistance by them. (2) They having been most inward with us, may do us more harm than those whom we have always esteemed enemies. Let us take heed with what men we make friendship. Let us not be dismayed though our friends become our foes, seeing it hath been often the lot of the godly, but seek to God the more earnestly for His assistance. 5. God often leaveth His people destitute of all outward help and comfort, to teach us to rest upon Him alone at whose disposition all things are, and not upon any outward thing, seem it never so glorious to our outward eyes. (*J. Udall.*) All her friends have dealt treacherously with her.—*Adversity the test of friendship*.—We do not know our friends until we are in some extremity. Fairweather friends are not to be implicitly trusted. You cannot know a man until you have had occasion to test him by some practical sacrifice; until you have opposed a man you do not know what his temper is; until you have disappointed a man you cannot tell the extent of his good nature; until you have seen a man in trial you know nothing whatever of his grace or his virtue. Many persons shine the more brightly because of the surrounding darkness; they have no genius for conversation, they cannot display themselves in public, they are but poorly feathered and coloured, so that they have nothing to attract and gratify the attention of curiosity: but how full of life they are when their friends are in trouble, how constant in watchfulness, how liberal in contribution, how patient under exasperation! These are the men to trust! As we should never see the stars but for the darkness, so we never should see real friendship but for our affliction and sorrow. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 3. Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction.—*Afflictive dispensations*.—1. The outward things of this life are the soonest lost; and being enjoyed, the most uncertain. (1) They are most subject to all kinds of enemies. (2) God knoweth that we may best want them. Learn to make least account of them, as things without which we may be perfectly happy. Endeavour most of all to obtain the true knowledge and fear of God, which is the treasure laid up in heaven (*Matt. vi. 19, 20*). 2. It is natural for a man to seek to better his outward estate, and his duty to seek far and near for the freedom and rest of conscience (*2 Chron. xi. 13-17*). 3. It is better to live anywhere than in our own country where our governors seek to oppress us, for their hatred being assisted with their might will never let us live in any tolerable peace. 4. Of two evils, we may and ought to choose the less, to avoid the greater. 5. It is grievous and dangerous to dwell among the ungodly. (1) They can administer no true comfort unto us. (2) They are strong to draw us to evil. 6. When God means to punish, He stirs up means; but when He means it not, the means shall not prosper. 7. There is no place or means to escape God's hand, when He means to punish. 8. There is no kind of people so generally and so evil entreated in their adversity as the godly. 9. This people seemeth to be utterly overthrown for ever, and yet they returned unto their land and became a commonwealth again. So is it often with the Church of God (*Psa. cxxxix. 1, &c.*). This teaches us—(1) Never to despair, though our calamities be never so many and grievous. (2) That there is no assured safety, but in the true fear of God. (*J. Udall.*)

Ver. 4. The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts.—*The decay of religion mournful*.—1. The overthrow of the commonwealth bringeth with it the overthrow of the Church's outward peace. 2. When the things that God hath given us here are not applied to the appointed use, we have just cause to mourn, seeing our sins have caused the let thereof (*Deut. xxviii. 15-68*; *Isa. xiii. 19, &c.*). 3. The earth and earthly things do often admonish men of their sins, either by denying that comfort which naturally they bring with them (*Lev. xviii. 25*), or bringing grief or punishment with them (*Mic. ii. 10*). (1) God hath made all His creatures as written books, wherein man may read his sins. (2) That man may have no show of excuse left him at that great day of account. 4. All God's creatures mourn when God is disobeyed, and rejoice when He is obeyed by His people. 5. The service of God is not tied to any place, but upon condition of their obedience that dwell therein (*Jer. xxvi. 4*). 6. It is a great grief to God's ministers to be deprived of their ministry or to see it unprofitable to the Church. (1) God is greatly dishonoured thereby. (2) It giveth occasion of interrupting all good things among the people, and

matter of all kinds of sin. 7. The ministers must be guides to the people, to lead them to mourning (when there is cause), as also to all other duties. 8. They that seem most exempt from it must mourn at the decay of religion. (1) This reproves them that lay not to heart the distress of God's people for the truth, thinking it sufficient that themselves live in safety. (2) It teaches us to strive to be grieved when we hear of the decay of true religion in any place, though it be safe where we are. 9. The greatest loss that can befall God's people is the loss of the exercise of the Word and Sacraments. Because God hath appointed them to be the means of begetting and confirming faith in us. (*J. Udal.*) **All her gates are desolate.**—*Religious desolation*:—A pathetic picture indeed is this, that the feast is spread and no man comes to the banqueting-table; every gate is open in token of welcome and hospitality, yet no wandering soul asks for admittance; the priests once so noble in the service of song, the virgins once so beautiful as images of innocence, now stand with hands thrown down, with eyes full of tears, with hearts sighing in expressive silence their bitterness and disappointment. All this can God do even to His chosen place, and to altars on which He has written His name. Officialism is no guarantee of spiritual perpetuity. Pomp and ceremony, with all their mechanical and external decorations and attractions, are no pledge of the presence of the Spirit of the Living God. The sanctuary is nothing but for the Lord's presence. Eloquent preaching is but eloquent noise if the Spirit of the Lord be not in it, giving it intellectual value, spiritual dignity, and practical usefulness. Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord; because men have forgotten this doctrine, they have trusted to themselves and have seen their hopes perishing in complete and bitter disappointment. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 5. Her adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper.—*The adversaries of the good*:—1. The cause apparent of all the miseries of God's people is the prospering and prevailing of their enemies. 2. It often comes to pass that the wicked prosper in all things of this life, and the godly contrary (*Psa. lxxiii. 4; Job xxi. 7.*) (1) God will, by giving them prosperity, make the wicked without excuse. (2) The godly being assured of God's favour and yet pinched, they may the more earnestly bend their affections to the inheritance which is prepared for them. 3. It is the natural disposition of the wicked towards the godly to oppress them in action and hate them in affliction. 4. The wicked never prevail against the godly, further than the Lord giveth strength unto them (*Job i. 11, 12; 1 Kings xxii. 22; Matt. viii. 31, 32.*) This teaches us—(1) To be more patient towards the instruments, and not to be as the dog that snatcheth at the stone cast at him, not regarding the thrower. (2) To seek the cause of our afflictions in ourselves, for else the just Judge of the world would not correct us. 5. All our afflictions come from the Lord, who is the chief worker thereof. 6. It is the sin of the godly that causeth the Lord to lay all their troubles upon them (*Dan. ix. 5; Neh. i. 6.*) 7. When God withdraweth His strength from His servants, they fall into many grievous sins, one after another. 8. When God meaneth to punish man, He will not spare to deprive him of that which is more dear unto him. 9. The wicked bear such malice unto the truth that when they get the advantage they spare neither age nor sex, thinking to root out the godly from under heaven. (*J. Udal.*)

Ver. 6. And from the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed.—*Departing glory*:—1. The Church of God doth esteem the exercises of religion the most excellent and glorious thing that can be had in this life. (1) They are notable signs of God's favour and presence. (2) There is more true comfort in them than in the whole world besides. 2. The weakening of the rulers is the height of misery upon the rest of the members of that body. 3. That people hath a heavy judgment upon them whose guides are destitute and deprived of necessary courage. 4. They that have the greatest outward privilege do often come the soonest into distress when God punisheth for sin (*Amos vi. 7.*) (*J. Udal.*) *Sin ruinous and destructive*:—We do our utmost to protect great buildings from fire and tempest, and yet all the time those buildings are liable to another peril not less severe—the subtle decay of the very framework of the structure itself. The tissue of the wood silently and mysteriously deteriorates, and calamity as dire as a conflagration is precipitated. The whole of the magnificent roofing of the church of St. Paul in Rome had to be taken out at enormous

expense because of the dry rot. Scientific men, by microscopic and chemical methods, have investigated the causes of this premature decay, and after patient search they have discovered not only the fungi which destroy the wood tissue, but also the spore that acts as the seed of the fungus. So this obscure, malign vegetation goes on in the heart of the wood, destroying the glory and strength of minster and palace. Character is liable to a similar danger. All evils do not come from the outside. Some of the worst possibilities of loss, weakness, and ruin emerge from within; the destroying agents work obscurely and stealthily, and are almost unsuspected until they have wrought fatal mischief.

Ver. 7. *Jerusalem remembered in the days of her affliction, and of her miseries, all her pleasant things.*—*The action of the memory in pain*:—I. It GENERALLY REFERS TO THE "PLEASANT THINGS" OF THE PAST. This it does by a necessary law of its nature—the law of contrast. All men must meet with trials sooner or later—physical, social, moral, &c. Now in the painful memory reverts to the pleasant. It is ever so. Men under the infirmities of age revert to the bright joys of youthhood; the rich man who has sunk into bankruptcy reverts to the days when he had more than heart could wish; souls in perdition recall the sunny day of grace. II. Its reference to the "pleasant things" of the past ALWAYS INTENSIFIES THE SUFFERINGS OF THE SUFFERER. There are two things that tend to this: (1) The consciousness that the "pleasant things" are irrevocably lost. Innocency of childhood, glowing hopes of youth, pleasures of mature manhood, sacred impressions made upon the young heart by books, sermons, and parental piety,—these can never be regained. (2) The consciousness that the "pleasant things" have been morally abused. This makes the action of memory in hell so overwhelmingly painful. "Son, remember," &c. Memory involves receptivity—retention—reproduction. (*Homilist*.) *The memory of pleasant things in the time of trial*:—1. In the time of affliction we do better consider of the blessings that our prosperity yielded unto us, than when we enjoyed them. 2. The time of adversity is fit, wherein we may best recount the prosperity that in former times we have enjoyed. 3. God often maketh all men adversaries to His children, that they may learn to rest on Him alone. 4. The enemies of religion do inquire into the decay of God's Church, and rejoice at it. 5. It is a certain note of an enemy to religion, to mock and deride the exercises of the same. (*J. Udal*.) *The mockery of bad men*:—What would the nightingale care if the toad despised her singing? She would still sing on, and leave the cold toad to his dank shadows. And what care I for the sneers of men who grovel upon earth? I will sing on in the ear and bosom of God. (*H. W. Beecher*.)

Vers. 8–11. *Jerusalem hath grievously sinned; therefore she is removed.*—*The captivity of Judah*:—The emphatic word is "therefore." It rings with sad and solemn cadence through the most mournful of all the books of the Bible. It is the epitaph of the nation to which once the conquest of the world was possible, but whose persistent resistance to the will of God secured at last its complete destruction. The processes by which it ruined itself are those by which individuals are destroyed. This "therefore" is the monumental inscription over a dead nation, which may serve as a warning and guide to every living soul. I. THE SINS WHICH BROUGHT ABOUT THE DOWNFALL OF JUDAH. 1. Unbelief. They refused to see God, and they gradually lost the power to see Him. When they found that their kings could not be trusted, could not take care of them, they trusted, not to God, but to other nations. One day they were vassals of the king of Egypt; the next, of the king of Babylon. Nothing but trust in God can make men free. As soon as we begin to doubt His word, and trust in human opinions, we expose ourselves to become the prey of untrustworthy powers. No confidence in our own learning or judgment, no trust in the boastful words of others, can ever take the place of confidence in the simple Word of God, and leave us sound and safe. 2. Pride. They could not accept God's way. They could not wait for other nations to be uplifted and join them. They chose to join other nations. Doubtless they said it would more quickly bring the world to God; that to be singular would only repel men, and make God repulsive to them. They preferred their way to the way of God, ostensibly because they thought their way was wiser, really because they could not bear to lose esteem in the eyes of the world. God's way is the same now. He still calls His

disciples a peculiar people. He still says, "Come ye out from among them and be ye separate." He still finds only occasionally a hearty response. But to those who do respond with willing love, what wonderful rewards He gives!

3. *Sensuality.* Outward contamination soon resulted in inward corruption. Vice belongs with separation from God, and association with the world. In time it will as surely follow as it is sure that man is made subject to temptation.

4. *Idolatry.* When men or nations become polluted, they seek to make religion justify their wickedness. Often the most self-indulgent are those most devoted to their ideas of religion. They make their gods responsible for their sins, and therefore treat them with greatest care.

II. *THE CONSEQUENCES OF JUDAH'S SINS.* 1. *Blindness.* They could not see the ruin they were approaching. When we cease to lay bare our sins and call them by their real names, we cease to feel them. We enter into moral darkness. The light of the world shines as before, but there is nothing in us which answers to that light. All knowledge of what we ought to do rests on some knowledge of what God is and does. We speak of seeing God, and though He is not visible to the bodily eye, there is no other description which expresses our perception of His character and presence surrounding us in all our ways. Men have eyes which behold Him; eyes which He Himself has opened to that light which is not the light of the sun, but which is the light of the celestial city. But when men turn away from that light, His character becomes to them distorted and unreal.

2. *Untrustworthiness.* When they became false to God they became false to all trusts. They substituted forms for righteousness, and increased them in proportion as they lost the spirit of truth.

3. *Misery.* The consequences of sin were seen too late. They were not foreseen.

Lessons.—1. The captivity of Judah was the fault of her religious men. Beware of seeking to justify what your conscience condemns by appeals to God in prayer, or by observing forms of worship. 2. Outward reformation but slightly arrests the progress of destruction. We cannot hope for much from the reform which aims only at self-protection. It is not deep, honest, hearty, unless we choose to renounce sins because we hate sin, and follow God because we love His ways. 3. Sin destroys the choicest qualities of human character. 4. The one thing necessary is to keep the eye on God. (*A. E. Dunning.*)

Sin's dire consequence:—Sin produceth all temporal evil. Jerusalem hath grievously sinned, therefore she is removed. It is the Trojan horse; it hath sword and famine and pestilence within it. (*T. Watson.*)

Sin the cause of affliction:—1. Their sins the cause of their afflictions being again mentioned unto them, teacheth this doctrine: that it is necessary whensoever we are afflicted, to recount often our sins to have procured the same to fall upon us. (1) We are naturally unwilling to blame ourselves for anything, and ready to impute the cause of any evil to others. (2) If we rightly charge ourselves and our sins, we shall be the better prepared thereby to true repentance and right humiliation. 2. It is peculiar to the godly to impute the cause of all their miseries unto their own sins. The wicked either lay the cause upon other things, or extenuate their fault, blaming God for rigour; or else break out into raging impatience or blasphemy. 3. It is our sin that depriveth us of any good thing we have heretofore enjoyed. 4. When we truly fear and serve the Lord, He honoureth us in the sight of men (1 Sam. ii. 30). (1) That it may appear that godliness is not without her reward even in this life. (2) To give a taste unto the godly here, of that honour which they shall hereafter enjoy without measure or end. 5. It is our sin that maketh us odious and contemptible amongst men. 6. The estimation that the godly have among worldlings is only whilst they are in outward prosperity. 7. The wicked, that have no knowledge or consciousness of their own faults, can see the offences of the godly, and upbraid them with them. 8. There is nothing that maketh men so filthily naked as sin. 9. The godly do take to heart with earnest affection the crosses that the Lord layeth upon them. 10. The godly are sometimes brought into so hard estate as that they are in men's judgment utterly deprived of all the signs of God's favour. (*J. Udall.*)

Ver. 9. *She remembereth not her last end: therefore she came down wonderfully.*—*The wicked surprised by their own destruction:*—There are certain great principles in the Divine administration, the operation of which gives a degree of uniformity to the Divine proceedings. For instance, it is the manner of our God to visit with signal destruction those who have proudly set at naught His authority in a course of prosperous wickedness. Such was His treatment of Jerusalem.

So it has been with individuals. Nebuchadnezzar, Herod, &c. Destruction came upon them, not only in a terrible form, but at an hour when they did not expect it. The same thing will hold true, in a greater or less degree, of all sinners, as it respects their final doom; while it will be especially true of those who have sinned against great light, and with a high hand. The destruction which will overtake sinners at last will be to them a matter of awful surprise. It will be at once unexpectedly dreadful, and dreadfully unexpected. I. GOD'S WRATH AGAINST THE WICKED IS CONSTANTLY ACCUMULATING. If the first sin you ever committed provoked God, do you think that the second provoked Him less; and that as He saw you become accustomed to sin, He came to think as little of it as yourself, and has not even charged your sin against you? Do you not remember that the Bible speaks of the sinner treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath?

II. THE DESTRUCTION WHICH WILL COME UPON SINNERS WILL BE TO THEM A MATTER OF FEARFUL SURPRISE, INASMUCH AS IN THE PRESENT LIFE GOD'S WRATH, FOR THE MOST PART, SEEMS TO SLUMBER; AT LEAST THEY PERCEIVE NO DIRECT EXPRESSION OF IT. It is true, indeed, that God is giving them warnings enough, both in His Word and providence; and if they did not close their ears against them, they could not fail to be alarmed; and they will never be able, in the day of their calamity, to charge God with having concealed from them their danger. Nevertheless, He treats them here as probationers for eternity; He sets life and death before them, but He does not unsheath His sword, and point it at the sinner's heart. He does not find that the elements are armed for his destruction. The thundercloud rises, and rolls, and looks terrific, as if it were borne along by an avenging hand, but the lightning that blazes from it passes him by unhurt. In short, not one of the vials of God's wrath can be said to be open upon him. There is nothing which he interprets as an indication of anything dreadful in the future. Now, must not all this be a preparation for a fearful surprise at last? III. NOT ONLY HAVE THE WICKED, DURING THE PRESENT LIFE, RECEIVED NO SIGNAL EXPRESSIONS OF DIVINE VENGEANCE, BUT THEY HAVE BEEN CONSTANTLY RECEIVING EXPRESSIONS OF THE DIVINE GOODNESS; AND THIS IS ANOTHER CIRCUMSTANCE WHICH WILL SERVE TO INCREASE THE SURPRISE THAT WILL BE OCCASIONED BY THEIR DESTRUCTION. What a fearful transition will it be from this world, in which there are so many blessings, to a world in which existence itself becomes a curse! Oh, will not the sinner feel that he has "come down wonderfully"? IV. GOD SOMETIMES NOT ONLY GIVES TO THE WICKED A COMMON SHARE OF TEMPORAL BLESSINGS, BUT DISTINGUISHES THEM BY WORLDLY PROSPERITY; HENCE ANOTHER REASON OF THE SURPRISE WHICH THEY WILL EXPERIENCE AT LAST. Think of the rich, and the great, and the noble of this world, who have been accustomed to receive a homage which has sometimes fallen little short of idolatry, finding themselves in the prison of despair, with no sound but the sound of their own wailing—with no society but the society of the reprobate! Have not these persons come down wonderfully?

V. THE DESTRUCTION WHICH WILL FINALLY OVERTAKE THE WICKED WILL BE TO THEM A MATTER OF GREAT SURPRISE, INASMUCH AS THEY WILL, IN SOME WAY OR OTHER, HAVE MADE CONFIDENT CALCULATION FOR ESCAPING IT. It will be found, no doubt, that many of them had flattered themselves with the hope that the doctrine of future punishment might turn out to be false; and some will have been left through their own perverseness to believe the lie, that the good and the bad will at last be equally happy. There will be others who will have wrought themselves into a conviction that destruction might be averted by some easier means than those which the Gospel prescribes, and may have chosen to trust to the orthodoxy of their creed, or the kindness of their temper, or the morality of their life. There will be others who will have intended ultimately to escape destruction by becoming true Christians, but who were looking out for some more convenient season. One thing will be certain in respect to all,—they will have intended to come out well at last. Not an individual among all the sufferers in hell but will have expected finally to be saved. Lessons.—1. How blinding is the influence of depravity. 2. It is a most awful calamity to relapse into a habit of carelessness after being awakened. 3. There is no class of men so much to be pitied as those who are perhaps most frequently the objects of envy, and none whose condition is so much to be envied as those whose circumstances are often looked upon as the most undesirable. 4. Who of you will turn a deaf ear to the warning which this subject suggests, to flee from the wrath to come? (W. B. Sprague, D.D.) *Sin unremembered*.—1. They that be hardened in sin by despising destruction, do grow to forget those things which continual experience and the light of reason

daily call to remembrance. (1) The daily custom of things, without grace to esteem them aright, breedeth contempt of them in our corrupt nature. (2) Satan blindeth the children of disobedience, lest they should rightly regard good things and profit by them. 2. The forgetfulness of the reward of sin throweth men headlong into iniquity; but the remembrance of it stayeth us from many evils (Amos vi. 3; Psa. xvi. 8). (*J. Udal.*) *Forgetfulness of the end* :—I. WHY IS MAN SO FORGETFUL OF HIS END? (1) Not because he can have any doubt as to the importance of it. (2) Not because he lacks reminders of the sad event. (3) Not because he has the slightest hope of avoiding it. Why then? 1. His instinctive repugnance to it. 2. The difficulty of realising it. 3. The commonness of the occurrence of the event. 4. The prevalent expectation of long life. 5. The secular engrossments of life. 6. The systematic efforts to render man oblivious of the subject. II. WHY SHOULD MAN REMEMBER HIS END? 1. That we may duly estimate our sinful condition. 2. To moderate our attachments to this passing life. 3. To stimulate us to a right preparation for the event. 4. To enable us to welcome the event when it comes. (*Homilist.*) *The end in view should control conduct* :—If the lazy student would only bring clearly before his mind the examination room, and the unanswerable paper, and the bitter mortification when the pass-list comes out and his name is not there, he would not trifle and dawdle and seek all manner of diversions as he does, but he would bind himself to his desk and his task. If the young man that begins to tamper with purity, and in the midst of the temptations of a great city to gratify the lust of the eye and the lust of the flesh, because he is away from the shelter of his father's house, and the rebuke of his mother's purity, could see, as the older of us have seen, men with their bones full of the iniquity of their youth, or drifted away from their home to die down in the country like a rat in a hole, do you think the temptations of the streets and low places of amusement would not be stripped of their fascination? If the man beginning to drink was to say to himself, "What am I to do in the end" when the craving becomes physical, and volition is suspended, and anything is sacrificed in order to still the domineering devil within, do you think he would begin? I do not believe that all sin comes from ignorance, but sure I am that if the sinful man saw what the end is, he would, in nine cases out of ten, be held back. "What will you do in the end?" Use that question, dear friends, as the Ithuriel spear which will touch the squatting tempter at your ear, and there will start up, in its own shape, the fiend. (*A. Maclaren.*) O Lord, behold my affliction.—*Refuge in distress* :—1. The only refuge in distress is to fly to the Lord by faithful and fervent prayer. (1) He it is that smiteth, and none else can heal. (2) He hath promised to hear and deliver us, calling upon Him in the day of our troubles (Psa. l. 15). 2. This prayer being made by the prophet in the name of the people, teacheth us: it is a great blessing of God to that people that hath a minister who is both able and willing not only to teach them the truth, but also to be their mouth to direct them. 3. God so pitieth His people that the view of their miseries moveth Him to help them, even when all men are against them. (1) He loveth them with an everlasting love. (2) He will not suffer them to be trodden down of their enemies for ever. (*J. Udal.*)

Ver. 10. The adversary hath spread out his hand upon all her pleasant things.—*Spoliation* :—1. The wicked are usually merciless towards the godly, spoiling them and theirs in most cruel manner, if the Lord restrain them not (Psa. liii. 4, cxlvi. 7). 2. The outward things of this world are uncertain, and made subject to the violence of the wicked. (1) Learn not to desire the things of this life too much. (2) Learn, when God guideth them unto us, to employ them aright. 3. The outward things and means of God's service are often made a prey to the enemies; especially upon our abusing of them (Jer. vii. 13; Luke xix. 44). 4. The injuries that the wicked do unto the godly in their sight, are more grievous unto them than those that they do only hear of. 5. The wicked make havoc of and scorn all the exercises of religion. 6. The outward ordinances of God are of reverent account to them that fear His name. 7. Those that be open wicked ones are not (without their open repentance) to be admitted to the holy exercises of religion. (*J. Udal.*)

Ver. 11. All her people sigh, they seek bread.—*Grief at losses* :—1. It is awful for the godly to be grieved with and take to heart their worldly losses—(1) Because the things of this life are God's blessings. (2) They are necessary to

support us here, and (being well used) to make us the fitter to serve Him. 2. For the preservation of the life, we must be willing to forego the dearest of these outward blessings. (1) Because life is the most precious of all earthly things, they being given for the use of it, and not it for them. (2) God hath given greater charge to preserve it than them. 3. In all our miseries we must seek relief only at God's hands. (1) He hath so commanded (Psa. l. 15, &c.). (2) All power to help is in His hands alone (2 Chron. xx. 6). 4. No extremity can drive the godly from trusting in God, and praying to Him (Job xiii. 15; Psa. xlv. 17). (*J. Udall.*) **They have given their pleasant things for meat to relieve the soul.—Surrender of luxuries for necessities:**—Our forefathers gave five marks or more for a good book; a load of hay for a few chapters of St. James or of St. Paul, in English, saith Mr. Foxe. The Queen of Castile sold her jewels to furnish Columbus for his discovering voyage to the West Indies, when he had showed his maps, though our Henry VII., loath to part with money, slighted his offers, and thereby the gold mines were found and gained to the Spanish crown. Let no man think much to part with his pleasant things for his precious soul, or to sacrifice all that he hath to the service of his life, which, next to his soul, should be most dear to him. Our ancestors in Queen Mary's days were glad to eat the bread of their souls in peril of their lives. (*J. Trapp.*)

Vers. 12–22. Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?—*Zion's appeal:*—1. The whole passage evidently expresses a deep yearning for sympathy. Mere strangers, roving Bedouin, any people who may chance to be passing by Jerusalem, are implored to behold her incomparable woes. The wounded animal creeps into a corner to suffer and die in secret, perhaps on account of the habit of herds, in tormenting a suffering mate. But among mankind the instinct of a sufferer is to crave sympathy, from a friend, if possible; but if such be not available, then even from a stranger. This sympathy, if it is real, would help if it could; and under all circumstances it is the reality of the sympathy that is most prized, not its issues. It should be remembered, further, that the first condition of active aid is a genuine sense of compassion, which can only be awakened by means of knowledge and the impressions which a contemplation of suffering produce. Evil is wrought not only from want of thought, but also from lack of knowledge; and good-doing is withheld for the same reason. Therefore the first requisite is to arrest attention. We are responsible for our ignorance and its consequences wherever the opportunity of knowledge is within our reach. 2. The appeal to all who pass by is most familiar to us in its later association with our Lord's sufferings on the Cross. But this is not in any sense a Messianic passage; it is confined in its purpose to the miseries of Jerusalem. Of course there can be no objection to illustrating the grief and pain of the Man of Sorrows by using the classic language of an ancient lament if we note that this is only an illustration. 3. In order to impress the magnitude of her miseries on the minds of the strangers whose attention she would arrest, the city, now personified as a suppliant, describes her dreadful condition in a series of brief, pointed metaphors. Thus the imagination is excited; and the imagination is one of the roads to the heart. Let us look at the various images under which the distress of Jerusalem is here presented. (1) It is like a fire in the bones (ver. 13). It burns, consumes, pains with intolerable torment; it is no skin-deep trouble, it penetrates to the very marrow. (2) It is like a net (ver. 13). We see a wild creature caught in the bush, or perhaps a fugitive arrested in his flight and flung down by hidden snares at his feet. Here is the shock of surprise, the humiliation of deceit, the vexation of being thwarted. The result is a baffled, bewildered, helpless condition. (3) It is like faintness. The desolate sufferer is ill. It is bad enough to have to bear calamities in the strength of health. Jerusalem is made sick and kept faint "all the day"—with a faintness that is not a momentary collapse, but a continuous condition of failure. (4) It is like a yoke (ver. 14) which is wreathed upon the neck—fixed on, as with twisted withes. The poet is here more definite. The yoke is made out of the transgressions of Jerusalem. As there is nothing so invigorating as the assurance that one is suffering for a righteous cause, so there is nothing so wretchedly depressing as the consciousness of guilt. (5) It is like a winepress (ver. 15). Wine is to be made, but the grapes crushed to produce it are the people who were accustomed to feast and drink of the fruits of God's bounty in the happy days of their prosperity. So the mighty men are set at nought, their prowess counting as nothing against

the brutal rush of the enemy; and the young men are crushed, their spirit and vigour failing them in the great destruction. 4. The most terrible trait in these pictures, one that is common to all of them, is the Divine origin of the troubles. Yet there is no complaint of barbarity, no idea that the Judge of all the earth is not doing right. The miserable city does not bring any railing accusation against her Lord; she takes all the blame upon herself. The grief is all the greater because there is no thought of rebellion. The daring doubts that struggle into expression in Job never obtrude themselves here to check the even flow of tears. The melancholy is profound, but comparatively calm, since it does not once give place to anger. It is natural that the succession of images of misery conceived in this spirit should be followed by a burst of tears. Zion weeps because the comforter who should refresh her soul is far away, and she is left utterly desolate (ver. 16). 5. Here the supposed utterance of Jerusalem is broken for the poet to insert a description of the suppliant making her piteous appeal (ver. 17). He shows us Zion spreading out her hands, that is to say, in the well-known attitude of prayer. She is comfortless, oppressed by her neighbours in accordance with the will of her God, and treated as an unclean thing; she who had despised the idolatrous Gentiles in her pride of superior sanctity has now become foul and despicable in their eyes! 6. After the poet's brief interjection describing the suppliant, the personified city continues her plaintive appeal, but with a considerable enlargement of its scope. She makes the most distinct acknowledgment of the two vital elements of the case—God's righteousness and her own rebellion (ver. 18). These carry us beneath the visible scenes of trouble so graphically illustrated earlier, and fix our attention on deep-seated principles. Although it cannot be said that all trouble is the direct punishment of sin, and although it is manifestly insincere to make confession of guilt one does not inwardly admit, to be firmly settled in the conviction that God is right in what He does even when it all looks most wrong, that if there is a fault it must be on man's side, is to have reached the centre of truth. 7. Enlarging the area of her appeal, no longer content to snatch at the casual pity of individual travellers on the road, Jerusalem now calls upon all the "peoples"—i.e., all neighbouring tribes—to hear the tale of her woes (ver. 18). The appeal to the nations contains three particulars. It deplores the captivity of the virgins and young men; the treachery of allies—"lovers" who have been called upon for assistance, but in vain; and the awful fact that men of such consequence as the elders and priests, the very aristocracy of Jerusalem, had died of starvation after an ineffectual search for food—a lurid picture of the horrors of the siege (vers. 18, 19). 8. In drawing to a close the appeal goes further, and, rising altogether above man, seeks the attention of God (vers. 20-22). This is an utterance of faith where faith is tried to the uttermost. It is distinctly recognised that the calamities bewailed have been sent by God; and yet the stricken city turns to God for consolation. Not only is there no complaint against the justice of His acts; in spite of them all, He is still regarded as the greatest Friend and Helper of the victims of His wrath. This apparently paradoxical position issues in what might otherwise be a contradiction of thought. The ruin of Jerusalem is attributed to the righteous judgment of God, against which no shadow of complaint is raised; and yet God is asked to pour vengeance on the heads of the human agents of His wrath! The vengeance here sought for cannot be brought into line with Christian principles; but the poet had never heard the Sermon on the Mount. It would not have occurred to him that the spirit of revenge was not right, any more than it occurred to the writers of maledictory Psalms. There is one more point in this final appeal to God which should be noticed, because it is very characteristic of the elegy throughout. Zion bewails her friendless condition, declaring, "there is none to comfort me." This is the fifth reference to the absence of a comforter (see i. 2, 9, 16, 17, 21). The idea may be merely introduced in order to accentuate the description of utter desolation. And yet when we compare the several allusions to it, the conclusion seems to be forced upon us that the poet has a more specific intention. Our thoughts instinctively turn to the Paraclete of St. John's Gospel. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*) *A Jeremiad*.—I. AN EARNEST EXPOSTULATION. /If there is anything in all the world that ought to interest a man, it is the death of Christ./ Yet do I find men, learned men, spending year after year in sorting out butterflies, beetles, and gnats, or in making out the various orders of shells, or in digging into the earth and seeking to discover what strange creatures once floundered

through the boundless mire, or swam in the vast seas. I find men occupied with things of no sort of practical moment, yet the story of God Himself is thought to be too small a trifle for intelligent minds to dwell upon it. O reason! where art thou gone? O judgment! whither art thou fled? It is strange that even the sufferings of Christ should not attract the attention of men, for generally, if we hear any sad story of the misfortunes of our fellow-creatures, we are interested. How is it earth does not stretch out her hands and say, "Come and tell us of the God that loved us, and came down to our low estate, and suffered for us men and for our salvation"? It ought to interest us, if nothing more. Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? And should it not be more than interesting? Should it not excite our admiration? You cannot read of a man sacrificing himself for the good of his fellow-creatures without feeling at once that you wish you had known that fine fellow, and you feel instinctively that you would do anything in the world to serve him if he still lives, or to help relatives left behind if he has died in a brave attempt. Is it nothing to you that Jesus should die for men? If I had no share in His blood, I think I should love Him.

- The life of Christ enobles me; the death of Christ binds me to His Cross. Even were I never washed in His blood, and were myself cast away into hell, if that were possible, I still feel I must admire Him for His love to others. Yea, and I must adore Him, too, for His Godlike character, His superhuman love in suffering for the sons of men. But why, why is it that such a Christ, so lovely and so admirable, is forgotten by the most of mankind, and it is nothing to them?
- II. A SOLEMN QUESTION. The Lord Jesus Christ may be represented here as bidding men see if there be any sorrow like unto His sorrow, which is done unto Him. 1. Truly the sufferings of Jesus were altogether unique; they stand alone. History or poetry can find no parallel. King of kings and Lord of lords was He, and the government was upon His shoulders, and His name was called Wonderful, the Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. All the hallelujahs of eternity rolled up at His august feet. But He was despised and rejected of men, a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief, and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised and we esteemed Him not. Never was one so high brought so low. "Behold, and see if ever there were sorrow like unto My sorrow, which is done unto Me." Never one so innocent, never one so falsely accused. Oh! was ever grief like His! exonerated yet condemned! adjudged to be without fault, yet delivered up to His direst foes! treated as a felon, put to death as a traitor; immolated on a gibbet which bore triple testimony to His innocence by its inscription. With none to pity, no one to administer comfort, forsaken utterly, our Saviour died, with accessories of sorrow that were to be found in no other decease than that which was accomplished at Jerusalem. Still, the singularity of His death lies in another respect. 2. There was never sorrow like unto the sorrow which was done unto Christ, because all His sorrow was borne for others. His Godhead gave Him an infinite capacity, and infused a boundless degree of compensation into all the pangs He bore. You have no more idea of what Christ suffered in His soul than you have, when you take up in a shell a drop of sea-water, power to guess from that the area of the entire boundless, bottomless ocean. What Christ suffered is utterly inconceivable. Was ever grief like Thine? Needless question; needless question; all but shameful question; for were all griefs that ever were felt condensed into one, they were no more worthy to be compared therewith than the glow-worm's tiny lamp with the ever-blazing sun. If Christ be thus alone in suffering, what then? 3. Why, let Him stand alone in our love. High, high, set up Christ high in your heart. Love Him; you cannot match His love to you; seek at least to let your little stream run side by side of the mighty river. If Christ be thus alone in suffering, let us seek to make Him, if we can, alone in our service. I wish we had more Marys who would break the alabaster box of precious ointment upon His dear head. Oh! for a little extravagance of love, a little fanaticism of affection for Him, for He deserves ten thousand times more than the most enthusiastic devotees ever dream of rendering. 4. If He be thus so far beyond all others in His sorrow, let Him also be first and foremost in our praise. If ye have poetic minds, weave no garlands except for His dear brow. If ye be men of eloquence, speak no glowing periods except to His honour. If ye be men of wit and scholarship, oh seek to lay your classic attainments at the foot of His Cross! Come hither with all your talents, and yield them to Him who bought you with His blood. (C. H. Spurgeon.) "Is it nothing to you?"

—The crucified Christ is still amongst us. We may even now by faith behold the Lamb of God in the very act of sacrificing Himself for the sin of the world. There are many who do not pass by the Cross on which He hangs. Come joy or sorrow, come honour or disgrace, whether others join you or whether you should be alone, in life and in death, you are resolved in penitential love and joyful obedience to dwell beneath the shadow of the Cross of Christ. But there are others who “pass by.” There are scorners and scoffers now, as in the times of old. All who live profligate and wicked lives; all who deliberately indulge in fleshly lusts; the licentious, the intemperate, the covetous, the proud, the revengeful; all who cherish some secret sin and will not give it up; all such “pass by”; for the sight of the great Example of self-sacrifice so condemns those who are resolved on a life of self-indulgence, and the sufferings He endured to save from sin so reproach those who determine to commit sin, that they cannot find any pleasure in their wickedness except as they banish Him from their thoughts; and so they “pass by.” It is possible that none of you may be fairly classed either with scorners or profligates. But nevertheless you may pass by Christ. Here are some in holiday attire, tripping and dancing along. Listening to the syren voice of pleasure, they wander off, some in one direction, some in another, in quest of new delights and fresh excitements. They often come within reach of the Cross, but they do not even see it, or they look at it so listlessly that it produces no effect. Others rush past, eager to grasp the phantoms which beckon them onward and still fly before them. Here comes one bending beneath a heavy load which eagerly he increases, as ever and anon he picks up some shining bit of earth and adds it to his store. Stooping down and gazing intently on the ground, he does not see the Cross. Miserable man! Eager to multiply riches which increase your cares and which you must soon lose, you neglect the only true, the imperishable treasure, and pass by! Now approach a sorrowful company, in dark attire, their cheeks bedewed with tears, their heads bowed down with grief. Oh, why do you not look up to that great Example of suffering, that Brother in adversity? You are passing by Him who is able to remove at once the heaviest portion of your burden, and by His sympathy to wipe your tears and heal your wounds! Others approach who have often been here before. They stopped at first, and admired, and went on; but now the Cross is too familiar to attract their notice. Here come others apparently determined to remain. They are much interested in the Cross. One sits down to sketch it. Another examines the wood of which it is made. A third measures its height and thickness. It is possible to be profound theologians and eloquent preachers, and yet pass by Christ. Others approach who are too intent in contemplating themselves to consider the crucified One. Not confessing themselves to be sinners, they pass by the Saviour, as having no need of Him. At length others come who resolve not to pass by. They are arrested by the sight of that patient sufferer; they wonder, they admire, they regret their former ignorance and folly, they will amend their lives, they will abandon their sins, they will remain beside the Cross; but it shall be—to-morrow! And so they also pass by! In order to pass by Christ it is not necessary to insult Him. Ye who have never yet really mourned for sin and forsaken it; who are not earnestly seeking Christ and relying on Him as your only Saviour; who do not imitate His example and obey His commands; ye who are not, for His sake, crucifying the flesh, dying with Christ to sin, that you may live with Christ in holiness; whatever your external behaviour, in heart you are amongst those to whom Jesus appeals, “Is it nothing to you all ye that pass by?” Do not say it is nothing to you because you are not included in the favoured few for whom Christ died. He is the “propitiation for the sins of the whole world,” and therefore for yours! You helped to fasten Christ to the Cross. Every sin was a blow of the hammer to drive in the nails. Is this nothing to you? On the Cross God proclaims that He is ready to pardon you and receive you home as His child; and that for this He gave Jesus to die for you. Is this nothing to you? Will you refuse to give heed to the earnest appeal of Him who beseeches you to be saved? What is anything to you if not Christ? If you heard a cry of “Fire,” you might selfishly say, “It is nothing to me.” But suppose it was your own house in flames? Sinner! it is your own soul which is in jeopardy, and it is for you that Jesus dies. (*Newman Hall, D.D.*) *The appeal of the Saviour’s sorrows*:—There is a most striking and close parallel between the sufferings of Jerusalem here impersonated as crying, “Is it nothing to you, all

yo that pass by?" and those endured by our Saviour, Jesus Christ. 1. The city that was in ruins, was, of all earth's cities, the one most intimately associated with God. The suffering Saviour was "the only begotten Son of God"; He alone, of all living beings, could say, "I and the Father are one." 2. The misery of Jerusalem consisted largely in the wrongs and insults of foes. "Is this the city that men call the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth?" And as His enemies passed by the suffering Saviour on Calvary, they wagged their heads, and said, "He saved others," &c. 3. The misfortunes of Jerusalem were greatly aggravated, because her friends dealt treacherously with her, and became her enemies. The suffering Saviour was betrayed by one disciple, denied by another, and at last "they all forsook Him and fled." 4. In her sorrows, Jerusalem cried unto God "who had left her, and delivered her into the hand of her enemies." The suffering Saviour too appealed to God in the profoundly awful cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" 5. Jerusalem was enduring the greatest misfortunes that history records of any city in any war. The suffering Saviour bore agony that no other being could endure. Every man has to "bear his own burden," but "the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all." I. THOSE WHO SORROW CLAIM OUR SPECIAL ATTENTION. 1. Because by sorrow sympathy is excited. Even those men who are most depraved are quickened to sympathise by any suffering that is placed before them in the peculiar phase they can understand. The best men will be quickened to sympathise with it in whatever form it appears. Christ was. No sort of sorrow was beneath His compassion, nor beyond the limits of His sympathy. 2. Because sorrow will generally teach us some lesson. The asking of "Why" this sorrow? How can it be destroyed? will often lead to the discovery of the profoundest and most necessary truths. Parents endure sorrow and suffering that their sons may learn lessons; neighbours, that their neighbours; nations, that surrounding nations may. But if the son will thoughtlessly "pass by" the sorrow of his parent; or the neighbour will "pass by" that of the neighbour; or the nation will "pass by" that of the nation—the son, the neighbour, the nation, must sorrow for themselves. II. OF ALL WHO EVER HAVE SORROWED, JESUS CHRIST PRE-EMINENTLY CLAIMS OUR ATTENTION. 1. He sorrowed more intensely than all others. He held Himself back from no grief, shrank from no abyss, refused no cross. Others have crowned themselves with royalty. He put the crown of sorrows upon His own brow. The solitariness of the Saviour's sufferings, moreover, gives Him pre-eminence in grief. Others have known the creeping shadows of loneliness; He its midnight. 2. As a sorrower, He taught infinitely more important lessons than all others. (1) The evil of sin. If sin could cause that sorrow in a holy Being, what will it cause in us? (2) God's hatred of sin. He loved His Son, and yet He thus gave Him to bruising and to death for us. (3) God's love for man, and way of saving him. "Comprehend God's mercy, by comprehending Christ's agony." (A. R. Thomas.) *The sufferings of Christ demand the attention of all*.—I. Let us, first, inquire into THE TRUE MEANING OF THESE WORDS; and, in order to that, examine the connection in which they stand. Jerusalem is here represented as speaking, in the character of a female person, and that of a widow, bitterly lamenting her desolate condition, and calling for compassion. Whether any sorrow was like unto her sorrow at this period, we cannot determine, nor is this material. It was, undoubtedly, very great; and it was not unnatural for them to suppose it peculiar and unexampled. This is a common case, both with bodies of people and individuals. Persons, when exercised with heavy and complicated afflictions, are very apt to suppose no sufferings equal to their own, and no sorrow like theirs. It is also very common and very natural for persons under heavy afflictions to feel it as a high aggravation that they have none to sympathise with them under their troubles, or to show any disposition to afford them relief. 1. This is a very grievous and pitiable condition for any to be in. 2. To exercise sympathy towards the afflicted is what may most reasonably be expected, and the neglect of it is highly culpable. II. HOW APPLICABLE THE DESCRIPTION IN THE TEXT IS TO THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. III. THERE ARE MANY WHO MAY BE SAID TO PASS BY WITH UNCONCERN, AS IF ALL THIS WAS NOTHING TO THEM, AND THEY HAD NO CONCERN IN IT. 1. What think you of the great number of those who are called by the name of Christ, who never set themselves seriously to contemplate His sufferings: who never, or but seldom, attend the preaching of Christ crucified; or who, though they may sometimes hear the doctrine of the Cross, never bestow a serious thought

about the ends and designs of the Saviour's sufferings, or the concern which they themselves have in them? 2. And what shall we say of those persons, who even profess faith in Christ and love to His name, and attend the ordinary worship of His house with apparent decency, who yet neglect to fulfil His dying command to commemorate His sufferings and death in that peculiar ordinance, in which we have a visible representation of them, designed to perpetuate the memory of them in the world, and affect the heart with a sense of His love? (S. Palmer.)

Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow.—Searchings of heart:—The greatest natures are capable of the greatest sorrow. It is utterly in conceivable to man of how much sorrow a nature like that of Jesus is capable. What sorrow would be ours if, for a single day, we were endowed with a power of vision which enabled us to see underneath all the coverings of life, into the heart of things; if all persons were laid bare to us, and we saw the stern reality below the veneer and polish and dress and shows of things! Let us not forget that the sufferings of our Lord historically recorded, are but part of His sufferings. The apostle speaks of "filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ." There are sorrows for the Son of Man still, for He has identified Himself with us, and become one with us. Does not His Church cause Him sorrow? Is it not like raw material, so very hard to His hand as to be almost incapable of being moulded into any shape or form of beauty? Does He not sorrow over our ignorance? Our mental dulness? Our pride of knowledge which is often worse than ignorance? Our unloveliness of spirit and unlovableness? Our hard thoughts of others? Do not these things cause Him sorrow? Again, our want of patience in doing His work? Our expecting to reap on the very day we sow? Does not our Lord sorrow over our legalism—that old Jewish spirit of slavishness to mere forms and customs which are of human device—the letter which killeth; the rigidity which knows not how to bend or adapt itself to weakness and feebleness and infirmity? Must He not sorrow over our sectarianisms—our thinking more of mere sectional names than of the real unity which underlies all these? Yea, sometimes, must not our very prayers be a source of sorrow to Him? Yes, truly, our Lord may well say, as He looks into the hearts of the members of His professing Church, "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow." When, in a court of justice, a man's own witnesses seem to damage his cause, the case is indeed painful. And yet, our Lord's deepest, profoundest, tenderest sorrow does not arise from any inconsistencies, or defects, or blunders, or ignorances, or wilfulnesses which He sees among those who believe in Him, trust Him and look to Him, many of whom do their feeble, blundering best, to serve Him. For, every man who names the name of Christ, and departs from iniquity, honours Christ. His chief sorrow is not over His Church, with all its multiplied inconsistencies, ignorances, and wilfulnesses, but over others; over you young man, to whom He has given a godly father and mother, who daily pray for you, though you hear it not, who love you with a love that, as far as a finite thing can represent an infinite thing, is like the love of God. Over you also, fathers and mothers, men and women bearing the holiest names that this world knows; into whose arms a gift has been placed than which this earth can furnish none so marvellous or wonderful—have you appreciated that gift at its true value? Have you realised that the flesh was only a platform for an immortal spirit to stand upon? Must there not be sorrow in the heart of Christ as He sees fathers and mothers treating children as though they were mere animal forms, or, at the most, mere children of this world, to be trained for this world, everything nurtured in them except that which is highest, that which is distinctive, that which makes them men? When our Lord looks from the height of His infinite knowledge upon the world of fathers and mothers, and sees how, by their example, they are bending their children's souls away from Him, how often must His feeling be like to that expressed in these words, "Is any sorrow like unto My sorrow?" Does not this line of reflection touch every one of us? What sorrow greater than that of being perpetually misunderstood? And who knows this sorrow as the Son of God knows it? Have we not misunderstood Him most egregiously? Have we not thought of Him as the condemner? Yet is He the Saviour. Have we not resisted the Holy Spirit's movements in our souls? Have we not almost forced ourselves into darkness? And all this has been so much of sorrow poured into the lot of the Son of Man. Yet still He broods over us, with a love that many waters cannot quench. (R. Thomas.) *Every one*

*disposed to think his afflictions peculiarly severe :—*I. THE AFFLICTED ARE VERY APT TO IMAGINE THAT GOD AFFLICTS THEM TOO SEVERELY. 1. There are many degrees and shades of difference in those evils which may be properly called afflictions. But those who suffer lighter troubles are very apt to let their imagination have its free scope, which can easily magnify light afflictions into great and heavy ones. So that mankind commonly afflict themselves more than God afflicts them. 2. There is another way, by which the afflicted are apt to magnify their afflictions. They compare their present afflictions, not only with their past prosperity, but with the afflictions of others; which leads them to imagine that their afflictions are not only great, but singular, and such as nobody else has suffered; at least, to such a great degree. II. THIS IS A GREAT AND UNEAPPY MISTAKE. 1. None that are afflicted ever know that God lays His hand heavier upon them than upon others. Mankind are extremely apt to judge erroneously, concerning the nature and weight of their own afflictions, and the nature and weight of the afflictions which others around them suffer. They have a high estimation of the good which they see others enjoy, but a low estimation of the evil they suffer. And, on the other hand, they cherish a low idea of their own prosperity, and a high idea of their own adversity. 2. The afflicted never have any reason to imagine that God afflicts them too severely, because He never afflicts them more than they know they deserve. Every person has sinned and come short of the glory of God. Every sin deserves punishment; and it belongs to God to inflict any punishment that sin deserves. 3. The afflicted have no reason to think that God afflicts them too severely, because He never afflicts them more than they need to be afflicted. God afflicts some to draw forth the corruption of their hearts, and make them sensible that they are under the entire dominion of a carnal mind, which is opposed to His character, His law, His government, and the Gospel of His grace, and of course exposed not only to His present, but His future and everlasting displeasure. This is suited to alarm their fears, and excite them to flee from the wrath to come. God afflicts others to try their hearts, and draw forth their right affections, and give them sensible evidence of their having the spirit of adoption, and belonging to the number of His family and friends, and thereby removing their past painful doubts and fears. And He afflicts others, to give them an opportunity to display the beauties of holiness, by patience, submission, and cordial obedience in the darkest and most trying seasons. 4. The afflicted have no reason to think that God afflicts them too severely, because He never afflicts them any more than His glory requires Him to afflict them. Improvement—1. It is very unwise, as well as criminal, for the afflicted to brood over and aggravate the greatness of their affliction. 2. If the afflicted have no reason to think hard of God, or indulge the feeling that He corrects them too severely, then as long as they do indulge such a thought and feeling, they can receive no benefit from the afflictions they suffer. 3. If the afflicted have no reason to think that God afflicts them too severely, then they always have reason to submit to Him under His correcting hand. 4. It appears from what has been said, that men may derive more benefit from great than from light afflictions. They are suited to make deeper and better impressions on the mind. 5. It is as easy to submit to heavy as to light afflictions. As there are greater and stronger reasons to submit to heavy than to lighter evils, so these reasons render it more easy to submit to heavy than light afflictions. 6. If men are apt to think that God afflicts them too severely, then their afflictions give them the best opportunity to know their own hearts. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *Instructive sorrows :—*1. The godly in all their afflictions must look unto the Lord the striker, and not respect the rod wherewith He smiteth. 2. Corrections laid upon others ought not to be neglected, but duly considered of, as the rest of God's works. (1) God often smiteth some to instruct others thereby. (2) We being of one mould should take to heart the condition one of another. 3. Man is not to be proud though God do many things by him and for him that seem both strange and commendable. 4. The wicked have no cause to rejoice when they prevail against the godly, though they do so usually. (1) They are but the Lord's rods, who (without repentance) shall be cast into the fire. (2) They do not, as they imagine, overthrow the godly and establish themselves, but the clean contrary. 5. The godly endure more trouble in this world, both inwardly and outwardly, than any other. (1) God loveth us, and would wean us from delighting in this world. (2) Our nature is so perverse that it will not be framed to any spiritual things without many and grievous corrections. (3) Satan and the world do hate us, and labour

continually for our destruction. 6. It is a usual thing with us, to think our own troubles more heavy and intolerable than any others suffer. (1) We feel all the smart of our own, and do only afar off behold that which others bear. (2) We are more discontented with our own crosses than we should, which maketh us bear them the more impatiently, and think them the more intolerable. 7. The afflictions that God layeth upon His servants are and ought to be grievous unto them for the present time (Heb. xii. 11). (1) We justly have deserved them through our sins. (2) We must be led by them to repentance, or we abuse them. 8. Though our sins do always deserve it, and our foes do daily desire, yet can no punishment befall the godly till God see it meet to lay it upon them. 9. The anger of God is hot against sin, even in His dearest servants. (1) He is most righteous, and cannot bear with any evil. (2) It tendeth to His great dishonour. 10. God doth not always afflict His servants, but at such special times as He seeth it meetest for them. (*J. Udall.*) *Good Friday.*—I. SOME OF THE PARTICULARS IN WHICH OUR SAVIOUR'S SUFFERINGS WERE ABOVE THOSE OF ALL OTHERS. 1. He endured bodily torture the most severe. 2. Jesus suffered still deeper sorrows of the soul. All that pierces our hearts with sorrow was heaped on Christ. What so grievous as the treachery of a friend? And Judas, His own familiar friend, betrayed Him. What so bitter as to be forsaken? Yet all His disciples forsook Him and fled. Mockery and scorn and reviling are more cruel than the pains of the body; and He suffered them all, though He had done no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth. Often man has much to soothe his dying moments; the eye of love watches by his pillow, and the hand of affection tries to lighten his pains. But this was denied to Jesus. When He died, malice and hatred were by, to pour fresh bitterness into His cup of death. 3. But will not God support Him? will not His Heavenly Father's presence and consolation supply the place of all others? No: Christ is in the sinner's stead; He is made sin for us, and His Father's countenance is turned away. II. HOW ARE WE TO THINK OF WHAT CHRIST HAS DONE AND SUFFERED? Why are we come together on this day, if it concerns us not? This day is our day of redemption. Hope, this day, has risen to a lost and sinful world. The things we hear and read of to-day are no vain story of years gone by: they are our very life. You who are passing by, as it were, in the carelessness and thoughtlessness of youth, young men and young women! you are called to-day to think of Jesus Christ. He speaks to you, and says, Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow, which I have borne for you. It is for your redemption. He will count all His sorrows as lightly borne, if you will let Him save your souls alive. Go to Him now in the first and best of your days. Give them to God, and not to sin; and so will He be with you in all your journey through this evil world, so shall you enjoy true peace of conscience. You who are passing by in manhood! to you also Jesus speaks. What are His sorrows to you? Do you find time and leisure to think of Him amidst the business, the labour, the burdens of life? Do you know anything of the power of His Cross? Has it led you to hate sin? Are you become new creatures in Christ Jesus? Do you pray for His Spirit to lead and sanctify you? You who are old, on the brink of the grave and of eternity! have you ever listened to the Saviour's call? Have you believed upon His name? How has your faith been shown? Has it appeared in a life devoted to His service, or have your years been spent in deadness to God? You who are living in the practice and love of any known sin, in profaneness, in the lusts of the flesh, in general carelessness about religion, trample not under your feet the precious blood as on this day shed. Oh, may you seek Him while He may be found, and call upon Him while He is near. Christian! is the death of Christ nothing to you? Nay; it is all in all. It is your hope, your life, the source of pardon and of peace. What is the voice that speaks to you from the Cross of Christ? It bids you die wholly unto sin, rise more truly unto righteousness. (*E. Blencowe, M.A.*) *Sorrow seen in its true light.*—"Everybody is so sorry for me except myself!" These are the words of Frances Ridley Havergal, that sweet singing spirit who dragged about through many years a weary, fragile, pain-ridden body. Everybody poured their sympathy upon her, and yet she half resented it. What is the secret of her triumph? She gives it us in one of the letters she wrote to her friends:—"I see my pain in the light of Calvary." Everything depends upon the light in which we view things. There are objects in the material world which, seen in certain lights, are visions of glory. Deprived of that revealing light, they are grey and commonplace. The Screens

at Wastwater, looked at in dull light, are only vast slopes of common pebble and common clay, but when the sunlight falls upon them they shine resplendent with the varied colours of a pigeon's neck. We must set our things in the right light. Frances Havergal set her pain in the light of Calvary, and so could almost welcome it. I remember another of her phrases, in which she said she never understood the meaning of the apostle's words, "In His own body," until she was in great pain herself, and then it seemed as though a new page of her Master's love had been unfolded to her. Bring your common drudgery, your dull duties, your commonplace tasks, your heavy, sullen griefs, into the light of the Saviour's sacrifice, and they will glow and burn with new and unexpected glory. "In Thy light shall we see light." (*Hartley Aspen.*) *Our sorrows rightly estimated* :—What we see in the water seemeth greater than it is, so is the waters of Marah. All our sufferings, saith Luther, are but chips of His Cross, not worthy to be named in the same day. (*J. Trapp.*) *On the Passion of our Saviour* :—I. THE GREATNESS OF OUR SAVIOUR'S SUFFERINGS. II. THE INTEREST THAT WE HAVE IN OUR SAVIOUR'S SUFFERINGS. 1. We were the occasion of them. 2. Their benefits redound unto us (Col. i. 14; Heb. x. 19, 20; Rom. iii. 15; Heb. x. 20). III. THE REGARD AND CONSIDERATION WE SHOULD BESTOW ON THEM. Fix the eyes of your mind, and call up your most serious attention; reach hither the hand of your faith, and thrust it into your Saviour's side; put your fingers into the print of the nails; lay to heart all the passages of His lamentable story; and this cannot but melt your heart, unless it be harder than the rocks, and deader than the bodies in the graves. (*H. Scougal, M.A.*)\

Ver. 13. From above hath He sent fire into my bones.—*Penetrating sorrows* :—1. This often mention of God's hand teacheth this doctrine: When God punisheth us by the hands of the wicked, we are hardly brought to ascribe it to Him alone; and they from thinking that their own hand and power hath done it. 2. When God layeth afflictions upon us, they ransack the most secret parts that are in us. 3. God often bringeth His servants to the greatest misery that can be sustained by man. 4. God doth govern, and that in special manner, the particular course of all those afflictions which He layeth upon His people. 5. We can no more wind ourselves out of those afflictions that God layeth upon us, than the entangled soul can escape the net that compasseth him. 6. Nothing can go forward, or come to any good issue, but that only which the Lord furthereth. 7. It is God that giveth friends, health, &c.; and taketh all away at His pleasure. 8. According to the measure and continuance of God's afflicting hand upon us, so must the measure and continuance of our sorrows be. (*J. Udall.*)

Ver. 14. The yoke of my transgressions is bound by His hand.—*A guilty conscience* :—I. Its sense of OPPRESSION. It feels itself under a "yoke." It is a heavy iron, a crushing "yoke" is sin. It is on the neck, there is no breaking away from it. II. Its sense of DEGRADATION. It feels itself held in a miserable vassalage, carnally sold under sin. III. Its sense of RETRIBUTION. It feels that the heavy, degrading yoke is bound by "His hand," the hand of justice: that his transgression is like a chain wreathed by retributive law upon the neck. The guilty conscience awakened feels that God is in all its sufferings, that there is justice in all. (*Homilist.*) *The misery of sin* :—1. The sins of God's people are the heaviest burden they can possibly bear in this life. (1) They make a separation between God and them. (2) They give Satan matter to tyrannise over them. (3) They do, after a sort, possess the soul with the very torments of hell. 2. When God meaneth to punish us for our sins, He calleth them all to remembrance. (1) That His justice may find just matter why to smite us. (2) That He may lay His corrections upon us according as He shall see meet, by viewing the quality of our sins and obstinacy therein, or proudness to repentance. 3. When God meaneth to correct, He will so do it as it cannot be escaped. 4. God giveth strength and courage to men, and taketh it away at His pleasure (Deut. xxviii. 7, 25). 5. The issue of battle is in the hand of God alone (Psa. xlv. 3). 6. God often delivereth His servants into the hands of the ungodly. (1) To exercise them, and bring them to repentance, or to perfect His power in their weakness. (2) To give the wicked occasion to show forth their cruel disposition. 7. God sometimes afflicteth His people so grievously that their state seemeth desperate and irrecoverable in the judgment of flesh and blood. (1) That He may show His mighty

power in restoring them. (2) That all means being taken away, they may learn to look up to heaven and rest upon Him only. (*J. Udall.*)

Vers. 15-17. The Lord hath trodden under foot all my mighty men.—Supreme penalties:—1. When God meaneth to afflict us, He will spoil us of all our helps wherein we may have any confidence. 2. God can as easily destroy in a fenced city as in a battle. 3. It is God that ruleth even the wicked, and setteth them on work against His servants. 4. Men can no more escape God's hand in punishing them, than the grapes can fly from the treader of the winepress. 5. The niceness of those that have lived daintily ("the virgin") is no reason to free them, but rather a provocation to bring afflictions upon them. (1) The pampering of ourselves is none of the ends for which God bestoweth His blessings upon us. (2) Such coy niceness as many be of is seldom without special sins that are incident to that condition, which God will not let pass unpunished. 6. Except the children forsake their sins, they shall not be spared for the godliness of their parents. (*J. Udall.*) **For these things I weep.—Grief in view of punishment:—**1. It is not only lawful, but also necessary, for the godly to be so greatly grieved, when God punisheth them for their sins, as may draw them into extreme weeping. 2. No adversity hath warrant to grieve us so much as the punishment of God upon us for our sins (Luke xxiii. 28). 3. There is none so stout, or hard-hearted, but afflictions will bring him down. 4. It is a grievous plague to be deprived of comforters in affliction; the contrary whereof is an exceeding blessing. 5. It is the duty of every one to comfort and relieve others that be in distress. (1) God hath so commanded (Gal. vi. 2). (2) We are members one of another (1 Cor. xii. 27). (3) We may have the like need ourselves another time. 6. The Church, as also the commonwealth, is to declare herself a kind mother to every one that is trained up therein, and to have compassion of their miseries, helping them to the uttermost. 7. It is the property of carnal friends to be friendly only whilst prosperity is upon us; but if our adversaries prevail against us, they are gone. (*Ibid.*) **Zion spreadeth forth her hands.—The appeal for help:—**1. It is a necessary duty in God's people to seek out all good means of their release from troubles. 2. God often frustrateth the lawful endeavours of His children of that good issue which is expected, and yet liketh well that they should use means to bring the same to pass. 3. The wicked have no power against God's people, but that which is given them from the Lord. 4. God's people are more grievously afflicted and reproached in the world than any else, and the godliest most of all. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 18. The Lord is righteous; for I have rebelled.—A right view of punishment:—When we see God in our punishments, we begin to take a right view of them; when they are nothing to us but self-humiliations or signs of contempt, they embitter us and harden our hearts; but when we see God at work in the very desolation of our fortunes, we are sure that He has a reason for thus scourging us, and that if we accept the penalty, and bow down before His majesty, we shall be lifted up by His mighty hand. Zion says that the Lord hath made her strength to fail, the Lord hath trodden under foot all her mighty men, the Lord hath trodden the virgin, the daughter of Judah, as in a winepress. But Zion does not accept these results with a hard heart; no: rather she says, "For these things I weep," &c. Whatever brings us to this softness of heart is a helper to the soul in all upward and Divine directions. Zion confesses the righteousness of the Lord. In proportion as we can recognise the justice of our punishment, may we bear that punishment with some dignity. It has been pointed out that with this beginning of conversion the name of the Lord, or Jehovah, reappears. The people whom God has punished on account of their sins have, in the result, been enabled to recognise the justice of their punishment. Of this we have an example in the Book of Nehemiah (ix. 33, 34). In the case of the Captivity, we see the extreme rigour of the law in the expression, "My virgins and my young men," &c.: the most honoured and the most beautiful have perished of hunger, as it were, in the open streets. How impartial and tremendous are the judgments of God! May not virgins be spared? May not His priests be exempted from the operation of the law of judgment? Will not an official robe protect a soul against the lightning of Divine wrath? All history answers No; all experience testifies to the contrary, and thereby re-establishes and infinitely confirms our confidence in the living God. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) **The equity of punishment acknowledged:—**1. God's people do acknowledge His justice in all His works, yea, even in His

punishments laid upon them. (1) His Word and Spirit hath reformed their judgments, teaching them how to think of His holy majesty in all things. (2) The consciousness of their own sins causeth them to justify the Lord, and to accuse themselves. 2. It is the duty of God's children to seek the cause of all their evils in themselves. (1) God is righteous, and layeth nothing upon them but what they justly deserve. (2) They know their own manifold sins, and their exceeding weakness in well-doing, which they cannot see in any others. 3. Though God punish us oft for other causes, yet the matter that He worketh upon is our sins. 4. We must not lessen our sins, but account them most heinous in our own eyes. 5. It is our duty (especially in religion) neither to go further nor to come shorter than God's revealed will; but attend unto it as the servant's eye doth unto his master's hand (Psa. cxxiii. 2). 6. It is rebellion against the Lord Himself to be disobedient unto the voice of His ministers teaching His truth (Luke x. 16). 7. We are constrained in our adversity to acknowledge God's hand in those things which in our prosperity we neglected. 8. When God's people are punished, they are not ashamed but willing to tell all men of it, and to declare their sins to be the cause of it. (1) Above all things they desire to have the Lord justified in all men's judgments. (2) They desire that their own example may teach others to serve God better. 9. The manifesting of our punishments unto the world as from God's hand because of our sins can neither dishonour the Lord nor harden others in their wickedness, but is a just occasion of the contrary. (*J. Udall.*) *Acknowledging the righteousness of God's judgments:*—The sure token of Judah's and Israel's repentance shall be when, accepting the punishment of their iniquity as their just due, they shall justify God. It is the most hopeful sign in any sinner, when the Holy Spirit applying inwardly the lesson taught by outward distresses, teaches him to cry, "The Lord is righteous; for I have rebelled against His commandments." (*A. R. Fausset, M.A.*)

Vers. 19-22. I called for my lovers, but they deceived me.—*Deceitful helpers:*—1. It is an increase of sorrow to be disappointed of their help by whom we looked to be delivered out of our troubles. 2. God often maketh our friends, that love us unfeignedly, utterly unable to do us any good in our distress. 3. The misery of that people must needs be great, whose rulers can neither hold themselves nor others. 4. God's plagues do often overtake the great ones, as well as others. 5. God's people may come to the extremest beggary that can be in this life. (1) Outward things are no part of their felicity, which is purchased for them by Christ Jesus. (2) God will now and then show Himself the preserver of His people, when all means do fail. (*J. Udall.*) *Behold, O Lord; for I am in distress.*—*Prayer in distress:*—1. We must not give over, but continue in prayer, though we be not heard in that we entreat for. God hath commanded us to pray without ceasing, and set no time when we shall be heard. 2. God seeth all things; but we must with lamentation lay open our miseries before Him. (1) Mercy is denied to them that hide their sins. (2) Forgiveness is granted upon a free confession. 3. We then pray most earnestly when we feel most sensibly the burden of that we would be rid of, and the want of that we would have. 4. There is no rest or quietness within us, when God presseth us with the weight of our own sins. 5. The godly do always, in the due consideration of their sins, aggravate them against themselves in greatest measure. (1) They see best into their own offences. (2) They measure them by the heavy anger of God, deserved by the same (Luke xviii. 13). 6. The things that are ordained for our greatest good in this life, do turn to our greatest harm when our sins provoke God's anger to break forth against us. (*Ibid.*) *There is none to comfort me.*—*Comfortless:*—1. It is the duty of all men to comfort the afflicted, and not to add to their miseries (Matt. xxv. 40; James i. 27; 1 Cor. xii. 26; Heb. xiii. 3). (1) We owe this duty one to another. (2) No misery can befall another, but when God will it may light upon ourselves. 2. It is the property of the wicked to rejoice at the miseries of the godly, with whom they should mourn (Psa. lxi. 12, cxxxvii. 3; Judg. xvi. 25). (1) They are affected as their father the devil, who rejoiceth in nothing but the calamity of mankind. (2) Their hatred maketh them glad when any evil lighteth on the righteous. 3. We are the fittest scholars to learn God's Word and make right use of it, when afflictions are upon us. (1) In prosperity we forget God and ourselves also. (2) We are in our corrupt nature as naughty children that will not learn except they be well whipped. (3) In afflictions we can more easily consider of our estate, both present,

past, and to come. 4. Every tittle of God's Word shall be accomplished in due season (Matt. v. 18). 5. Though the troubles of the righteous be many, yet are not the elect to be discerned from the reprobate by affliction. 6. It greatly easeth the godly in their afflictions to consider that their foes shall be destroyed (Rev. xviii. 20). 7. The punishments that God's people sustain in this life are sure tokens that the wicked shall be plagued, howsoever they escape for a time. (*Ibid.*) **Thou wilt bring the day that Thou hast called.**—*The day that will right all wrongs*:—In that day—1. God shall no longer be shut out of His own world. 2. Christ shall no longer be denied and blasphemed. 3. Evil shall no longer prevail. 4. Error shall give place to truth. 5. The saints shall no longer be malignèd. (*H. Bonar, D.D.*)

CHAPTER II.

VERS. 1-9. How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger.—*Chastisements*:—1. It is our duty to strive with ourselves to be affected with the miseries of God's people. 2. The chastisements and corrections that God layeth upon His Church are most wonderful. (1) The Lord will in His own servants declare His anger against sin. (2) He seeth afflictions the best means to frame them to His obedience. (3) His ways are beyond the reach of flesh and blood. 3. God spareth not to smite His dearest children when they sin against Him. (1) That He may declare Himself an adversary to sin in all men without partiality. (2) That He may reduce His servants from running on headlong to hell with the wicked. 4. The higher God advanceth any, the greater is their punishment in the day of their visitation for their sins. (1) To whom much is given, of them must much be required. (2) According to the privileges abused, so is the sin of those that have them greater and more in number. 5. The most beautiful thing in this world is base in respect of the majesty and glory of the Lord. 6. God's anger against sin moveth Him to destroy the things that He commanded for His own service, when they are abused by men. (*J. Udal.*) **The Lord hath swallowed up all the habitations of Jacob.**—*Spoiled habitations*:—1. It is the hand of God that taketh away the flourishing estate of a kingdom (Dan. iv. 29). 2. As God is full of mercy in His long-suffering, so is His anger unappeasable when it breaketh out against the sons of men for their sins (Jer. iv. 4). 3. God depriveth us of a great blessing when He taketh from us our dwelling-places. 4. There is no assurance of worldly possessions and peace, but in the favour of God. 5. God overthroweth the greatest strength that man can erect, even at His pleasure. 6. It is a mark of God's wrath, to be deprived of strength, courage, or any other necessary gift, when we stand in need of them. 7. It is the sin of the Church that causeth the Lord to spoil the same of any blessing that she hath heretofore enjoyed. 8. These being taken away in God's anger, teacheth us that it is the good blessing of God to have a kingdom, to have strongholds, munitions, &c., for a defence against their enemies. 9. The more God honoureth us with His blessings, the greater shall be our dishonour if we abuse them, when He entereth "into judgment" with us for the same. (*Ibid.*) **He hath cut off in His fierce anger all the horn of Israel.**—*Strength despoiled*:—1. Strength and honour are in the Lord's disposition, to be given, continued, or taken away at His pleasure. 2. When God's favour is towards us, it is our shield against our enemies; but when He meaneth to punish us, He leaveth us unto ourselves. 3. Though God's justice be severe against sin in all men, yet is it most manifest in His Church, having sinned against Him. (1) All men's eyes are most upon God's Church. (2) God doth declare Himself more in and for His Church than all the world besides. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 4, 5. He hath bent His bow like an enemy.—*God as an enemy*:—If God is tormenting His people in fierce anger, it must be because He is their enemy—so the sad-hearted patriot reasons. First, we have the earthly side of the process. The daughter of Zion is covered with a cloud—a metaphor more striking in the brilliant East than in our habitually sombre climate. There it would suggest unwonted gloom—the loss of the customary light of heaven, rare distress, and excessive melancholy.

But there is more than gloom. A mere cloud may lift, and discover everything unaltered by the passing shadow. The distress that has fallen on Jerusalem is not thus superficial and transient. She herself has suffered a fatal fall. The language is now varied; instead of "the daughter of Zion" we have "the beauty of Israel." The use of the larger title, "Israel," is not a little significant. It shows that the elegist is alive to the idea of the fundamental unity of his race, a unity which could not be destroyed by centuries of inter-tribal warfare. It has been suggested with probability that by the expression "the beauty of Israel" the elegist intended to indicate the temple. This magnificent pile of buildings, crowning one of the hills of Jerusalem, and shining with gold in "barbaric splendour," was the central object of beauty among all the people who revered the worship it enshrined. Its situation would naturally suggest the language here employed. Still keeping in mind the temple, the poet tells us that God has forgotten His footstool. He seems to be thinking of the mercy-seat over the ark, the spot at which God was thought to show Himself propitious to Israel on the great day of atonement, and which was looked upon as the very centre of the Divine presence. No miracle intervenes to punish the heathen for their sacrilege. Yes, surely God must have forgotten His footstool! So it seems to the sorrowful Jew, perplexed at the impunity with which this crime has been committed. But the mischief is not confined to the central shrine. It has extended to remote country regions and simple rustic folk. The shepherd's hut has shared the fate of the temple of the Lord. All the habitations of Jacob—a phrase which in the original points to country cottages—have been swallowed up. The holiest is not spared on account of its sanctity, neither is the lowliest on account of its obscurity. The calamity extends to all districts, to all things, to all classes. If the shepherd's cot is contrasted with the temple and the ark because of its simplicity, the fortress may be contrasted with this defenceless hut because of its strength. Yet even the strongholds have been thrown down. More than this, the action of the Jews' army has been paralysed by the God who had been its strength and support in the glorious olden time. It is as though the right hand of the warrior had been seized from behind and drawn back at the moment when it was raised to strike a blow for deliverance. The consequence is that the flower of the army, "all that were pleasant to the eye," are slain. Israel herself is swallowed up, while her palaces and fortresses are demolished. The climax of this mystery of Divine destruction is reached when God destroys His own temple. The elegist returns to the dreadful subject as though fascinated by the terror of it. According to the strict translation of the original, God is said to have violently taken away His tabernacle "as a garden." At the siege of a city the fruit gardens that encircle it are the first victims of the destroyer's axe. Lying out beyond the walls they are entirely unprotected, while the impediments they offer to the movements of troops and instruments of war induce the commander to order their early demolition. Thus Titus had the trees cleared from the Mount of Olives, so that one of the first incidents in the Roman siege of Jerusalem must have been the destruction of the Garden of Gethsemane. Now the poet compares the ease with which the great, massive temple—itsself a powerful fortress, and enclosed within the city walls—was demolished, with the simple process of scouring the outlying gardens. The deeper thought that God rejects His sanctuary because His people have first rejected Him is not brought forward just now. Yet this solution of the mystery is prepared by a contemplation of the utter failure of the old ritual of atonement. Evidently that is not always effective, for here it has broken down entirely; then can it ever be inherently efficacious? It cannot be enough to trust to a sanctuary and ceremonies which God Himself destroys. The first thing to be noticed in this unshattering ascription to God of positive enmity is the striking evidence it contains of faith in the Divine power, presence, and activity. The victorious army of the Babylonians filled the field as completely in the old time as that of the Germans in the modern event. Yet the poet simply ignores its existence. He passes it with sublime indifference, his mind filled with the thought of the unseen Power behind. He knows that the action of the true God is supreme in everything that happens, whether the event be favourable or unfavourable to His people. Perhaps it is only owing to the dreary materialism of current thought that we should be less likely to discover an indication of the enmity of God in some huge national calamity. Still, although this idea of the elegist is a fruit of his unshaken faith in the universal sway of God, it startles and shocks us, and we shrink from it almost as though

it contained some blasphemous suggestion. Is the elegist only expressing his own feelings? Have we a right to affirm that there can be no objective truth in the awful idea of the enmity of God? In the first place, we have no warrant for asserting that God will never act in direct and intentional opposition to any of His creatures. There is one obvious occasion when He certainly does this. The man who resists the laws of nature finds those laws working against him. The laws of nature are, as Kingsley said, but the ways of God. If they are opposing a man, God is opposing that man. But God does not confine His action to the realm of physical processes. His providence works through the whole course of events in the world's history. What we see evidently operating in nature we may infer to be equally active in less visible regions. Then, if we believe in a God who rules and works in the world, we cannot suppose that His activity is confined to aiding what is good. It is unreasonable to imagine that He stands aside in passive negligence of evil. And if He concerns Himself to thwart evil, what is this but manifesting Himself as the enemy of the evil-doer? It may be contended, on the other side, that there is a world of difference between antagonistic actions and unfriendly feelings, and that the former by no means imply the latter. Still, for the time being, the opposition is a reality, and a reality which to all intents and purposes is one of enmity, since it resists, frustrates, hurts. Nor is this all. We have no reason to deny that God can have real anger. We must believe that Jesus Christ was as truly revealing the Father when He was moved with indignation as when He was moved with compassion. His mission was a war against all evil, and therefore, though not waged with carnal weapons, a war against evil men. The Jewish authorities were perfectly right in perceiving this fact. They persecuted Him as their enemy; and He was their enemy. This statement is no contradiction to the gracious truth that He desired to save all men, and therefore even these men. If God's enmity to any soul were eternal, it would conflict with His love. But if He is at the present time actively opposing a man, and if He is doing this in anger, in the wrath of righteousness against sin, it is only quibbling with words to deny that for the time being He is a very real enemy to that man. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*) *The Divine anger*:—1. Where God is angry, there is nothing to be looked for but destruction and ill success in all things. 2. God punisheth sin in His children in this world as severely as if they were reprobates. (1) To declare that He is not partial, but hateth sin in those whom He most of all loveth. (2) That it may appear what great wrath remaineth for the ungodly (1 Pet. iv. 17). 3. Though God show all outward signs of enmity against His Church, yet is His love everlasting thereunto. 4. God's anger is never in vain, but effecteth punishment upon them with whom He is angry. 5. God regardeth not the most precious things that are amongst the sons of men, in respect of declaring His justice against sin. (*J. Udall.*) *The Lord was as an enemy*.—*Divine displeasure*:—1. This oft repeating of one thing teacheth that it is hard to persuade God's people rightly to judge of and be afflicted with the afflictions that are upon them. (1) The ways of God are high beyond the reach of the sons of men. (2) We are naturally of a blind and dull disposition, with much ado brought unto any good thing. 2. God hath no need of any people, but all have need of Him. 3. God will increase His plagues upon His children, where sin without repentance is increased. 4. God giveth many causes of sorrow when He punisheth His people. (1) He giveth a token that He is displeased, which is cause of greatest grief unto His children. (2) His punishments do usually cross our affections in the things that they are much set upon. (a) Labour with ourselves that we may be affected with the crosses that are upon us. (b) Seek to Him alone for succour in the time of our sorrow. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 6-9. *He hath violently taken away His tabernacle.*—*Divine destruction*:—Jehovah is here represented as throwing down His own temple, as treating it as if it were a temporary shelter, as disregarding all its glory, and merely throwing it from Him as men might tear down and cast away a shed from an orchard, a garden, or a field. Who can set a measure to the wrath of God? Continually does the Lord assert that He will have nothing to do with mere form or ceremony, with mere locality or consecration; He will only accept living obedience, living faithfulness, living sacrifice. He will have no mercy upon polluted temples and polluted altars; nor will His own Book be spared if men have used it as an idol: He will destroy and utterly drive away everything that once was sacred if it has

been perverted to unholy purposes. Let not men say that they will be safe in God's temple from God's wrath, because when law has been violated there is no sanctuary where God will regard man as safe from the visitation of His penal sword. How living and real does all this make the providence of heaven! How near does this bring God to our daily life and conduct! (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *God destroying His own ordinances*.—1. It is the Lord alone that giveth safety unto His Church, or layeth His people open to spoilers (*Isa. v. 5, 6; Psa. lxxx. 12, 13*). 2. No place on earth hath any holiness in it, or promise of a continuance, further than it is holily used. 3. God is angry with His own ordinances, and layeth a curse upon them, for the sins of those that abuse them (*Psa. lxxiv. 5-7; Isa. i. 13, vi. 10*). 4. The Church of God on earth is not always visible and apparent to the eyes of men (*Rev. xii. 14*). 5. When God will afflict a people, He will spoil them of the means of their peace and comfort (*Isa. iii. 1-5*). 6. It is a grievous plague of God for a people to be spoiled of their rulers; and to enjoy them is a great blessing. 7. It is the heaviest judgment that God's Church can have falling upon her in this life, to be deprived of that holy ministry which should build her up in true religion (*Psa. lxxiv. 9; Mic. ii. 6*). (*J. Udall.*) *The Lord hath cast off His altar*.—*Altars destroyed*.—1. It is the duty of God's people to labour their affections, that they may be rightly touched with the loss of the outward exercises of religion. 2. When God is angry with His people, He will take from them the outward signs of His favour. 3. When God's people grow obstinate in their sins, He spoileth them of all those things wherein they trust. 4. When the Church is spoiled, the commonwealth cannot go free. 5. The wicked could never prevail against the godly, but that God giveth them into their hands. 6. God giveth the wicked (for the sins of His people) occasion to blaspheme His name and to deride His holy ordinances. (*Ibid.*) *The Lord hath purposed to destroy the wall . . . of Zion*.—*Privileges no protection*.—1. No privilege can free the impenitent sinners from the plague that God meaneth to bring upon them, though they persuade themselves otherwise (*Jer. vii. 4*). 2. The ruins of kingdoms and strong cities come to pass only by the immutable decree of God; and not by fortune, man's power, or any other thing (*Dan. iv. 22; 1 Sam. xv. 28, 29*). 3. The Lord doth both decree His judgments and also determine the measure of them (*Dan. iv. 29*). 4. The dumb and senseless creatures do mourn according to their kind when we are punished in them for our sins (*Rom. viii. 22*). 5. The sin of men bringeth strongest things to nothing when God calleth them to an account (*Isa. xiii. 19, 20*). 6. God's hand prevaileth as easily against the strongest and most as the weakest and feeblest. (*Ibid.*) *Her gates are sunk into the ground*.—*Gates sunk*.—1. When God punisheth His people, He will especially destroy those things wherein they put most confidence. 2. When God meaneth thoroughly to afflict a people, He will spoil them of the means of their peace and comfort. 3. When God by punishments sheweth His anger against a people, He especially plagueth their princes and rulers. 4. It is a grievous punishment unto the godly to live with or to serve them that are wicked (*Psa. cxx. 4, 5*). 5. It is a fearful judgment to have the ministry of the Word that heretofore we enjoyed, taken away from us (*Psa. lxxiv. 9; Mark vi. 10, 11*). (*Ibid.*) *The desolations of Zion*.—I. *THE PRESENT DESOLATE AND MISERABLE STATE OF THE HEBREW NATION*. No people, since the creation, are in so anomalous a state as the Jews—without a country or a city, a temple or a service, a priest or a sacrifice, worthy of the name. Enter a Jewish synagogue, and you will see "Ichabod is written on its walls"—"the glory has departed": it is no longer the "house of God" or "of prayer," but "a house of merchandise," if not worse. II. *FOR SUCH STUPENDOUS EVILS "IS THERE NOT A CAUSE"?* If the heinousness of sin be in proportion to the favours which the sinner has received, or to the light against which it has been committed, no ingratitude seems to be so great as that of the Jewish nation. III. *THE ONLY REMEDY*. God, by the prophet Hosea, after charging Israel with complicated guilt, gives a gleam of hope and a ray of mercy. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thy help." This is the burden of my message to-day, that "with God there is mercy, yea, plenteous redemption"; and that, though others can neither profit nor deliver, He can and shall "redeem Israel from all his sins." IV. *ANSWER OBJECTIONS*. One says, "This is not the time." But who, I ask, is God's time-keeper? Times and events are in God's hands; and it is neither in our power, nor would it be for our good, to know them. Who, then, can say what is not, when he confessedly knows not what is the time? Again I ask, "For what is it not the time?"

For reaping ?—for triumph ? We never led you to expect it was ; but, for breaking up the ground it is always opportune. Again, “ we shall probably never live to see any fruits of our labours.” This we cannot know for certain ; and if we could, it is as selfish and ungenerous, as it is unwise, to use such an argument. We may set up the hoard, or erect the scaffolding, or lay the foundation : another generation may carry up the walls ; and a third may put the finishing stroke with shoutings, songs, and triumphs. “ After all,” says another, “ you will do no real good : you may make hypocrites of your converts, and those only of the poorest, but you will not make Christians : the prejudices of the Jew are too deeply rooted to be removed by a tract, or even by the New Testament ; your labour will therefore be in vain.” Formidable as this objection is, it is as flimsy as it is false. We make Christians ! We make no such pretensions : it is not in us : this is God’s work—His high and exclusive prerogative. Believers “ are God’s husbandry, and God’s building.” “ Is anything too hard for the Lord ? ” is a key which will open any lock which unbelief shall place in its way. One class of objectors, of all others the most to be lamented and feared, is that who say, respecting the Jews, “ Let them alone : do not meddle with them : they will not attend to your instructions, nor have they any wish to change their religion ; besides, what need ? one religion is as good as another, if a man does but act up to that he has, and does as well as he can ! Bigotry and intolerance will do them more harm than good.” To this specious reasoning I reply, It is criminal indifference, and cruel inhumanity, to let men live and die in sin. True charity will make an effort to save those it loves. We know, from bitter experience, in our own cases, that, if left to themselves, the Israelites will not attend to us ; but God, who commanded, has promised His blessing on our labours. Sinners must not be left to themselves. (*J. W. Niblock, D.D.*) Her prophets also find no vision from the Lord.—*Prophets without a vision*.—In deploring the losses suffered by the daughter of Zion, the elegist bewails the failure of her prophets to obtain a vision from Jehovah. To understand the situation, we must recollect the normal place of prophecy in the social life of Israel. The great prophets whose names and works have come down to us in Scripture were always rare and exceptional men—voices crying in the wilderness. Possibly they were not more scarce at this time than at other periods. This was not an age like the time of Samuel’s youth, barren of Divine voices. Yet the idea of the elegist is that the prophets who might be still seen at the site of the city were deprived of visions. These must have been the professional prophets, officials who had been trained in music and dancing to appear as choristers on festive occasions, the equivalent of the modern dervishes ; but who were also sought after like the seer of Ramah, to whom young Saul resorted for information about his father’s lost asses, as simple soothsayers. Such assistance as these men were expected to give was no longer forthcoming at the request of troubled souls. The low and sordid uses to which everyday prophecy was degraded may incline us to conclude that the cessation of it was no very great calamity, and perhaps to suspect that from first to last the whole business was a mass of superstition affording large opportunities for charlatany. But it would be rash to adopt this extreme view without a fuller consideration of the subject. The prophets were regarded as the media of communication between heaven and earth. It was because of the low and narrow habits of the people that their gifts were often put to low and narrow uses which savoured rather of superstition than of devotion. The belief that God did not only reveal His will to great persons and on momentous occasions, helped to make Israel a religious nation. That there were humble gifts of prophecy within the reach of the many, and that these gifts were for the helping of men and women in their simplest needs, was one of the articles of the Hebrew faith. When we have succeeded in recovering this Hebrew standpoint, we shall be prepared to recognise that there are worse calamities than bad harvests and seasons of commercial depression ; we shall be brought to acknowledge that it is possible to be starved in the midst of plenty, because the greatest abundance of such food as we have lacks the elements requisite for our complete nourishment. As we look across the wide field of history, we must perceive that there have been many dreary periods in which the prophets could find no vision from the Lord. Now what is the explanation of these variations in the distribution of the spirit of prophecy ? Why is the fountain of inspiration an intermittent spring, a Bethesda ? We cannot trace its failure to any shortness of supply, for this fountain is fed from the infinite ocean of the Divine life. Neither can

we attribute caprice to One whose wisdom is infinite, and whose will is constant. It may be right to say that God withholds the vision, withholds it deliberately; but it cannot be correct to assert that this fact is the final explanation of the whole matter. God must be believed to have a reason, a good and sufficient reason, for whatever He does. Can we guess what His reason may be in such a case as this? It may be conjectured that it is necessary for the field to lie fallow for a season in order that it may bring forth a better crop subsequently. Incessant cultivation would exhaust the soil. The eye would be blinded if it had no rest from visions. Until we have obeyed the light that has been given us, it is foolish to complain that we have not more light. Even our present light will wane if it is not followed up in practice. But while such considerations must be attended to, they do not end the controversy, and they scarcely apply at all to the particular illustration of it that is now before us. There is no danger of surfeit in a famine; and it is a famine of the word that we are now confronted with. Moreover, the elegist supplies an explanation that sets all conjectures at rest. The fault was in the prophets themselves. Addressing the daughter of Zion, the poet says: "Thy prophets have seen visions for thee." The visions were suited to the people to whom they were declared—manufactured, shall we say?—with the express purpose of pleasing them. Such a degradation of sacred functions in gross unfaithfulness deserved punishment; and the most natural and reasonable punishment was the withholding for the future of true visions from men who in the past had forged false ones. There is nothing so blinding as the habit of lying. People who do not speak truth ultimately prevent themselves from perceiving truth, the false tongue leading the eye to see falsely. This is the curse and doom of all insincerity. It is useless to inquire for the views of insincere persons; they can have no distinct views, no certain convictions, because their mental vision is blurred by their long-continued habit of confounding true and false. Then, if for once in their lives such people may really desire to find a truth in order to assure themselves in some great emergency, and therefore seek a vision of the Lord, they will have lost the very faculty of receiving it. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*)

Ver. 10. *The elders . . . keep silence.—Overwhelming judgments*:—1. The wisest of God's servants are at their wit's end, or fall into despair, if they be deprived of their hope, in the promise of God's assistance (*Psa. cxix. 92*). 2. Bodily exercises do profit to further lamentations in the day of heaviness, but are no part of God's service in themselves. 3. The extremity of God's judgments do for the time overwhelm God's dearest children in the greatest measure of grief that can be in this life (*Psa. vi. 3, xxii. 1*). 4. The most dainty ones are made to stoop when God's hand is heavy upon them for their sins. (*J. Udall.*)

Vers. 11-13. *Mine eyes do fall with tears.—The miseries of the Church taken to heart*:—1. The true ministers of God do take the miseries of the Church to heart in the greatest measure. 2. Our sorrow, humiliation, earnest prayer, and all other means of extraordinary calling upon God, must increase in us, so long as God's heavy hand is upon us. 3. Hearty sorrow for spiritual miseries distempereth the whole body. 4. The sorrows of the soul will easily consume the body. 5. A lively member is grieved with the hurt of the body, or any member thereof. 6. The ministers of Christ should have a tender affection to the members of the Church, as a man hath to his daughter. 7. There is no outward thing so much cause of sorrow, as the miseries laid upon our children in our sight. (*J. Udall.*) *Compassion for sinners*:—It is the missionary with the fountain of pity that reaches the deepest place in the native's heart. When Livingstone was found dead on his knees in the heart of Africa, his head was resting over his open Bible, and his finger was pointing to the last words he ever penned in his diary: "Oh, God, when will the open sore of the world be healed?" That was the profound pity which commenced the redemptive work in Africa, and which lives in emanipating influence to-day. (*Hartley Aspen.*) *They say to their mothers, Where is corn and wine?*—*Great grief*:—1. It is the greatest grief that can be, to have them whom we would gladly pleasure, seek that at our hands which we cannot help them unto. 2. When God would have us profit by any work of His, He will let us see the true cause of it. 3. The grief that is seen with the eye is the heaviest unto us of all other things that fall upon our friends. 4. When God meaneth to humble us, He will use most effectual means to bring

it to pass. (J. Udal.)

What thing shall I take to witness for thee?—*Plain ministers*:—Ministers must be studious in the Word, to find out everything that may fit the Church's present condition (Isa. l. 4; Matt. xiii. 52). 2. It is the greatest grief that can be, to fall into a trouble that hath not been laid upon others before. 3. That minister loveth us best, that dealeth most plainly with us. 4. The visible state of the Church of God may come to be of a desperate condition, every way vexed more and more. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 14. Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee.—*Prophetic fidelity*:—The crying fault of the prophets is their reluctance to preach to people of their sins. Their mission distinctly involves the duty of doing so. They should not shun to declare the whole counsel of God. It is not within the province of the ambassador to make selections from among the despatches with which he has been entrusted in order to suit his own convenience. One of the gravest possible omissions is the neglect to give due weight to the tragic fact of sin. All the great prophets have been conspicuous for their fidelity to this painful and sometimes dangerous part of their work. If we would call up a typical picture of a prophet in the discharge of his task, we should present to our minds Elijah confronting Ahab, or John the Baptist before Herod, or Savonarola accusing Lorenzo de Medici, or John Knox preaching at the court of Mary Stuart. He is Isaiah declaring God's abomination of sacrifices and incense when these are offered by blood-stained hands, or Chrysostom seizing the opportunity that followed the mutilation of the imperial statues at Antioch to preach to the dissolute city on the need of repentance, or Latimer denouncing the sins of London to the citizens assembled at Paul's Cross. The shallow optimism that disregards the shadows of life is trebly faulty when it appears in the pulpit. It falsifies facts in failing to take account of the stern realities of the evil side of them; it misses the grand opportunity of rousing the consciences of men and women by forcing them to attend to unwelcome truths, and thus encourages the heedlessness with which people rush headlong to ruin; and at the same time it even renders the declaration of the gracious truths of the Gospel, to which it devotes exclusive attention, ineffectual, because redemption is meaningless to those who do not recognise the present slavery and the future doom from which it brings deliverance. (W. F. Adeney, W.A.) *False teachers*:—1. False teachers are as grievous a plague as can be laid upon a people. They bring with them inevitable destruction (Matt. xv. 14). 2. They that refuse to receive the true ministers, God will give them over to be seduced by false teachers and to believe lies (2 Chron. xxxvi. 15; Prov. i. 24; 2 Thess. ii. 10-12). 3. It is a certain note of a false prophet, to speak such things in the name of the Lord as are untrue, or misalleged to please the carnal desires of the people (Jer. xiv. 13-15). 4. It is not sufficient for a true minister not to flatter; he must also discover the people's sins unto them (Ezek. xiii. 4; 1 Kings xviii. 18; Matt. iii. 7; Luke iii. 8; Matt. xiv. 4). 5. The only way to avoid God's plagues is gladly to suffer ourselves bitterly to be reproved by God's ministers. 6. The falsehood that is taught by false prophets, and believed by a seduced people, is the cause of all God's punishments that light upon them. (J. Udal.) *False spiritual guides lead to ruin*:—A short time back the papers told of a vessel that had a most unfortunate trip. The captain became blind three days after leaving St. Pierre-Martinique, and no one on board was capable of navigating the ship. The mate did his best, and after drifting about for twenty-seven days came in sight of Newfoundland, where some fishermen saw her signals of distress, and piloted her into port. If a ship with a blind captain is poorly off, what of a nation, a church, a village, where blind men are in charge: some born blind and by nature unqualified; others blind through worldly interests and a false learning! "Blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." (*Footsteps of Truth.*)

Ver. 15. All that pass by clap their hands at thee.—*Deriding the distressed*:—1. God is wont to whip His children for their sins, by the multitude of unbelievers that hate the truth (Isa. x. 5, 6; Jer. xxv. 9; Exod. i. 13, 14). 2. It is a property of a wicked heart, to insult over the distressed, whom we should pity and relieve (Psa. xxxv. 15, lxxix. 4; 2 Sam. xvi. 7, 8; Matt. xxvii. 39). 3. The wicked seeing the godly afflicted, take occasion thereby to blaspheme God and His truth (Psa. lxxiv. 10, 18; 2 Kings xviii. 30, 35; xix. 12). 4. There only is true joy and excellency where God's truth is rightly preached, and His name called upon

(Psa. l. 2; Ezek. xlvii. 8, 9, 12). (*J. Udall.*) *Exultation over the fallen* :—Men are always ready to remind the fallen of the days of prosperity. It is hard to pass by a man who is thrown down without telling him what he might have been, what he once was, and how foolishly he has acted in forsaking the way in which he found prosperity and delight. We must expect this from all men. It is not in their nature to heal our diseases, to comfort our sorrows, to sympathise with us in the hour of desolation. The Psalmist complained, "Thou makest us a by-word among the heathen, a shaking of the head among the people." Wonderful things had been spoken of Zion in the better days. In proportion to our exaltation is our down-throwing. "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion," &c. "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined." "How great is His goodness! and how great is His beauty!" But all this will go for nothing where there has been moral apostasy, spiritual disobedience, or spiritual idolatry. Decoration is vanity. All that men can do in the beautifying of their lives is as rottenness if the heart itself be not in a healthy condition. Add to the bitterness of self-remorse the triumphant exultation of enemies who pass by, and say whether any humiliation can be deeper or more intolerable. Where, then, is hope to be found? In heaven. The God whom we have offended must be the God who can forgive us. Do not let us seek to placate our enemies, or turn their triumphing into felicitation: we have no argument with them; not a word ought we to have to say to such mockers; we must acquaint ourselves with God, and make ourselves at peace with heaven, and if a man's ways please the Lord, the Lord will make that man's enemies to be at peace with him. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The call to prayer* :—This is not the first occasion on which the elegist has shown his faith in the efficacy of prayer. But hitherto he has only uttered brief exclamations in the middle of his descriptive passages. Now he gives a solemn call to prayer, and follows this with a deliberate full petition, addressed to God. This new and more elevated turn in the elegy is itself suggestive. The transition from lamentation to prayer is always good for the sufferer. The trouble that drives us to prayer is a blessing, because the state of a praying soul is a blessed state. Like the *muezzin* on his minaret, the elegist calls to prayer. But his exhortation is addressed to a strange object—to the wall of the daughter of Zion. This wall is to let its tears flow like a river. Browning has an exquisitely beautiful little poem apostrophising an old wall; but this is not done so as to leave out of account the actual form and nature of his subject. Walls can not only be beautiful and even sublime, as Mr. Ruskin has shewn in his *Stones of Venice*; they may also wreath their severe outlines in a multitude of thrilling associations. This is especially so when, as in the present instance, it is the wall of a city that we are contemplating. Such a wall is eloquent in its wealth of associations, and there is pathos in the thought of its mere age when this is considered in relation to the many men and women and children who have rested beneath its shadow at noon, or sheltered themselves behind its solid masonry amid the terrors of war. The walls that encircle the ancient English city of Chester and keep alive memories of mediæval life, the bits of the old London wall that are left standing among the warehouses and offices of the busy mart of modern commerce, even the remote wall of China for quite different reasons, and many another famous wall, suggest to us multitudinous reflections. But the walls of Jerusalem surpass them all in the pathos of the memories that cling to their old grey stones. In personifying the wall of Zion, however, the Hebrew poet does not indulge in reflections such as these, which are more in harmony with the mild melancholy of Gray's "Elegy" than with the sadder mood of the mourning patriot. He names the wall to give unity and concreteness to his appeal, and to clothe it in an atmosphere of poetic fancy. But his sober thought in the background is directed towards the citizens whom that historic wall once enclosed. Let us look at the appeal in detail. First the elegist encourages a free outflow of grief, that tears should run like a river, literally, like a torrent—the allusion being to one of those steep watercourses which, though dry in summer, become rushing floods in the rainy season. This introduction shews that the call to prayer is not intended in any sense as a rebuke for the natural expression of grief, nor as a denial of its existence. The sufferers cannot say that the poet does not sympathise with them. There may be a deeper reason for this encouragement of the expression of grief as a preliminary to a call to prayer. The helplessness which it so eloquently proclaims is just the condition in which the soul is most ready to cast itself on the mercy of God. The first step towards deliverance

will be to melt the glacier. The soul must feel before it can pray. Therefore the tears are encouraged to run like torrents, and the sufferer to give himself no respite, nor let the apple of his eye cease from weeping. Next the poet exhorts the object of his sympathy—this strange personification of the “wall of the daughter of Zion,” under the image of which he is thinking of the Jews—to arise. The weeping is but a preliminary to more promising acts. The sufferer must be roused if he is to be saved from the disease of melancholia. He must be roused also if he would pray. True prayer is a strenuous effort of the soul, requiring the most wakeful attention and taxing the utmost energy of will. Therefore we must gird up our loins to pray just as we would to work, or run, or fight. Now the awakened soul is urged to cry out in the night, and in the beginning of the night watches—that is to say, not only at the commencement of the night, for this would require no rousing, but at the beginning of each of the three watches into which the Hebrews divided the hours of darkness—at sunset, at ten o’clock, and at two in the morning. The sufferer is to keep watch with prayer—observing his vespers, his nocturns, and his matins, not of course to fulfil forms, but because, since his grief is continuous, his prayer also must not cease. Proceeding with our consideration of the details of this call to prayer, we come upon the exhortation to pour out the heart like water before the face of the Lord. The image here used is not without parallel in Scripture (see *Psa. xxii. 14*). But the ideas are not just the same in the two cases. While the Psalmist thinks of himself as crushed and shattered, as though his very being were dissolved, the thought of the elegist has more action about it, with a deliberate intention and object in view. His image suggests complete openness before God. Nothing is to be withheld. The sufferer should tell the whole tale of his grief to God, quite freely, without any reserve, trusting absolutely to the Divine sympathy. The attitude of soul that is here recommended is in itself the very essence of prayer. The devotions that consist in a series of definite petitions are of secondary worth, and superficial in comparison with this outpouring of the heart before God. To enter into relations of sympathy and confidence with God is to pray in the truest, deepest way possible, or even conceivable. Even in the extremity of need, perhaps the best thing we can do is to spread out the whole case before God. It will certainly relieve our own minds to do so, and everything will appear changed when viewed in the light of the Divine presence. Perhaps we shall then cease to think ourselves aggrieved and wronged; for what are our deserts before the holiness of God? Passion is allayed in the stillness of the sanctuary, and the indignant protest dies upon our lips as we proceed to lay our case before the eyes of the All-Seeing. We cannot be impatient any longer; He is so patient with us, so fair, so kind, so good. Thus, when we cast our burden upon the Lord, we may be surprised with the discovery that it is not so heavy as we supposed. The secret of failure in prayer is not that we do not ask enough; it is that we do not pour out our hearts before God, the restraint of confidence rising from fear or doubt simply paralysing the energies of prayer. Jesus teaches us to pray not only because He gives us a model prayer, but much more because He is in Himself so true and full and winsome a revelation of God, that as we come to know and follow Him our lost confidence in God is restored. Then the heart that knows its own bitterness, and that shrinks from permitting the stranger even to meddle with its joy—how much more then with its sorrow?—can pour itself out quite freely before God, for the simple reason that He is no longer a stranger, but the one perfectly intimate and absolutely trusted Friend. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*)

Ver. 19. Arise, cry out in the night.—*Watch-night service*:—Methinks I might become a Jeremiah to-night, and weep as he, for surely the Church at large is in almost as evil a condition. Oh, Zion, how hast thou been veiled in a cloud, and how is thy honour trodden in the dust! Arise, ye sons of Zion, and weep for your mother, yea, weep bitterly, for she hath given herself to other lovers, and forsaken the Lord that bought her. We leave Zion, however, to speak to those who need exhortation more than Zion does; to speak to those who are Zion’s enemies, or followers of Zion, and yet not belonging to her ranks. 1. It is never too soon to pray. You are lying on your bed; the gracious Spirit whispers—“Arise, and pray to God.” Well, there is no reason why you should delay till the morning light; “in the beginning of the watches pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord.” Need we remind you that “delays are dangerous”? Need we tell you that those are the workings of Satan? For the Holy Ghost,

when He strives with man, says, "To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your heart." 2. Again, it is not too late to cry to the Lord; for if the sun be set, and the watches of the night have commenced their round, the mercy-seat is open. There have been some older than you can be; some as sinful and vile, and heinously wicked, who have provoked God as much, who have sinned against him as frequently, and yet they have found pardon. 3. We cannot pray too vehemently, for the text says, "Arise, cry out in the night." God loves earnest prayers. He loves impetuous prayers—vehement prayers. "Arise, cry out in the night," and God will hear you, if you cry out with all your souls, and pour out your hearts before Him. 4. We cannot pray too simply. Just hear how the Psalmist has it: "Pour out your hearts before Him." Not "pour out your fine words," not "pour out your beautiful periods," but "pour out your hearts." Pour out your heart like water. How does water run out? The quickest way it can; that's all. It never stops much about how it runs. That is the way the Lord loves to have it. Pour out your heart like water; pour it out by confessing all your sins; pour it out by begging the Lord to have mercy upon you for Christ's sake; pour it out like water. And when it is all poured out, He will come and fill it again with "wines on the lees, well refined." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Night cries*:—"Pull the night bell." This is the inscription we often see written on the door-post of the shop in which medicines are sold. Some of us have had our experiences with night-bells when sudden illness has overtaken some member of our households, or when sickness has rapidly grown worse. How have we hurried through the silent streets, when only here and there a light glimmered from some chamber window! How eagerly have we pulled the night-bell at our physician's door, and then, with prescription in hand, have sounded the alarm at the place where the remedy was to be procured. Those of us who have had these lovely midnight walks, and have given the summons for quick relief, know the meaning of that text, "Arise, cry out in the night." (*T. L. Cuyler.*)

Ver. 20. Behold, O Lord, and consider to whom Thou hast done this.—Fervent prayer:—1. The only way of remedy in our greatest miseries is to call upon God in fervent prayer. (1) It declareth that we are humbled and our pride broken, in confessing no power to be in ourselves, and seeking help elsewhere. (2) He is of greatest power, and none else can help us. (3) He will have all the glory of our deliverance (*Psa. l. 15*). 2. By this vehement kind of speech we learn that in right prayer to God the frame of our words must be according to our affection. 3. The chief reason to move the Lord to pity us is the remembrance of His covenant of mercy in Christ. 4. God's wrath overturneth the course of nature in those against whom it is bent. 5. There is sufficient cause and matter in all the infants of God's people, why God should in His justice destroy them (*Psa. li. 5*). 6. Cruelty exercised by the hands of the wicked upon children and ministers is a special means to move God to hear us when we pray for them. 7. There is no privilege of peace that can free us from punishment when we sin against the Lord. (*J. Udall.*)

Ver. 21. The young and the old lie on the ground in the streets.—Unburied:—1. When God punisheth a people for sin, He spareth neither age nor sex. 2. It is a sign of God's anger upon a people, when they want decent burial (*Psa. lxxix. 3*). 3. The wicked will do most barbarous things, when God bridlETH them not. 4. As God is full of mercy in His longsuffering, so is His anger unappeasable when it breaketh out. (*J. Udall.*)

Ver 22. Thou hast called . . . my terrors round about.—The wicked as instruments of punishment:—1. God raiseth up the wickedest, and employeth them to punish His own servants when they sin (*Isa. v. 26, viii. 7*). 2. None can escape God's punishments, whom He meaneth to punish (*Psa. cxxxix. 7*). 3. The children of impenitent sinners are often taken away, and prosper not to their comfort. In God's displeasure all things are accused unto us (*Deut. xxviii. 15*). (*J. Udall.*) *The ministry of terror*:—At Dunkeld there is a high rock, forming a conspicuous feature in the landscape. It is covered at the top with pine trees, which stand out like spears against the sky-line, and only here and there can you see the grey face of the rock itself, showing how steep and dangerous it is. At one time the rock was perfectly bare; and one of the Dukes of Athole, who had a perfect passion for planting trees everywhere, wished to

cover it like the other heights around with wood. But it was found impossible to climb up to the crevices and ledges of the huge rock, in order to plant the young trees. One day, Alexander Naismith, the father of the great engineer, paid a visit to the duke's grounds; and when told about his grace's wish to adorn the rock with trees, he suggested a plan by which this might be accomplished. In front of the duke's castle he noticed an old cannon, which had been used for firing salutes on great occasions. He got this cannon removed to a convenient point near the rock; and then putting a large quantity of the seeds of pine and fir trees into a round tin canister, he rammed it into the mouth of the cannon with a charge of gunpowder, and fired it at the top of the rock. The canister, when it struck the rock, broke into bits and scattered the seeds in every direction. A great many of them fell into the nooks and crannies of the rock, where a little moss or soil had gathered; and with the first showers they began to sprout and send up their tiny shoots, which took firm hold of the rock. After years of slow and steadfast growth, for they had exceedingly little soil, they became trees which completely clothed the naked rock and made it one of the most picturesque parts of the landscape. Now, this was a very strange use to make of a cannon, and a very strange way of sowing seed. A cannon is usually employed to cause death and destruction. But on this occasion it was used to do good, to clothe a naked rock with beauty and fertility, to bring life out of death. It made a loud terrifying noise; it broke the rock in splinters, it burst the canister into fragments, but it scattered the seeds of life where they were wanted. Never was gunpowder employed in a more beneficent work! Now, God sometimes sows his seeds of eternal life by means of a cannon. He persuades men by terror. He says, indeed, of Himself, "Fury is not in Me." It is contrary to His nature; for He is love. And yet He is sometimes obliged to do things that terrify for His people's good. There are proud, lofty natures, full of conceit and self-sufficiency, that rise above their fellows in their own esteem, and lord it over them, and yet are bare and barren of any spiritual good thing, neither profitable to God nor man. If the seed of eternal life is to be sown at all in such lofty, inaccessible natures, it must be by means of a cannon. They must be persuaded by terror. God must thunder forth to them His warnings and invitations. (*H. Macmillan, D.D.*)

CHAPTER III.

VERS. 1-21. I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of His wrath.—*The Man that hath seen affliction*.—Whether we regard it from a literary, a speculative, or a religious point of view, the third and central elegy cannot fail to strike us as by far the best of the five. Like Tennyson, who is most poetic when he is most artistic, as in his lyrics, and like all the great sonneteers, the author of this exquisite Hebrew melody has not found his ideas to be cramped by the rigorous rules of composition. Possibly the artistic refinement of form stimulates thought and rouses the poet to exert his best powers; or perhaps—and this is more probable—he selects the richer robe for the purpose of clothing his choicer conceptions. This elegy differs from its sister poems in another respect. It is composed, for the most part, in the first person singular, the writer either speaking of his own experience or dramatically personating another sufferer. Who is this "Man that hath seen affliction"? There is just the possibility that the poet is not describing himself at all; he may be representing somebody well known to his contemporaries—perhaps even Jeremiah, or just a typical character, in the manner of Browning's *Dramatis Personæ*. While some mystery hangs over the personality of this man of sorrows, the power and pathos of the poem are certainly heightened by the concentration of our attention upon one individual. Few persons are moved by general statements. The study of abstract reports is most important to those who are already interested in the subjects of these dreary documents; but it is useless as a means of exciting interest. Philanthropy must visit the office of the statistician if it would act with enlightened judgment, and not permit itself to become the victim of blind enthusiasm; but it was not born there, and the sympathy which is its parent can only be found among individual instances of distress. In the present case the speaker who recounts his own misfortunes

is more than a casual witness, more than a mere specimen picked out at random from the heap of misery accumulated in this age of national ruin. He is not simply a man who has seen affliction, one among many similar sufferers; he is the man, the well-known victim, one pre-eminent in distress even in the midst of a nation full of misery. Yet he is not isolated on a solitary peak of agony. As the supreme sufferer, he is also the representative sufferer. He is not selfishly absorbed in the morbid occupation of brooding over his private grievances. He has gathered into himself the vast and terrible woes of his people. Thus he foreshadows our Lord in His passion. The idea of representative suffering which here emerges, and which becomes more definite in the picture of the servant of Jehovah in Isa. liii., only finds its full realisation and perfection in Jesus Christ. It is repeated, however, with more or less distinctness wherever the Christ Spirit is revealed. The portrait of himself drawn by the author of this elegy is the more graphic by reason of the fact that the present is linked to the past. The striking commencement, "I am the man," &c., sets the speaker in imagination before our eyes. The addition "who has seen" (or rather, experienced) "affliction" connects him with his present sufferings. His own personality has slowly acquired a depth, a fulness, a ripeness that remove him far from the raw and superficial character he once was. We are silenced into awe before Job, Jeremiah, and Dante, because these men grew great by suffering. Is it not told even of our Lord Jesus Christ that He was made perfect by the things that He suffered? It is to be observed that here in his self-portraiture—just as elsewhere when describing the calamities that have befallen his people—the elegist attributes the whole series of disastrous events to God. So close is the thought of God to the mind of the writer, he does not even think it necessary to mention the Divine name. Like Brother Lawrence, this man has learnt to "practise the presence of God." In amplifying the accounts of his sufferings, after giving a general description of himself as the man who has experienced affliction, and adding a line in which this experience is connected with its cause—the rod of the wrath of Him who is unnamed, though ever in mind—the stricken patriot proceeds to illustrate and enforce his appeal to sympathy by means of a series of vivid metaphors. Let us first glance at the successive pictures in this rapidly moving panorama of similes, and then at the general import and drift of the whole. The afflicted man was under the Divine guidance; he was not the victim of blind self-will; it was not when straying from the path of right that he fell into this pit of misery. The strange thing is that God led him straight into it—led him into darkness, not into light, as might have been expected with such a Guide. The first image, then, is that of a traveller misled. God, whom he has trusted implicitly, whom he has followed in the simplicity of ignorance, God proves to be his Opponent! He feels like one duped in the past, and at length undeceived as he makes the amazing discovery that his trusted Guide has been turning His hand against him repeatedly all the day of his woeful wanderings. For the moment he drops his metaphors, and reflects on the dreadful consequences of this fatal antagonism. His flesh and skin, his very body is wasted away; he is so crushed and shattered, it is as though God had broken his bones. Then the scene changes. The victim of Divine wrath is a captive languishing in a dungeon, which is as dark as the abodes of the dead, as the dwellings of those who have been long dead. The horror of this metaphor is intensified by the idea of the antiquity of Hades. There the prisoner is bound by a heavy chain (ver. 7). He cries for help; but he is shut down so low that his prayer cannot reach his captor (ver. 8). Again, we see him still hampered, though in altered circumstances. He appears as a traveller whose way is blocked, and that not by some accidental fall of rock, but of set purpose, for he finds the obstruction to be of carefully prepared masonry, "hewn stones" (ver. 9). Therefore he has to turn aside, so that his paths become crooked. Yet more terrible does the Divine enmity grow. When the pilgrim is thus forced to leave the highroad and make his way through the adjoining thickets, his Adversary avails Himself of the cover to assume a new form, that of a lion or a bear lying in ambush (ver. 10). The consequence is that the hapless man is torn as by the claws and fangs of beasts of prey (ver. 11). But now these wild regions, in which the wretched traveller is wandering at the peril of his life, suggest the idea of the chase. The image of the savage animals is defective in this respect, that man is their superior in intelligence, though not in strength. But in the present case the victim is in every way inferior to his Pursuer. So

God appears as the Huntsman, and the unhappy sufferer as the poor hunted game. The bow is bent, and the arrow directed straight for its mark (ver. 12). Nay, arrow after arrow has already been let fly, and the dreadful Huntsman, too skilful ever to miss His mark, has been shooting "the sons of His quiver" into the very vitals of the object of His pursuit (ver. 13). Here the poet breaks away from his imagery for a second time, to tell us that he has become an object of derision to all his people, and the theme of their mocking songs. This is a striking statement. It shows that the afflicted man is not simply one member of the smitten nation of Israel, sharing the common hardships of the race whose "badge is servitude." Returning to imagery, the poet pictures himself as a hardly used guest at a feast. He is fed, crammed, sated; but his food is bitterness, the cup has been forced to his lips, and he has been made drunk—not with pleasant wine, however, but with wormwood (ver. 15). Gravel has been mixed with his bread, or perhaps the thought is that when he has asked for bread stones have been given him. He has been compelled to masticate this unnatural diet, so that his teeth have been broken by it. Even that result he ascribes to God, saying, "He hath broken my teeth." It is difficult to think of the interference with personal liberty being carried farther than this. Here we reach the extremity of crushed misery. Reviewing the whole course of his wretched sufferings from the climax of misery, the man who has seen all this affliction declares that God has cast him off from peace (ver. 17). This most precious gift of heaven to suffering souls is denied to the man who here bewails his dismal fate. So, too, it was denied to Jesus in the garden, and again on the Cross. It is possible that the dark day will come when it will be denied to one or another of His people. In the elegy we are now studying, a burst of praise and glad confidence breaks out almost immediately after the lowest depths of misery have been sounded, showing that, as Keats declares in an exquisite line—

"There is a budding morrow in midnight."

When we come to look at the series of pictures or affliction as a whole, we shall notice that one general idea runs through them. This is that the victim is hindered, hampered, restrained. He is led into darkness, besieged, imprisoned, chained, driven out of his way, seized in ambuscade, hunted, even forced to eat unwelcome food. This must all point to a specific character of personal experience. The troubles of the sufferer have mainly assumed the form of a thwarting of his efforts. If the opposition comes from God, may it not be that the severity of the trouble is just caused by the obstinacy of self-will? Certainly it does not appear to be so here; but then we must remember the writer is stating his own case. Two other characteristics of the whole passage may be mentioned. One is the persistence of the Divine antagonism. This is what makes the case look so hard. The pursuer seems to be ruthless; He will not let his victim alone for a moment. One device follows sharply on another. There is no escape. The second of these characteristics of the passage is a gradual *aggravation* in the severity of the trials. At first God is only represented as a guide who misleads; then He appears as a besieging enemy; later like a destroyer. And correspondingly the troubles of the sufferer grow in severity, till at last he is flung into the ashes, crushed and helpless. All this is peculiarly painful reading to us with our Christian thoughts of God. It seems so utterly contrary to the character of our Father revealed in Jesus Christ. But then it was not a part of the Christian revelation, nor was it uttered by a man who had received the benefits of that highest teaching. That, however, is not a complete explanation. The narrator may be perfectly honest and truthful, but it is not in human nature to be impartial under such circumstances. Even when, as in the present instance, we have reason to believe that the speaker is under the influence of a Divine inspiration, we have no right to conclude that this gift would enable him to take an all-round vision of truth. Finally, it would be quite unfair to the elegist, and it would give us a totally false impression of his ideas, if we were to go no further than this. To understand him at all we must hear him out. The triplet of verses 19 to 21 serves as a transition to the picture of the other side of the Divine action. It begins with prayer. Thus a new note is struck. The sufferer knows that God is not at heart his enemy. So he ventures to beseech the very Being concerning whose treatment of him he has been complaining so bitterly, to remember his affliction and the misery it has brought on him, the wormwood, the gall of his hard lot. Hope now dawns on him out of his own recollections. God, too, has a memory, and will remember

His suffering servant. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*) *Ecce homo!*—I. CONSIDER THE GENERALITY OF AFFLICTION IN THE NATURE THEREOF. We met all generally in the first treason against ourselves in Adam's rebellion; and we met all, too, in the second treason—the treason against Jesus Christ. All our sins were upon His shoulders. All the evils and mischiefs of life come for the most part from this—that we think to enjoy those things which God has given us only to use.

II. CONSIDER AFFLICTION AS BEARING ON MAN. "I am the man that hath seen affliction." Man carries the spawn and seed and eggs of affliction in his own flesh, and his own thoughts make haste to hatch them and bring them up. We make all our worms snakes, all our snakes vipers, all our vipers dragons, by our murmuring.

III. CONSIDER AFFLICTION IN ITS SPECIAL APPLICATION TO ONE MAN. That man the prophet Jeremiah, one of the best of men. As he was submitted to these extraordinary afflictions, we see that no man is so necessary to God as that God cannot come to His ends without that man. God can lack and leave out any man in His service. The best of our wages is adversity, because that gives us a true fast, and a right value of our prosperity.

IV. CONSIDER THE WEIGHT AND VEREMENCE OF AFFLICTIONS. 1. They are aggravated in that they are the Lord's. They are inevitable; they cannot be avoided; they are just, and cannot be pleaded against; nor can we ease ourselves with any imagination of our innocency, as though they were undeserved. 2. They are in His rod. Our murmuring makes a rod a staff, and a staff a sword, and that which God presented for physic, poison. 3. They are inflicted by the rod of His wrath. It is the highest extent of affliction that we take God to be angrier than He is.

V. CONSIDER THE COMFORTS WE HAVE IN AFFLICTIONS. 1. That we see our afflictions, we understand, consider them. We see that affliction comes from God, and that it is sent that we may see and taste the goodness of God. 2. That, though afflicted, we still retain our manhood. God may mend thee in marring thee; He may build thee up in dejecting thee; He may infuse another manhood into thee, so that thou canst say, "I am that Christian man; I am the man that cannot despair since Christ is the remedy." 3. That the rod of God's wrath is also the rod of His comfort and strength (*Micah vii. 14; Psa. xlv. 6, xxiii. 4.*) (*J. Donne, D.D.*) *The personality of sorrow*:—This chapter would seem to be the property of all sorrowful men. Job's lamentation over the day of his birth, and Jeremiah's lamentation over his personal sufferings, are the heritage of sorrow throughout all time. We never know what sorrow is until we feel its personality. Every man must have his own sorrow, must receive sorrow into his nature, so that the whole plan of life may, so to say, be saturated with tears, and be made to know how much weight God can lay upon human life, as if He were heaping it up in cruelty. What would be sorrow to one man would be no sorrow to another; hence the infinite variety of the Divine visitation of our life. God knows where the stroke would hurt us most, and there He delivers the blow, so that we may know ourselves to be but men. Every man having a sorrow of his own is thereby tempted to make a species of idol of it. Are there not persons who make a luxury of sorrow? Are they not pleased to be the objects of social interest and sympathy, instead of being humbled by their losses, and taught to seek the true riches which are in heaven? Silent sorrow is the most poignant. If sorrow could sometimes shed tears, it would be relieved of its keenest agony. In many cases it is impossible for the sufferer to give expression to his distress, and therefore he is deprived of all the compensation and holy excitement to be derived from earnest and intelligent human sympathy. If a man has not seen affliction, what has he seen? The deepest students of human life assure us that unless joy has in it somewhat of a tinge of melancholy it is not pure gladness. We must look at both sides of the picture; we must allow the light and the shadow to interplay, and judge not by the one nor by the other, but by the result. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *My flesh and my skin hath He made old.*—*Punishment seen in the body*:—1. God's punishments for sin often appear even in the body of man. (1) Because sin is committed in the body. (2) The body being the more sensitive part, it may affect us the more when we feel God's punishments in it. (3) That others may have the more clear example in beholding our bodies punished. 2. The wasting and withering of the body is to be acknowledged a punishment from God; and the flourishing of the same to be a special blessing. 3. There is no torment so grievous but the godly feel it when God's hand is upon them for their sins. (1) His anger is most grievous and intolerable. (2) He would have us

thoroughly affected and humbled. (*J. Udall.*) **He hath hedged me about that I cannot get out.**—*The sinner's hedges*:—I. The “hedge” of MORAL SENSE. Conscience shuts the sinner in and prevents him from a full development of all the wicked passions and impulses of his nature. II. The “hedge” of SOCIAL LIFE. 1. Social relationship. How many sinners are held in by the influence of father, mother, brother, sister! 2. Social sentiment. In a morally enlightened age like ours, public sentiment is strong against wrong, and most men stand in awe of public sympathy. III. The hedge of PERSONAL INCAPACITY. 1. The want of physical health. Many men would do far more mischief were they not so physically frail. 2. The want of intellectual ability. Many men would swindle on a large scale, propagate infidelity by their writings and their oratory, had they the ability. 3. The want of secular means. Were there not so much incapacity and poverty, the world would abound with Alexanders, Cæsars, and Napoléons. Thank God for these hedges! (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 8. Also when I cry and shout, He shutteth out my prayer.—*Unregarded prayer*:—I. Although our prayers were never, in a single instance, directly answered in this world, YET IS PRAYER NOT IN VAIN, FOR TO PRAY IS A COMMANDED DUTY; and to the dependent creature it can never be unprofitable to obey a Divine command. Prayer, in its very nature, tends to mortify sin, to compose our minds into a frame of devout dependence on Almighty power, and to maintain in us sentiments of habitual trust, and rejoicing confidence in God. II. Though prayer be not immediately answered, IT MAY NEVERTHELESS BE ANSWERED AT SOME AFTER PERIOD, even in the present world. The glory of God, the arrangements of Providence, and our own good, may render delay expedient; but delay is not denial. III. The thing we ask MAY BE INCONSISTENT WITH THE RECTITUDE OF THE DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY, and on that account must necessarily be denied. IV. IT IS NOT ALWAYS IN WRATH, HOWEVER, THAT OUR PRAYERS FOR OTHERS ARE NOT HEARD, BUT OFTEN IN MERCY TO THEM. In our fond attachment to children or to friends, we would detain them from God and glory, to suffer amid the evils of time. In our ignorance we ask things detrimental for ourselves as well as for others. In labour, poverty, and trouble, we seek ease, and peace, and competency, and freedom from affliction; but it may enter into God's plan for preserving and perfecting us, to withhold from us health and a prosperous state. And, besides, the thing we desired may be refused, in order to give us something better than we sought. Oh, what need there is of the Spirit to help our infirmities! for we know neither what we should pray for, nor as we ought. V. When we pray to God, it becomes us to REMEMBER THE INFINITE DISTANCE BETWIXT THE CREATURE AND THE GLORIOUS CREATOR; AND THOUGH EARNEST, LET US BEWARE OF BEING WILFUL AND PEREMPTORY. (*J. Sieveurwright, M.A.*) *Unheeded prayers*:—God wants more than prayer from His creatures, when that prayer is limited to mere asking, or to the expression of a beggar's desires. Prayer may be but a religious form of selfishness. Asking must, of course, enter into prayer: every day brings its need; but what is prayer in its widest and most enduring acceptance? It is communion with God. When we omit this element, we degrade ourselves and our prayers to the level of selfishness, and when our prayer is so degraded it is shut out from heaven. There is no mystery in this. Let us always understand that we are accepted, not because of our formality, but because of our sincerity and earnestness and importunity. Good men in all ages have had experience of this exclusion of prayer from heaven, and sometimes they have misjudged it (*Job xxx. 20; Psa. xxii. 2*). It is well to have such experiences, terrible as they are at the moment of their realisation; they chasten the spirit, they are full of theological teaching, they drive us back to first principles, they constrain us to ask the most serious and penetrating questions. God will not allow such experiences to be unduly prolonged, for he knows that the extension of such trial would end in despair or madness. The Lord can take us very near to the brink, but He will not let us fall over. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Prayer not immediately answered*:—1. Afflictions do make the dullest and most forward of God's children cry for help (*Lev. xxvi. 41; Psa. cvii. 6, 19, 28*). 2. The heaviest plague that man can endure in this life is to have God refuse to hear his prayer when he calleth upon Him in distress (*Prov. i. 28; Jer. xiv. 11, 12*). 3. God often deferreth to hear the prayer of His children, when He yet purposeth in due time to grant their requests (*Psa. xxii. 1, lxxvii. 8*). (1) To try their patience, and exercise their faith. (2) To move them to continue

and to grow in fervency. (*J. Udal.*) *Prayers shut out*:—Or shutteth His ear to my prayer. This was very grievous to any good heart; more than it could be to Tully, a stranger to the true God, who yet bewaileth the matter to his brother in these words: "I would pray to the gods for those things; but that, alas! they have given over to hear my prayers." (*J. Trapp.*)

Vers. 14-21. **I was a derision to all my people.**—*Deriding the godly*:—1. The godly are usually more subject to reproaches than any other people. (1) Because godliness seemeth mere foolishness to them that are naturally minded. (2) They show, as they think, their own wisdom in disdainfully contemning the godly. 2. Then are the godly most derided by the wicked, when the hand of God is heaviest upon them to afflict them. 3. All sorts of people (though divers one from another) do deride the godly in their adversity. 4. Those that are nearest unto the godly, and not fearing God, will be crosses unto them in the time of trouble. 5. The wicked do greatly delight themselves in mocking the godly. (1) Thereby they think to suppress and disgrace the truth for ever. (2) They think their own folly by that means will justify and advance. 6. The wicked are never satisfied, but still continue their hatred against the godly. (1) Because they do greatly delight therein. (2) They are afraid that they have never done enough to defame them. (*J. Udal.*) **He hath filled me with bitterness.**—*Filled with sorrow*:—1. This sorrow did arise especially from the derision they were in by their adversaries, and yet it being ascribed unto the Lord, teaches us that there is no outward trouble more grievous to the godly than to be reproached by their adversaries in the time of their affliction. 2. There is no outward trouble more grievous to the godly than to be reproached by their adversaries in the time of their affliction. (1) Because we are much comforted in the hope that our sufferings shall advance the truth, which professed derision hindereth. (2) Such reproaches are accompanied with much blasphemy and wickedness. (3) Such dealing carrieth many weak professors from the affecting of our cause and sufferings. 3. The godly have often upon them all the greatest griefs that can be desired. 4. It is the Lord above that frameth our hearts to be affected with our afflictions, else they remain stony and astonished. 5. The godly may not be as Stoics, but must be most passionate in their afflictions. (1) Because their sins procure them their troubles, which ought to grieve them most of all, that God is offended with them. (2) God afflicteth us that we should repent, which we cannot do without great remorse. 6. The godly are often so laden with miseries, that they are exceedingly distracted therewith, both in body and mind. (*Ibid.*) **My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord.**—*Hopeless sorrow*:—1. The godly are often brought to such extremity as they find no way out of it. 2. According to our strength, generally of knowledge, and particularly of feeling, so do we hope. Because hope is grounded upon faith, and faith upon knowledge (Heb. xi. 1). 3. The godly in their afflictions do recount what blessings they have lost. (1) Because of the love and delight that they had therein, which is most remembered when it is lost. (2) That their hearts may be made the more affected with grief for the loss thereof, and with desire to be restored thereunto again. 4. The godly do not always feel the comfort of God's favour in the like measure. (1) Because God will make it the more delightful unto them by intermission. (2) That they may see what they are, if God should leave them unto themselves. (3) That they may be the more careful to use all good means to keep it while they have it. 5. The godly are often so grievously afflicted that they grow to a great measure of desperation. (1) Because of their great weakness when God, who is strong, trieth them. (2) They judge according to their present feeling. (3) Because of the consciousness of their deserts for sin. (4) The abundance of natural infidelity which, always being in us, doth then appear to have the greatest power. (*Ibid.*) **Remembering mine affliction and my misery.**—*Weighing God's punishments*:—1. The deep weighing of God's punishments for sin felt in times past doth often most effectually move the heart unto great lamentation. 2. Though grief and sorrow be naturally the effects of affliction, yet in the godly it must be, because of the sin committed, and not for the penalty sustained. 3. In recounting any former thing, we must take only so much thereof as may serve our turn. (1) That it may affect us the more. (2) That our minds be not employed about any other matter. (*Ibid.*) **My soul hath them still in remembrance.**—*Memory in affliction*:—1. There is no meditation that is available to further ingodliness, but that which is earnest and effectual. (1) Else it moveth not the heart. (2)

Nothing else prevaileth with the affections. 2. The heart must be thoroughly touched before we can profit by any action of religion that we take in hand. (1) Every point of religion concerneth principally the heart. (2) God accepteth nothing but that which proceedeth from the heart. 3. When we are thoroughly affected with any part of God's Word, or His works, then do we much consider of it, and cannot easily forget it. (1) Because it hath taken root in the heart, which is the fountain of all serious meditations. (2) It setteth the affections on work, to digest it, unto the end whereunto the heart desireth to bring it. (*Ibid.*)

This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.—A stay to the troubled heart:—

1. It is a special stay to the troubled heart, to consider how it hath striven to be at peace. (1) It calleth to mind the strife betwixt the flesh and the spirit, which argueth that God hath a portion there. (2) It sheweth our desire of well-doing which must needs be the work of grace. (3) It daunteth Satan our adversary, depriving him of hope to prevail. (4) It administereth us hope, that we shall stand even in the strongest temptations. 2. The right and thorough meditation of God's punishments upon us for sin, and our striving to profit thereby, hath always hope of the issue. (1) Because it taketh away all those refuges which naturally we flee unto, as friends, wit, riches, strength, &c., and forceth us to fly unto God. (2) The Lord respecteth, and is ready to help the broken and contrite hearted (*Isa. lvi.* 2). 3. All our care in peace and in affliction must be how to gather to ourselves a certain hope that God will be merciful unto us. (1) Because we have more need of it than of all things else. (2) Satan will labour more to deprive us of it than of anything else. 4. It is our duty to hope for God's favourable hand to rid us out of any trouble that we are in, though it continue and increase upon us, and no means of redress appear. (1) Because God afflicteth us not to cast us off, but to amend us and try us. (2) He useth so to deliver His servants. 5. The consideration of God's heavy rod upon us in this life giveth us hope to find favour for the life to come. (1) God chastiseth those whom He receiveth. (2) It is a token of bastardy to be without correction. (3) The whole life of the godly hath been continual affliction. (*Ibid.*)

Fruitful memories:—The prophet begins to realise the results of discipline wisely and gratefully accepted. At first probably, like all other men, he was obstinate, resentful, and wholly indisposed to look for moral teaching in the midst of physical suffering. Better thoughts came to his aid. After a while he began to survey the situation, and, as he looked upon the plan of God, light came to him, and he saw that God's meaning even in man's humiliation was the elevation and perfecting of the man himself. Let us be rich in remembrance. Who cannot recount the sorrows which have been turned to his advantage? There was a day that was all cloud, a cloud that was all thunder, and we said we should die when that cloud discharged its tempest upon us. The cloud broke, the thunder rolled, and our life was refreshed by the very torrent that we looked forward to with dread. Do not let us forget those days of rain and storm and high wind, but call them to remembrance, and count them as amongst our jewels, for we then saw somewhat of the treasures of the Most High, and saw how even in what appeared to be extremity God could provide a way of deliverance. The prophet derives hope from a sanctified review of providence—"therefore have I hope." The sorrow had not been in vain; it had become a sweet gospel to the soul which it overshadowed, and this it will become to us if we remember that the Lord reigneth, and that discipline as well as benediction is in the hand of the living God. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Memory—the handmaid of hope:—Memory is very often the servant of despondency. Despairing minds call to remembrance every dark foreboding in the past, and every gloomy feature in the present. Memory stands like a handmaiden, clothed in sackcloth, presenting to her master a cup of mingled gall and wormwood. Like Mercury, she hastes, with winged heel, to gather fresh thorns with which to fill the uneasy pillow, and to bind fresh rods with which to scourge the already bleeding heart. There is, however, no necessity for this. Wisdom will transform memory into an angel of comfort. That same recollection which may in its left hand bring so many dark and gloomy omens, may be trained to bear in its right hand a wealth of hopeful signs. She need not wear a crown of iron, she may encircle her brow with a fillet of gold, all spangled with stars. When Christa, according to Bunyan, was locked up in Doubting Castle, memory formed the crab-tree cudgel with which the famous giant beat his captives so terribly. They remembered how they had left the right road, how they had been warned not to do so, and how in rebellion against their better selves, they wandered into

By-path Meadow. They remembered all their past misdeeds, their sins, their evil thoughts and evil words, and all these were so many knots in the cudgel, causing sad bruises and wounds in their poor suffering persons. But one night, according to Bunyan, this same memory which had scourged them, helped to set them free; for she whispered something in Christian's ear, and he cried out as one half-amazed, "What a fool am I to lie in a stinking dungeon, when I may as well walk at liberty! I have a key in my bosom, called Promise; that will, I am persuaded, open any lock in Doubting Castle." So he put his hand into his bosom, and with much joy he plucked out the key, and thrust it into the lock; and though the lock of the great iron gate, as Bunyan says, "went damnable hard," yet the key did open it, and all the others too; and so, by this blessed act of memory, poor Christian and Hopeful were set free. We lay it down as a general principle, that if we would exercise our memories a little more, we might, in our deepest and darkest distress, strike a match which would instantaneously kindle the lamp of comfort. There is no need for God to create a new thing, in order to restore believers to joy; if they would prayerfully rake the ashes of the past, they would find light for the present; and if they would turn to the book of truth and the throne of grace, their candle would soon shine as aforetime. I shall apply that general principle to the cases of three persons. I. First of all, to **THE BELIEVER WHO IS IN DEEP TROUBLE**. If you turn to the chapter which contains our text, you will observe a list of matters which recollection brought before the mind of the prophet Jeremiah, and which yielded him comfort. 1. First stands the fact that, however deep may be our present affliction, it is of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed. This is a low beginning certainly. The comfort is not very great, but when a very weak man is at the bottom of the pyramid, if he is ever to climb it, you must not set him a long step at first; give him but a small stone to step upon the first time, and when he gets more strength then he will be able to take a greater stride. Now, consider, thou son of sorrow, where thou mightest have been. Have you seen those foul dungeons of Venice, which are below the water-mark of the canal, where, after winding through narrow, dark, stifling passages, you may creep into little cells in which a man can scarcely stand upright, where no ray of sunlight has ever entered since the foundations of the palace were laid—cold, foul, and black with damp and mildew, the fit nursery of fever, and abode of death? And yet those places it were luxury to inhabit compared with the everlasting burnings of hell. When you are kindling your household fire, before which you hope to sit down with comfort, you do not first expect to kindle the lumps of coal, but you set some lighter fuel in a blaze, and soon the more solid material yields a genial glow; so this thought, which may seem so light to you, may be as the kindling of a heavenly fire of comfort for you who now are shivering in your grief. 2. Something better awaits us, for Jeremiah reminds us that there are some mercies, at anyrate, which are still continued. "His compassions fail not, they are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness." Evil your plight may be, but there are others in a still worse condition. You can always, if you open your eyes and choose to do so, see at least this cause for thankfulness that you are not yet plunged into the lowest depth of misery. This again is not a very high step, but still it is a little in advance of the other, and the weakest may readily reach it. 3. The chapter offers us a third source of consolation. "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him." You have lost much, Christian, but you have not lost your portion. Your God is your all; therefore, if you have lost all but God, still you have your all left, since God is all. 4. The prophet then reminds us of another channel of comfort, namely, that God is evermore good to all who seek Him. "The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him." Let Him smite never so hard, yet if we can maintain the heavenly posture of prayer, we may rest assured that He will turn from blows to kisses yet. Bunyan tells us that when the City of Mansoul was besieged it was the depth of winter and the roads were very bad, but even then prayer could travel them; and I will venture to affirm that if all earthly roads were so bad that they could not be travelled, and if Mansoul were so surrounded that there was not a gap left through which we could break our way to get to the king, yet the road upwards would always open. No enemy can barricade that; no blockading ships can sail between our souls and the haven of the mercy-seat. 5. We are getting into deeper water of joy, let us take another step, and this time we shall win greater consolation still, from the fact that it is good to be afflicted. "It is good that a man should

bear the yoke in his youth." Why should I dread to descend the shaft of affliction if it leads me to the gold mine of spiritual experience? Why should I cry out if the sun of my prosperity goes down, if in the darkness of my adversity I shall be the better able to count the starry promises with which my faithful God has been pleased to gem the sky? 6. One step more, and surely we shall then have good ground to rejoice. The chapter reminds us that these troubles do not last for ever. When they have produced their proper result they will be removed, for "the Lord will not cast off for ever." Who told thee that the night would never end in day? Who told thee that the sea would ebb out till there should be nothing left but a vast track of mud and sand? Who told thee that the winter would proceed from frost to frost, from snow, and ice, and hail, to deeper snow, and yet more heavy tempest? Who told thee this, I say? Knowest thou not that day follows night, that flood comes after ebb, that spring and summer succeed to winter? Hope thou then! Hope thou ever! for God fails thee not.

II. We will speak to the DOUBTING CHRISTIAN WHO HAS LOST HIS EVIDENCES OF SALVATION. 1. Let me bid you call to remembrance in the first place matters of the past. Do you remember the place, the spot of ground where Jesus first met with you? Perhaps you do not. Well, do you remember happy seasons when He has brought you to the banqueting-house? Cannot you remember gracious deliverances? 2. Possibly, however, that may not be the means of comfort to some of you. Recall, I pray you, the fact that others have found the Lord true to them. They cried to God, and He delivered them. 3. Remember, again, and perhaps this may be consolatory to you, that though you think you are not a child of God at all now, yet if you look within you will see some faint traces of the Holy Spirit's hand. The complete picture of Christ is not there, but cannot you see the crayon sketch—the outline—the charcoal marks? "What," say you, "do you mean?" Do not you want to be a Christian? Have you not desires after God? Well, now, where God the Holy Ghost has done as much as that, he will do more. 4. But I would remind you that there is a promise in this Book that exactly describes and suits your case. A young man had been left by his father heir of all his property, but an adversary disputed his right. The case was to come on in the court, and this young man, while he felt sure that he had a legal right to the whole, could not prove it. His legal adviser told him that there was more evidence wanted than he could bring. How to get this evidence he did not know. He went to an old chest where his father had been wont to keep his papers, turned all out, and as he turned the writings over, and over, and over, there was an old parchment. He undid the red tape with great anxiety, and there it was—the very thing he wanted—his father's will—in which the estate was spoken of as being left entirely to himself. He went into court boldly enough with that. Now, when we get into doubts, it is a good thing to turn to this old Book, and read until at last we can say, "That is it—that promise was made for me." 5. If these recollections should not suffice, I have one more. You look at me, and you open your ears to find what new thing I am going to tell you. No, I am going to tell you nothing new, but yet it is the best thing that was ever said out of heaven, "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." You have heard that a thousand times—and it is the best music you have ever heard. If I am not a saint, I am a sinner; and if I may not go to the throne of grace as a child, I will go as a sinner. In a lamentable accident which occurred in the north, in one of the coal pits, when a considerable number of the miners were down below, the top of the pit fell in, and the shaft was completely blocked up. Those who were down below, sat together in the dark, and sang and prayed. They gathered to a spot where the last remains of air below could be breathed. There they sat and sang after the lights had gone out, because the air would not support the flame. They were in total darkness, but one of them said he had heard that there was a connection between that pit and an old pit that had been worked years ago. He said it was a low passage, through which a man might get by crawling all the way, lying flat upon the ground—he would go and see: the passage was very long, but they crept through it, and at last they came out to light at the bottom of the other pit, and their lives were saved. If my present way to Christ as a saint gets blocked up, if I cannot go straight up the shaft and see the Light of my Father up yonder, there is an old working, the old-fashioned way by which sinners go, by which poor thieves go, by which harlots go—come, I will crawl along lowly and humbly, flat upon the ground—I will crawl along till I see my Father, and cry, "Father, I am not worthy to be

called Thy son ; make we as one of Thy hired servants, so long as I may but dwell in Thy house." III. A few words with *SEEKERS*. 1. Some of you are troubled about the doctrine of election. You have got an idea that some persons will be sent to hell, merely and only because it is the will of God that they should be sent there. Throw the idea overboard, because it is a very wicked one, and is not to be found in Scripture. Remember again, that whatever the doctrine of election may be or may not be, there is a free invitation in the Gospel given to needy sinners, "Whosoever will let him take of the water of life freely." Now you may say, "I cannot reconcile the two." There are a great many other things that you cannot do. Leave your difficulties till you have trusted Christ, and then you will be in a capacity to understand them better than you do now. Trust Christ even if thou should perish, and thou shalt never perish if thou trustest in Him. 2. Well, if that difficulty were removed, I can suppose another saying, "Ah ! but mine's a case of great sin." Recall this to mind and you will have hope, namely, that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom," Paul says, "I am the chief." The stupendous bridge which Christ has flung across the wrath of God will bear the weight of your sin, for it has borne ten thousand across before, and will bear millions of sinners yet to the shore of their eternal rest. Call that to remembrance, and you may have hope. 3. "Yes," says one, "but I believe I have committed the unpardonable sin." My dear brother, I believe you have not, but I want you to call one thing to remembrance, and that is that the unpardonable sin is a sin which is unto death. Now a sin which is unto death means a sin which brings death on the conscience. The man who commits it never has any conscience afterwards ; he is dead there. Now, you have some feeling ; you have enough life to wish to be saved from sin ; you have enough life to long to be washed in the precious blood of Jesus. You have not committed the unpardonable sin, therefore have hope. 4. "Oh, but," you say, "I have a general unfitness and incapacity for being saved." Then call this to remembrance, that Jesus Christ has a general fitness and a general capacity for saving sinners. I do not know what you want, but I do know Christ has it. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The reason of hope* :—This "therefore" ought to be to us like a great gate of entrance into a king's house. If the logic fails here, it fails everywhere. We must keep our eye upon the therefores of Divine and human reasoning and providence. We must note the time of things ; we must not set up the standard at the wrong place ; nor must we judge the evening by the morning nor the morning by the evening. There is a manhood of infancy, and a manhood of youth, and a manhood of old age : each period has its own manhood, its own Bible, its own vision, its own song or groan. This third chapter of Lamentations opens well. "I am the man that hath seen affliction." That is the man we want to hear talk ; we do not want any foamy babble ; we cannot now do with any piled or inflammatory rhetoric. There comes a time in life when affliction must speak to us. "He hath filled me with bitterness, He hath made me drunken with wormwood." And yet I am told I should be cheerful, and pray, and look up, and be happy, and be expectant ; how can I pray when the Lord hath broken my teeth with gravel stones and covered me with ashes ? Can the grave praise His majesty ? And so long has He removed my peace and my joy that I have forgotten prosperity. My soul has been removed from peace ; strength and hope I have none. But, "remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall, my soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope." It is as if insanity suddenly emerged into sobriety, self-control, and a true spiritual realisation of the meaning and purpose of things. The very memory of the gall and the wormwood makes me hope ; I have had so much of them that there cannot be any more to have ; it has been so terrible that now surely it is going to be summer-time and joy. We need those great prophetic voices. Sometimes we need the very biggest soul that ever lived, and we seem to need him every whit—all his brains, all his heart, all his music. He is not too much for us because our grief is so deep and so sensitive, and the whole outlook is a horizon of blackness, and darkness has no history and no measuring points. This is where the religious element enters into life with great copiousness, and where it should be received with unutterable welcomes. I wonder if there are any analogies that may help us in the explanation of the meaning and the application of the purpose of this mysterious "therefore." Seed grows. If it does grow, what then ? Everything. As what ? As the resurrection ; that is answer enough to your mean inquiry. If a little seed can

grow, why may not the planted bulb of the body grow? Thou sowest not the body that shall be, and yet a body in some real, strong, clear, and satisfactory sense. But some man will say, How? Oh, universe, halt! call thy suns and moons to stand still, to answer this fool's How? When we come to question-asking, we had better fall to praying. Do not mistake impertinence for inquiry; and do not suppose that the whole universe, with all its constellations, will say to itself, Hush! here is some poor dark stumbling soul that wants to understand how. There will be no answer given to him until time, with all its evolution and declaration of answers to enigmas and mysteries, shall work out its purpose, and the man shall be answered by a great vision. "Therefore." I have never seen the stars except in the darkness, therefore the night may have something to show me as well as the day—the night of loneliness and desolation and bitter sorrow. Intellect grows, therefore character may grow. The little may become great, the weak may become strong, that which is far off may be brought nigh, and that which is barren may be fruitful. We know that intellect grows; we have seen it in the little child, we have almost seen the new idea enter the opening brain; it is as if we saw a beautiful little bird fly into a bush in the summer-time and reappear, so to say, though not literally, not as a bird, but as a song. Who can tell when the ideas came to fruition in the human brain? Who can fix the date when the little boy became almost a philosopher? Who can say at what hour the meaning of certain words was revealed to any one of us? If this process of mental expansion can go forward with such happy results, so the human soul, when it is known under the name of character, nobleness, self-control, love of God, may grow, and no man can say just when or just where. (J. Parker, D.D.)

Vers. 22-24. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed.—*Man living by mercy*.—I. MAN'S WHOLE LIFE, BODILY, MENTAL, AND SPIRITUAL, IS SUSTAINED BY THE MERCY OF THE LORD. 1. It is of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed bodily. Consider the waste constantly going on, &c. Set against this the powers of digestion and assimilation, and the constant supply of food. 2. It is of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed intellectually. Consider the wear and tear of the brain, the continual evolution of thought, the daily anxiety of mind; and against this set the all-renewing energy of the Holy Ghost, who gives strength day by day, repairing the waste of faculty and renewing the resources of power. 3. It is of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed morally. Consider our sins, our daily provocations, our constant obduracy of heart. Why does He withhold the stroke of righteous vengeance? The answer is, in His mercy! Very beautiful is the expression, "They are new every morning"—new just as we want them—standing at the very threshold of the day to help us through all work and trial, all darkness and light. II. To know what the mercy is, consider WHAT IS MEANT BY CONSUMPTION. Figure a tree that is diseased at the roots; a man who is daily pining away; a soul wasting! From such consumption there is no protection but in God's mercy. Show the vanity of all human schemes. Call the attention of Christians to the fact that every day is provided for; if the trial comes daily, so does the mercy. Human preservation is not merely a question of science or prudence; underlying all are the "compassions" which are "new every morning." (J. Parker, D.D.) *Mercy and faithfulness*.—I. The application of this to the case of the Jews is very obvious, considering their multiplied provocations, and God's multiplied mercies toward them; but we may well consider it in its application to ourselves, for AS SINNERS WE HAVE ALL DESERVED TO BE CONSUMED. "The wages of sin is death." "Sin is the transgression of the law." Sin therefore is man practically separating himself from God, refusing to love Him, to serve Him, preferring to go with the great enemy of God and godliness, and to be led by him according to his evil will, and to do the vile work which he commands. Thus sin is no trifle. We have all sinned in our different ways. In how many ways, how many times we have abused the faculties which God hath given us, whether of body, soul, or spirit! We have perverted the energies which should have been employed in serving Him, into so many weapons of rebellion wherewith we dared to fight against God. And what have we deserved? Surely to be consumed, to be cut off in our sins, to be separated from God for ever. Then how is it that we are here spared as we are? It is not of our merits, but of the Lord's mercies. This explains His wonderful forbearance towards sinners while living in sin, forming habits of sinning, and acting out those habits in innumerable acts, and

deeds, and thoughts of a sinful character, doing, in fact, nothing to please God. II. HIS MERCIES ARE TO BE TRACED UP TO HIS COMPASSIONS; even "because His compassions fail not." His mercies are the streams of which His compassions are the source. His compassions are in the essential goodness of our God, prompting Him to manifest His mercies in a way consistent with His glorious perfections. Of His compassion to guilty sinners He sent His Son to take man's nature, to become man's substitute, to be his surety, to suffer the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. Thus His compassions prompting, His mercies can flow freely through the mediation of Christ. God can be just, and yet justify the ungodly, believing in Jesus for His sake. Hence, if partakers of His mercies in Christ Jesus, we are quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; we are justified by faith, and so have peace with God, who were guilty before God, under condemnation, deserving hell. We, who were by nature the children of wrath, even as others, are made the children of God by adoption and grace. We are being trained and educated by the Holy Spirit for dwelling with God in heaven; our trials and sufferings are all being sanctified for our souls' profit. Thus how great the compassions of our God! what a never-failing source of mercies ever flowing and overflowing! III. THESE MERCIES, SO TRACED UP TO THE COMPASSIONS OF OUR GOD, ARE ALL SECURED BY HIS FAITHFULNESS. Every morning brings a new or a renewed need to every man of the mercies and compassions of God. The coming day will bring its duties and its trials, its difficulties, its dangers, its temptations, it may be its sufferings. For all these we need new or renewed grace. The grace that was sufficient yesterday will not serve for to-day. We need like grace, or more grace to-day, and this our God in covenant is ready to supply. "As thy day is, so shall thy strength be." It is morning. "Son, go work to-day in My vineyard," the Lord of the vineyard is saying; then, Lord, I must look to Thee to give working strength, otherwise I faint and fail. But "He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might, He increaseth strength." Thus out of weakness we are made strong. Every working Christian, as he goeth forth to his work and to his labour until the evening, can say or sing of God's mercies and compassions, "They are new every morning." But again, it is morning; a voice from heaven is saying, "My child, to-day go not out to work; stay at home and suffer according to the will of God; commune with thine own heart upon thy bed, and be still, and know that I am God." Here, then, is harder duty than out-door work. But here again the mercies and compassions of our God are found "new every morning"; the throne of grace is nearer to us than before; these trials draw the soul nearer to God, and into closer communion with Him; there is more leisure now for retirement and devotion, or if pain and weakness interrupt, there is by the medium of pain a reminder of Christ's own sufferings and their saving object. He can make His strength manifestly perfect in this felt weakness. Thus the day of suffering, though it may seem long and tedious, may yet be short and sweet in the experience of His mercies. (*John Hambleton, M.A.*) *Profitable discipline*:—Spiritual experience must be looked at as a whole. It is not right to fix attention either upon this side or upon that, to the exclusion and the forgetfulness of the other. One side is very dark and full of sadness, sharply inclined towards despair; the other is brighter than the summer morning, tuneful, sunned with all the lustre of saintly hope: so we must take the night with the morning, if we would have the complete day. Where we find the highest mountains we find the deepest valleys. In proportion to the range and spirituality of the world in which a man lives will be the pensiveness and gloom of his occasional hours. If the poet droops when his harp does not respond to his touch, how must the soul faint when God hides Himself? If the timid child moans because his chamber-light has gone out, with what bitterness of complaint should we speak if the sun were extinguished? If men say they are never depressed, that they are always in high spirits, it is probably because they never were really in high spirits at all—not knowing the difference between the soul's rapture, mental and spiritual ecstasy, and merely animal excitement. A great deal depends upon the clearness of the atmosphere as to whether we appreciate this object or that in natural scenery. So it is with souls. A great many of us seem to have such long winters, short days, with poor, artificial light, and such murky, gloomy, dispiriting weather, with cruel fogs. Others of us have more sunshine, more summer weather in the soul. But what we want to understand is this—that religion, right relations with God, a true standing before the Almighty, does not depend upon this feeling or upon that; it is not a question of climate,

atmosphere, air, spirits: it is a question of fact. The question is not, How do you feel to-day? but, Where are you standing? are you on the rock? The rock will not change: the climate will. Be right in your foundation, and the season of rejoicing will come round again. Taking Jeremiah's experiences as a whole, what do we find that sanctified sorrow had wrought in him? 1. In the first place, it gave him a true view of Divine government. Jeremiah was brought to understand two things about the government of God. He was brought to understand that God's government is tender. What words do you suppose Jeremiah connected with the government of God? Why these two beautiful words, each a piece of music, "Mercies," "Compassions." A man can only get into that view of government by living the deepest possible life. A God all strength would be a monster. A God throned on ivory, ruling the universe with a sceptre of mere power, could never establish Himself in the confidence and love and trust of His creatures. Man cannot be ruled and governed by mere power, fear, overwhelming, dominating, crushing strength and force. So we find David saying, "Power belongeth unto God: unto Thee also, O Lord, belongeth mercy." Power in the hands of mercy, Omnipotence impregnated by all the tenderness of pity. That is the true exposition of Divine nature which opens up the fatherliness, motherliness, mercifulness, and compassion of God's great heart. 2. This discipline wrought in Jeremiah the conviction that God's government was minute. Speaking of God's mercies, he says, "They are new every morning." Morning mercies—daily bread. That is it. God shutting us up within a day and training us a moment at a time. The Psalmist said, "Thy mercies have been ever of old." And another singer said, "Thy mercies are new every morning." Is there no contradiction there? Ever of old—every morning! Old as duration, new as morning; old as human existence, new as the coming summer. These are all inconsistencies that mark our life. Jeremiah having given this view of the Divine government, tells us two things about discipline. He tells us, in the first place, the goodness of waiting: it is good for a man to wait. Observe you: wait for God. I am not called upon to wait because somebody has put a great waggon across the road; I might get that out of the way. But if God had set an angel there, I must make distinctions. There is a waiting that is indolence; there is a waiting that is sheer faithlessness; there is a waiting that comes of weakness. This is the true waiting,—wanting to get on, resolute about progress, and yet having a notion that God is just before us teaching patience. Jeremiah tells us this second thing about the Divine government. It is good for a man to bear the yoke. Commend me to the man who has been through deep waters, through very dark places, through treacherous, serpent-haunted roads, and who has yet come out with a cheerful heart, mellow, chastened, subdued, and who speaks tenderly of the mercy of God through it all. And that man I may trust with my heart's life. A right acceptance of God's schooling, God's rod, God's judgment, and God's mercy, mingled together, will cause us to become learned in Divine wisdom, tender in Divine feeling, gentle and charitable in all social judgment; good men whilst we are here, and always waiting, even in the midst of our most diligent service, to be called up into the more fully revealed presence and the still more cloudless light. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *God's mercy acknowledged*:—I. A STATE OF DESERVED PUNISHMENT. It is not enough to compare England with other nations—in the glory of her institutions, in the valour of her arms, in the extent and enterprise of her commerce, in the growth of her civilisation, in the freedom of her laws, in the grandeur of her discoveries, and in the nobility and genuine heartedness of her people—and then to boast of her superiority. No. We must look upon our nation in the light of her moral and spiritual character as she stands related to the God of the universe. And what is the nature and character of the spectacle? Have we not reason for humiliation? But regard this part of our subject in an individual point of view. Let us bring the matter home to our own hearts. And do we not find in them reason upon reason why the vengeance of Almighty God should fall upon us? Well then may we exclaim, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed." II. A REASON FOR THE DIVINE CONDUCT. "Because His compassions fail not." Thus our hopes are centred in the unchangeableness of God's mercy and love. Other things do change. The sunshine gives place to the blackness of the tempest. The life and bloom of spring and summer pass away into the fading beauties of autumn and the cold sterility of winter. The health of childhood, of youth and manhood, soon yields to the power of sickness, and perishes beneath the

blight of death. Prosperity is oftentimes overcast with the gloomy shadows of adversity. The smiles of peace are changed into the frowns of war. Promises and compacts are broken—superseded by the avarice of selfishness, by the grasping aims of ambition, by the caprice of pride, and by the tyranny of despotism. But the “compassions” of God “fail not.” They are ever new, and ever abiding.

III. DUTIES SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT. 1. What more consistent and natural than thankfulness and gratitude? 2. Trust in God, and not in man, is another duty founded upon the constancy and immutability of God’s compassion. There is something sublime, as well as consolatory, in trust in God: sublime, as respects its object, so infinitely superior to any other in the glory and majesty of its nature, its eternity and perfectibility; consolatory, inasmuch as the human mind is cheered and strengthened with the conviction, founded upon the most certain evidence, that “they who trust in the Lord shall never be confounded.” And herein, too, lies the special privilege of the Christian. 3. Another duty presented to us by the text is repentance. And what so calculated to effect this glorious result as the unfailing compassions of the Almighty? (*W. D. Horwood.*)

Preservation.—I. THE PRESERVATION. It is ascribed in this passage to three attributes. 1. Mercy. Many “mercies” here referred to, for there are many manifestations of the same mercy—*e.g.*, there is atoning mercy, forgiving mercy, sanctifying mercy, and preserving mercy—all of which are combined in the salvation of the believer. 2. Compassion. This differs from mercy, because it does not, like mercy, necessarily imply sin. (1) It fails not. In it there is neither fickleness nor exhaustion (*Heb. xiii. 8*). (2) It is new every morning. There are fresh mercies every day—daily bread, daily power for work, daily comforts, daily privileges of family prayer, &c. 3. Faithfulness. Faithfulness implies unchanging love. There may be faithfulness to a covenant, faithfulness to a promise, and faithfulness to a person. The latter seen in the faithfulness of a mother or nurse. II. THE EFFECT OF THIS PRESERVATION ON THE MIND OF THE PROPHET. Seen in his declaration for the present, and determination for the future. (*E. Hoare, M.A.*)

Manifold mercy.—As John Bunyan says, all the flowers in God’s garden are double; there is no single mercy; nay, they are not only double flowers, but they are manifold flowers. There are many flowers upon one stalk, and many flowers in one flower. You shall think you have but one mercy, but you shall find it to be a whole flock of mercies. Our beloved is unto us a bundle of myrrh, a cluster of camphire. When you lay hold upon one golden link of the chain of grace, you pull, pull, pull, but lo! as long as your hand can draw there are fresh “linked sweetnesses” of love still to come. Manifold mercies! Like the drops of a lustre, which reflect a rainbow of colours when the sun is glittering upon them, and each one, when turned in different ways, from its prismatic form, shows all the varieties of colours, so the mercy of God is one and yet many, the same, yet ever changing, a combination of all the beauties of love blended harmoniously together. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Innumerable mercies.—I was going home one winter’s evening with my little maiden at my side, when she looked up into the sky and said, “Father, I am going to count the stars.” “Very well,” I said, “do.” And soon I heard her whispering to herself, “Two hundred and twenty-one, two hundred and twenty-two, two hundred and twenty-three,” and then she stopped and sighed. “Oh dear! I had no idea they were so many!” Like that little maiden, I have often tried to count my mercies, but right soon have I had to cry, “I had no idea they were so many!” (*Mark Guy Pearse.*)

His compassions fail not.—The unfailing goodness of God. Although the elegist has prepared us for brighter scenes by the more hopeful tone of an intermediate triplet, the transition from the gloom and bitterness of the first part of the poem to the glowing rapture of the second is among the most startling effects in literature. How could a man entertain two such conflicting currents of thought in closest juxtaposition? In their very form and structure these touching elegies reflect the mental calibre of their author. A wooden soul could never have invented their movements. They reveal a most sensitive spirit, a spirit that resembles a finely strung instrument of music, quivering in response to impulses from all directions. The author composes the first part in an exceptionally gloomy mood, and leaves the poem unfinished, perhaps for some time. When he returns to it on a subsequent occasion he is in a totally different frame of mind, and this is reflected in the next stage of his work. Still the point of importance is the possibility of the very diverse views here recorded. Nor is this wholly a matter of temperament.

Is it not more or less the case with all of us, that since absorption with one class of ideas entirely excludes their opposites, when the latter are allowed to enter the mind they will rush in with the force of a pent-up flood? Then we are astonished that we could ever have forgotten them. Still it may seem to us a strange thing that this most perfect expression of a joyous assurance of the mercy and compassion of God should be found in the Book of Lamentations of all places. It may well give heart to those who have not sounded the depth of sorrow, as the author of these sad poems had done, to learn that even he had been able to recognise the merciful kindness of God in the largest possible measure. A little reflection, however, should teach us that it is not so unnatural a thing for this gem of grateful appreciation to appear where it is. We do not find, as a rule, that the most prosperous people are the foremost to recognise the love of God. The reverse is very frequently the case. The softening influence of sorrow seems to have a more direct effect upon our sense of Divine goodness. Perhaps, too, it is some compensation for melancholy, that persons who are afflicted with it are most responsive to sympathy. The morbid, despondent poet Cowper has written most exquisitely about the love of God. Watts is enthusiastic in his praise of the Divine grace; but a deeper note is sounded in the Olney hymns, as, for example, in that beginning with the line—

“Hark, my soul, it is the Lord.”

In his new consciousness of the love of God, the elegist is first struck by its amazing persistence. Probably we should render the twenty-second verse thus—

“The Lord’s mercies, verily they cease not,” &c.

There are two reasons for this emendation. First, the momentary transition to the plural “we” is harsh and improbable. Second—and this is the principal consideration—the balance of the phrases, which is so carefully observed throughout this elegy, is upset by the common rendering, but restored by the emendation. The topic of the triplet in which the disputed passage occurs is the amazing persistence of God’s goodness to His suffering children. The proposed alteration is in harmony with this. The thought here presented to us rests on the truth of the eternity and essential changelessness of God. We cannot think of Him as either fickle or failing; to do so would be to cease to think of Him as God. If He is merciful at all He cannot be merciful only spasmodically, erratically, or temporarily. The elegist declares that the reason why God’s mercies are not consumed is that His compassions do not fail. Thus he goes behind the kind actions of God to their originating motives. To a man in the condition of the writer of this poem of personal confidences the Divine sympathy is the one fact in the universe of supreme importance. So will it be to every sufferer who can assure himself of the truth of it. But is this only a consolation for the sorrowing? The pathos, the very tragedy of human life on earth, should make the sympathy of God the most precious fact of existence to all mankind. Portia rightly reminds Shylock that “we all do look for mercy”; but if so, the spring of mercy, the Divine compassion, must be the one source of true hope for every soul of man. Further, the elegist declares that the special form taken by these unceasing mercies of God is daily renewal. The love of God is constant—one changeless Divine attribute; but the manifestations of that love are necessarily successive and various, according to the successive and various needs of His children. The living God is an active God, who works in the present as effectually as He worked in the past. There is another side to this truth. It is not sufficient to have received the grace of God once for all. If “He giveth more grace,” it is because we need more grace. This is a stream that must be ever flowing into the soul, not the storage of a tank filled once for all and left to serve for a lifetime. Therefore the channel must be kept constantly clear, or the grace will fail to reach us, although in itself it never runs dry. There is something cheering in the poet’s idea of the morning as the time when these mercies of God are renewed. God’s mercies do not fail, are not interrupted. The emphasis is on the thought that no day is without God’s new mercies, not even the day of darkest trouble; and further, there is the suggestion that God is never dilatory in coming to our aid. He does not keep us waiting and wearying while He tarries. He is prompt and early with His grace. The idea may be compared with that of the promise to those who seek God “early,” literally, “in the morning” (Prov. viii. 17). Or we may think of the night as the time of repose, when we are oblivious of God’s

goodness, although even through the hours of darkness He who neither slumbers nor sleeps is constantly watching over His unconscious children. Then in the morning there dawns on us a fresh perception of His goodness. To the notion of the morning renewal of the mercies of God the poet appends a recognition of His great faithfulness. This is an additional thought. Faithfulness is more than compassion. There is a strength and a stability about the idea that goes further to insure confidence. The conclusion drawn from these considerations is given in an echo from the Psalms—

“The Lord is my portion.”

The words are old and well worn; but they obtain a new meaning when adopted as the expression of a new experience. The lips have often chanted them in the worship of the sanctuary. Now they are the voice of the soul, of the very life. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*) *Man's desert and God's compassion*:—I. GOD HAS THE ORDERING OF BOTH WHAT HIS PEOPLE FEEL, AND WHAT THEY ARE KEPT FROM FEELING; that they are cast down, and yet not destroyed; afflicted, and yet not consumed. All their times are in His hand (*Isa. xlv. 7; Amos iii. 6*). He orders what affliction shall befall any one of His children, and in what manner; to what degree it shall prevail, how long continue, and what shall be the issue (*1 Sam. ii. 6; Job xxxviii. 11*). This is agreeable to His nature, and His relation to them; to His love and promise to His people, and to the design He is carrying on by all His dealings with them, which is to fit them for the kingdom He hath prepared for them (*Psa. ciii. 8, 9, 14; Isa. lvii. 16*). In judgment He remembers mercy, correcting in measure, and staying the rough wind in the day of His east wind (*Isa. xxvii. 8*). II. THE PEOPLE OF GOD UNDER THEIR HEAVIEST SUFFERINGS, ARE TO LOOK TO THE FAR GREATER MISERY WHICH GOD MAY RIGHTEOUSLY INFLICT UPON THEM FOR THEIR SINS. Think of the misery due to sin, as it includes—1. The loss or being deprived of the image and Spirit of God, being abandoned by Him, and left to live without Him in the world. 2. It is part of the misery due to sin, to be cast out of the favour of God, and abhorred by Him. 3. A being stript of all external comforts, of whatever might make life easy or desirable; a deprivation of all such things, is our due upon the account of sin. 4. Having the body filled with pain and torment, making its beauty to consume away as a moth-fretten garment, is part of the punishment due to sin. 5. Having the soul filled with horror, belongs to the punishment of sin; which some have felt to that degree, as to extort from them that doleful cry (*Psa. lxxxviii. 15*). 6. Being cut off by death, and cast into hell, is the destruction due to sin. III. Such is the evil of sin, and so much of it is found even in saints themselves, that SHOULD GOD BE STRICT TO MARK INIQUITY, THEY WOULD HAVE NOTHING TO EXPECT BUT TO BE CONSUMED. 1. Such is the evil of sin, that it deserves this. It is the abominable thing that God hates; and well it may, as by it His majesty and justice are affronted, His power and wisdom disowned, His goodness despised; His holiness reproached, His truth contradicted, His promises and threatenings slighted, as if His favours were not valuable, nor His wrath to be feared. 2. So much of this is found in saints themselves, as would expose them to destruction, should God deal with them according to it. IV. IT IS TO THE DIVINE MERCY AND COMPASSIONS THAT EVEN THE PEOPLE OF GOD OWE THEIR PRESERVATION FROM BEING CONSUMED. 1. The evidence of this is obvious. (1) As it is not owing to any worth nor power of their own, not to anything they could do for God, or do against Him. (2) Nor is their preservation owing to this, that God is unacquainted with the sins of His people, or makes light of them. (3) Nor is their preservation owing to God's want of power to punish to the height of the desert of sin. (4) He has given dreadful proofs of His power on His implacable enemies; and that His people are otherwise treated, is because His mercies and compassions fail not. It was mercy that spared them in their unregenerate state, though they were by nature children of wrath, even as others (*Eph. ii. 3*). It was mercy in God that provided us an all-sufficient Saviour, even His own Son (*John iii. 16*). It was mercy that from eternity designed their recovery whom God is pleased to set apart for Himself; and according to it, in the appointed season, He called them into the kingdom of His dear Son. 2. What kind of mercy it is. (1) It is most free and sovereign. This is His own declaration (*Exod. xxxiii. 19; Rom. ix. 15*). (2) It is rich and full; large and abundant in the fountain, and extending to all His people. (3) It is most wonderful mercy; considering by whom it is exercised, towards whom, against what provocations,

in what manner, and to what ends. Considering by whom exercised. How astonishing is it that the High and Holy One, who humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in heaven, will attend to the preservation of any in this lower world! Considering to whom it is exercised, to men, to sinners; recovered indeed, but very imperfect; such whom He fetched out of nothing by His power, and from a state of guilt by His grace. Considering against what provocations, even from those towards whom it is exercised. How often do we offend our God, while preserved by Him? How many, how great are our sins? How grievous to Him, and how plain before Him? How worthy of destruction are we, and yet He spares us! Considering in what manner it is exercised by God, even with delight. Judgment is His strange work. Considering to what end it is exercised, namely, in order to their salvation, for them or in them, preparatory to their being with Him in heaven, the blissful state to which by mercy they are designed. (4) It is most seasonable mercy. How often has my life been in danger, and yet God has appeared for me, when unable to help myself, and the help of fellow-creatures was tried in vain, in how remarkable a juncture did He take my case into His own hands; proving thereby that to Him alone belong the issues from death? (5) The mercy of God, to which saints owe their preservation, is distinguishing, such as He did not exercise towards apostate spirits. (6) The mercy of God is never-failing (Psa. ciii. 17). This makes up the greatest part of His name, and what He esteems His glory (Exod. xxxiv. 6). 3. The manner in which this mercy is exercised. (1) Through a Mediator, for His sake, and upon His account. (2) In a covenant way. (*D. Wilcox.*) *The perennial stream of Divine compassion*:—Because His compassions are not spent, wasted; but as the oil in the cruse, as the spring ever running, the sun ever shining, &c. This should ever shine in our hearts as the sun doth in the firmament. (*J. Trapp.*) *God's mercies recognised*:—Joseph Parker bids us “never go to God for new blessings before we have given Him a receipt for the old ones.” We may at least recognise them, and the recognition is sure to render us grateful. But, on the contrary, most lives are one big sponge, one hungry petition, always greedily asking, and never stopping to repay. (*Amos R. Wells.*) *A memorial of God's mercy*:—Many times Captain Holm had crossed the Atlantic Ocean without losing a spar, but at last disaster overtook him. He says, “On one voyage my ship was struck by lightning in mid-ocean. The bolt came down the mizzenmast through the cabin and passed into the hold, leaving a long black scar on the mast as it went. We were cotton loaded, and we had every reason to fear the horrors of a ship on fire at sea. But the Lord in His mercy spared us, and we came safely to port. When, a little later, men came on board to make some repairs, I went into the cabin one day, just as the painter was raising his brush to paint out the lightning mark on the mast. ‘Stop! stop!’ I said; ‘don’t you put a brushful of paint on that mast. So long as I am master of this ship, that scar on the mast shall stand, so that I may never forget how good the Lord was to save us when my cotton-loaded ship was struck by lightning.’” (*Christian Age.*)

Ver. 23. *They are new every morning.*—*Dayspring mercies*:—It is almost startling to find this tender and inspiring utterance embedded in the very heart of a book of lamentations. It is not what we expect. The hurricane that has been haunting all hearts with the frenzy of its unceasing roar lulls itself for a moment to listen to the low-ringing, fearless prattle of a child. The wreaths of smoke that rise from sacked and smouldering homes and from crackling cities part as some passing breeze stirs the air, and the calm, lustrous azure of the firmament peeps out again. The shrieks that break from a thousand homes of death, and rend the awful midnight, grow shrill for a while; and in the mysterious pause a nightingale begins to pour out its stream of dainty melody. I. THE INEXHAUSTIBLE WEALTH OF GOD'S FORGIVENESS. But for the daily renewal of God's mercy to His people, they would have been utterly cut off. 1. Alas! with many of us every day has its acts of shortcoming, if not of conscious transgression, and God's pardoning love must needs go before us in new forms of manifestation. I once visited the ruins of a noble city that had been built on a desert oasis. Mighty columns of roofless temples still stood in unbroken file. Halls in which kings and satraps had feasted two thousand years ago were represented by solitary walls. Gateways of richly carved stone led to a paradise of bats and owls. All was ruin. But past the dismantled city, brooks, which had once flowed through gorgeous flower gardens and at the foot of marble halls, still swept on in undying

music and unwasted freshness. The waters were just as sweet as when queens quaffed them two thousand years ago. A few hours before, they had been melted from the snows of the distant mountains. And so God's forgiving love flows in ever-renewed form through the wreck of the past. 2. And when there is no fresh wandering to be forgiven, God's new mercy awaits us at the dawn to refresh our joy and invigorate our strength, and to give to us the power of a new and sinless consecration. Close by one of the great cities of the East, there is a large stretch of grass that is always green. Sometimes the showers are rare and scanty, and the thermometer mounts to an appalling height, and one wonders to see the grass green and lush as though it were growing in some English meadow. It is kept so by a heavy dew that never fails to fall in the nighttime. And so with our life of consecration. There is no dawn without the dew of abounding love and compassion descending to keep it green. II. THE RESOURCEFULNESS OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE. The mercy that is ever fresh to pardon is ever fresh to guide and shape the circumstances in the midst of which the pardoned life is spent. "Weeping may endure for the night," but God's gracious hand never forgets to make ready its surprise of joy for the morning. The setting sun sees God's people beleaguered by hostile legions, and with hearts sinking beneath the weight of perplexity and despair; but the path of providential leading has turned a sharp corner in the night, and the morrow's sun has risen upon a traversed sea, and the dreaded foe strewn like helpless wreck-drift along the shore. And even when there are no special difficulties awaiting the solution of God's providence, and our life is uneventful in its outward complexion, providence is always versatile in its unseen methods and processes. We may sometimes seem to be left at the mercy of unalterable forces; no interposition; old natural laws that shaped the destiny of Adam shaping ours without any break, old events repeating themselves, all mechanism. Yet as bridges built in the time of the Conquest carry over their lines day by day new men with new thoughts to be accomplished in the world, these ever-repeating events are working by the line of an old order to new providential issues. Astronomers at one time puzzled themselves over a problem in solar physics. How was the heat of the sun maintained? It seemed a natural inference that as it was always giving off heat in stupendous volumes, ultimate exhaustion must one day come. Within recent times the suggestion has found wide acceptance, that the sun is constantly drawing meteors and asteroids and comets to itself, and that the heat is maintained by the impact of these bodies, as they fall into the sun. Things come to us from time to time that seem out of all accord with the harmonies around us. Strange difficulties, stumbling-blocks, tribulations start up in the path of our daily life. These things are drawn into the circle of God's control and government for their solution, and it is in this way that the very glory of God's providence is maintained. III. THE UNFAILING TRUTH AND FAITHFULNESS OF GOD in His relation to His people. God's renewed mercies are linked with the morning, because the return of the day is one of the most perfect and intelligible symbols of constancy to be found in the economy of nature. How unlike human love in many of its forms, which, once embittered by disappointment, changes into gall, cynicism, misanthropy! There are not a few hearts from whose affection all elasticity has for ever gone. The affection is like a spring that has been rendered limp and useless through overstrain. A shrewd observer of human nature has said, "For a woman there is no second love. Her nature is too delicate to withstand a second time that most terrible shock and convulsion of soul. Think of Juliet. Could she have sustained a second time that overpowering bliss and horror?" Well, that statement is true, within certain limits of both man and woman alike. The human love that is centred on human objects cannot renew itself for ever. It may be so crushed, that no dew or sunshine can lift it up again. Old people do not care to form new friendships. How transcendent the Divine love! It has been grieved and crossed and condemned by our weaknesses, insincerities, rebellions, a thousand times; and yet it renews itself unceasingly with every day-dawn. IV. THE UNFAILING PROMPTNESS OF GOD'S MINISTRATIONS. "His mercies are new every morning"; that is, just as soon as, or even before, we begin to need them. We receive our salvation and guidance and defence, not of our own work, but of His free love. If it were of our own work, we must needs wait for the nightfall before we could receive any recompense. Wages are paid at sunset. But it is all His gift. So the mercy in which we rejoice comes to us with the dawn, before we have done a solitary stroke of work. The regulations of the court at Peking are so framed

as to give to the Chinese Empire an example of promptness and despatch. The emperor always receives his cabinet ministers and councillors at three or four o'clock in the morning, long before day-dawn. And so God awaits His servants with new pardons, new counsels, new honours in His kingdom, long before the day-dawn. God's mercies are new for you at the outset of every morning. There are some flowers that do not open till noon, and others that pour out the stores of rare spices hidden in their hearts at sunset only. God's mercy begins to shine before the sun, and diffuses its incense about our path through every succeeding hour of the day. An ingenious botanist, by watching the hours at which certain flowers opened, hit upon the pretty conceit of constructing what he called a flower clock. God's matchless mercies, like circles of thickset bloom that break into splendour with a rhythm that never halts, are measuring out the successive hours of our life. No winter comes to blast the flowers, and the clock is never behind time. His opening compassions anticipate the light. "They are new every morning."

V. THE PERPETUAL FRESHNESS OF THE DIVINE NATURE. God's compassions are unceasingly new, because they well, pure and fair, out of the sacred and stainless and infinite depths of His Fatherhood. They have the ever-renewed and living sweetness of His own spring-like nature in them. A smile never grows old, because it is kindness turned into the grace of outward line, and the charm of kindness is undying. Art may pall upon the taste, and music jar to torture over-wrought nerves. But not so the smile of sincere and unaffected human kindness. A smile with the love of a finite nature behind it is always new. How much more is that true of a smile with the infinite kindness behind it! God's daily mercies come to us clothed with the enkindled grace of His own matchless smile, and full of the light of an immortal May-time. He cannot give or do without putting the buoyancy of His own untiring and eternal youth into each boon and act. Charles Lamb, in a few wise and beautiful sentences, dedicates one of his books to his afflicted sister Mary, with whom he had been living for years in tender and unselfish affection. He says that "when people are living together day by day, they are too apt to take for granted the affection they bear each other, and to forget those special expressions of affection that are the gauge of its true and constant depth." He would therefore make the publication of his book the occasion for that special expression of love he might have forgotten to render amidst the bustle and routine and commonplace of daily life. God is always with us, but He never suffers us to take His tender affection for granted. Each of His daily mercies comes to us with a new dedication upon it. It is a legible evangel, witnessing to the exceeding love of our Father on high. How sweet and lightsome life would be to us, if we could only enter into the prophet's view of the ever-renewed mercy with which it is filled! Solomon had jaded his nature with false luxury and mock grandeur, and voluptuous habits that would have better suited a pagan, when he moaned out his epitaph upon human life, "There is nothing new under the sun." Some one has said he counted the sun itself "a piece of warmed-up pleasantries only." A Frenchman would have put an end to himself when he had reached that point. Solomon was kept from that madness by his reserve of religious principle, and made to warn all the ages against the vanity of a life spent away from God. He would have tuned his harp to a better key than that, if, like his father, he had bathed his spirit day by day in the fountain of God's perpetual goodness. He could not see the goodness and mercy that were ever following him. Is life wearisome and insipid? It is because we are blind to God's ever-renewed mercies. I read the other day of a man who had lost his sense of taste through the shock of a railway collision. And some of us are like that. Our faith has had its shocks, and our hopes its disappointments, and our life-plan its abrupt and disastrous interruptions, and we sometimes find it an empty counsel to "taste and see that the Lord is good." We fail to appreciate the newness of His daily mercy. It is fitting that new mercies should be greeted with new songs. The heart alive to the freshness of God's mercy will find new language in which to express itself. Whilst passing in early manhood through a stage of deep dejection, John Stuart Mill found occasional comfort in music. One day he was thrown into a state of profound gloom by the thought that musical combinations were exhaustible. The octave was only composed of five tones and two semi-tones. Not all the combinations of these notes were harmonious, so there must be a limit somewhere to the possibilities of melody. No such possibility can limit the range of "the new song," for it shall be pitched to the key of God's ever-renewed mercies. (*T. G. Selby.*) *New mercies* :—There

is, I am persuaded, no greater evil committed by any of us than a practical forgetfulness of the common mercies of life, mercies which, because of their commonness, cease to be regarded as mercies. The Psalmist, you will remember, calls upon us to "forget not all God's benefits," and he thus indicates our perpetual danger, a danger which he himself felt and against which he had to guard his own soul. There are two great causes which may be said to account for our forgetfulness of the mercies of God which are new every morning. I. **THE HAND OF THE GIVER IS INVISIBLE.** He is a Spirit, and He can only manifest Himself to the senses of His creatures by such physical operations as appeal to their senses. To ask that we may see God, and see Him with our eyes, is to ask that He may cease to be what He is, namely, an infinite Spirit; or else it is to ask that we should cease to be what we are. We forget, when we wish to see God who giveth us all things richly to enjoy, that we do not even see each other. My friend may give me presents, but I do not see that in my friend which these presents express and reveal. I can only infer that he loves me because of what he has given me, and if he should send me gifts every day and every moment, I should still only infer the same. And if he were some unknown friend—that is, a person whose face I had never seen at all, but who for some reason or other should supply me with all the necessaries of life every day—the fact that I had never seen him would not impair the value of his gifts, nor would it diminish the gratitude which I should feel towards him. It may be, too, that the gifts of a friend might come to me through a chain of a thousand hands, some of which I might see, and some of which I might not see; but no matter how long the chain of intermediate agents through whom the blessings come, they would still be the gifts of a friend. Nay, if the chain were long, so far from our forgetting the friend, or being ungrateful for his gifts, we should see in every separate link of the chain a fresh proof of his regard, and should say, how much he must love me when he takes so much pains that his gifts shall not miscarry, but provides agents at every step to hand on the gifts until they reach me in safety. This is what God does. He is this friend, except that though unseen He is not unknown. He is our Father in heaven Who loves us and cares for us. II. Another cause of our forgetfulness of our mercies as gifts of God is **THEIR CONSTANCY, OR REGULARITY.** This is strange, and sad as well as strange, that the very faithfulness and constancy with which God's blessings come down to us should create forgetfulness, and should lead us to undervalue them. He has made them constant that we may never lack, has remembered us always that we might always remember Him, has given us perpetual mercies that we might give Him perpetual praise; and we forget Him, forget Him because His mercies are new every morning. What if they were not? What if they were intermittent? Let us look at a few. 1. Take as the first illustration, sleep. I venture to say that there are thousands who never kneel down and thank God for sleep. While it visits us unwooded, unsolicited, even unsought, and sometimes even unwelcomely, it takes its place without any distinct recognition among the regular facts in the order of nature. "We sleep"; of course we sleep; we sleep as we stand, or walk, or eat, or think, so much is it a matter of course! Happy they who can speak thus; happier still if they knew the priceless value of this boon, and happier still if, with the breaking day, they have a heart to bless that God from whom sleep cometh. It is a mercy which no money can buy, which no rank can command. I call you, then, to-day to thank God for the common blessing of sleep, which is new "every night." 2. Look at another of these common mercies which are too often forgotten. I mean our reason. The value of this gift is practically disesteemed from the very fact of its commonness. We need at times to see men and women bereft of their reason, that we may see by comparison with these sad foils how much we need to bless God that our intellects are preserved. To see a man once sound in brain and rich in faculty, with high powers of reasoning and of speech, wild and wandering, the victim of strange and delirious fantasies, turning his heart away from those he has most deeply loved, and sometimes blaspheming the very God whom it has been his joy to worship and to serve; this is a spectacle to fill one with grief and horror. But should it not also awaken in us a perpetual wonder that we have been preserved from such a calamity; and should it not stir us up to daily thanksgiving to Him whose mercies are new to us every morning? 3. Look at another common mercy—the power of motion and action and speech, or, in other words, that general energy of body which constitutes the great part of our daily outward life. Have you ever thought of this? Has not its very

commonness hidden its value and meaning from you? (E. Mellor, D.D.) *The Originality of human life*:—I. NATURE PRESENTS A CERTAIN UNIFORMITY, BUT IN THAT UNIFORMITY WE FIND INFINITE VARIETY. It is commonplace to say, "No two blades of grass are alike." The ancients believed that a new sun rose every day—a technical error, but a positive truth. We never look twice at the same sun; we never twice see the same river. The water flows along and next moment is a new river. This is true of the whole universe about us. Landscapes, mountains, forests, oceans, skies, all change while we gaze. So with man. All life is newness. II. THE ORIGINALITY OF HUMAN LIFE PRESENTS AN UNCEASING DISCOVERY OF DIVINE MERCIFULNESS. "His mercies are new every morning." The text contains two grand ideas:—1. The inexhaustibility of the Divine mind. In this way we consider His works from the intellectual standpoint. 2. The inexhaustibility of the Divine heart. Not only do God's thoughts fail not, but His compassions fail not. His love is as great as His power. III. THIS RENEWAL OF MERCIES SHOULD MATERIALLY AFFECT OUR DAILY LIFE. 1. "New every morning." Then how blind we are! There is a huge gloomy crowd to whom life lacks variety, freshness, gladness. The carnally-minded, whose heart is gross, &c., cannot see the glory of life, the grandeur of events, the power and prophecy of all things. It is far otherwise with the man whose spiritual nature has made them full of life. So with the Bible. It is a field of treasure. But how many scan its pages, yet miss its precious thoughts! 2. "New every morning." Then how thankless we often are! Judging from our spirit and speech, it would hardly seem as if we had any mercies at all. As a great rose-grower was walking with a lady in his grounds, she expressed the desire to possess one of the most beautiful blossoms. He plucked the coveted flower and gave it to his friend, only to find, shortly after, that in a fit of unconsciousness she was plucking the leaves and dropping them to the ground. Is not this a picture of ourselves? We covet certain things—health, wealth, knowledge, friendship. Yet, having obtained these and other mercies, how coldly and carelessly we receive and use them. The rose-grower was so deeply offended that he gave away no more prize-flowers. This was like man, but not like God. He still gives, although the dying leaves of many wasted mercies are ever lying at our feet. Heaven drops fresh blossoms into our hands, only to be ignored and wasted in their turn. 3. "New every morning." Then how foolish we often are! Every mercy has a mission, and designs the enrichment of our life and character. How much, then, do we lose by our carelessness and ingratitude! There is a fairy-tale, in which a boatman in the evening time ferried across a river a strange being, who gave him as a reward what seemed to be only shavings and stones, which he threw over in disgust. But next morning, when the sun arose, he discovered that a few fragments of the gift had escaped destruction, and the light showed him that it consisted, not of shavings and dirt, but of gold and precious stones, and, too late, he cursed his hateful folly. So through life we go casting aside from us our daily benefits as if they were poor and meaningless, and appropriating to ourselves but a fraction of that which is more precious than rubies. (W. L. Watkinson.) *New daily mercies*:—There are a great many mercies that are "new every morning." One of them is the benefit of yesterday's experience. This life is a training school; each day teaches its needed lessons. Experience is a pretty rough instructor, but, next to the Holy Spirit, none is more valuable. If yesterday led us astray, then we are worse than fools if we take the same track again. The mischief with bad habits is that we thoughtlessly put them on again as we put on our clothes. If they are ever to be broken off, they must be taken by the throat; and the beginning of a new day is a good time to begin. A distinguished minister once said to me, "I found that hard smoking was killing me, and one morning I stopped square off, and it has saved my life." It is doubtful if he had squelched that enemy as successfully later in the day. How can we ever hope to grow in grace, and make real progress in the Divine life, if we are satisfied to start every day on the same old beaten tracks, and repeat the old blunders; and let the same besetting sins get firmer hold on us? (T. L. Cuyler, D.D.) *No monotony in God's gifts*:—Mr. Gladstone, speaking at the National Workmen's Exhibition, said he remembered how, in the old coaching days, the dead level of nearly thirty miles on the Slough road killed more horses than any other road, because the same muscles were constantly in action, whereas there would have been a change in going up or down hill. Nature has no dead levels. Ruskin says that, with one or two exceptions, there are no lines nor surfaces of Nature

without curvature. God's gifts to us are never "staled by frequency." They are "new every morning." He ordains constant changes in our life and its sceneries, "lest we be wearied, and faint in our minds." (*Quiver.*)

Vers. 24-26. **The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope in Him.**—*The believer's hope in God, and waiting for His salvation.*—I. **GOD IS THE PORTION OF EVERY ONE OF HIS PEOPLE.** 1. What may be said of God as the portion of His people? He is—(1) A most suitable portion to them. (2) An all-sufficient portion. (3) An infinite portion. (4) As the portion of His people, He is most safe and secure to them. (5) He is an eternal, durable portion. (6) As the result of all this, He is a satisfying portion: What we can never be weary of, or desire to change. 2. Every one of God's people has a special interest in Him as his. How He comes to be so? There is a mutual claim, and 'tis brought about by something on each side; on God's part and on theirs. (1) On God's part, it is owing to His own love resolving to raise them to the highest happiness. This He has done from all eternity (Psa. ciii. 17; Eph. i. 3, 4). To make way for this, His Son is given to die for them. God expressly makes over Himself in the covenant of grace to be theirs, saying, I am God All-Sufficient, and your God: And to every individual believer, I am, and will be Thine: One whom thou hast an interest in, and may'st call thy own. (2) On His people's part, they accept of Him as such; having their minds enlightened by His Spirit to discern what a portion God is, how much preferable to all others, and their wills sweetly bowed to choose and close with Him. II. **THE SOUL THAT HAS THE LORD FOR HIS PORTION HAS ABUNDANT ENCOURAGEMENT TO HOPE IN HIM.** 1. Under an affecting sense of the Church's sufferings. 2. When low and despised in the world, exercised with pressing necessities and straits, the soul that can say, The Lord is my portion, may take encouragement to hope in Him. 3. When walking in darkness, and seeing no light, the soul that can say, The Lord is my portion, has encouragement still to hope in Him. 4. When buffeted by Satan, the soul that has the Lord for his portion has reason also to hope in Him. 5. The people of God are not exempted from afflictions: But when these are their lot their interest in God is sufficient for their support. 6. The righteous must die as well as others: but, under the apprehensions of this, the interest he hath in God is a solid ground of hope. III. **PRAYER AND PATIENCE ARE TO BE THE COMPANIONS OF HOPE IN THE PEOPLE OF GOD, TO BOTH WHICH THEY HAVE A POWERFUL ARGUMENT IN HIS GOODNESS.** 1. The people of God are a generation that seek Him. 2. Everyone that seeks God aright has his soul engaged in the work. 3. They whose souls are engaged in seeking God, will and ought to wait for Him. 4. The goodness of God is a powerful argument to engage His people to seek to Him, and wait for Him. IV. **NO SERVANT OF GOD SHALL BE A LOSER BY HIM; BUT EVERY ONE OF THEM BE LED TO OWN AT LAST THAT IT IS GOOD TO HOPE, AND QUIETLY WAIT FOR HIS SALVATION.** 1. What is included in the salvation waited for? (1) A salvation from every kind and degree of evil; sin, temptation, the troubles of this world, and future everlasting miseries (Rev. xxi. 3, 4). (2) A being put into a possession of all good. 2. Consider it under its engaging title, the salvation of the Lord. (1) It is a salvation worthy of him (Heb. xi. 16). (2) It is designed, prepared, and promised by Him. (3) It is a salvation that will consist in the enjoyment of God; dwelling in His presence under the light of His countenance, the freest communications of His love and goodness, filling the soul with that fulness of joy, which nothing short of possession can acquaint us with. 3. What is implied in hoping, and patiently waiting for it? (1) Having the heart fixed by faith on the salvation of God as real, though out of sight. (2) A firm persuasion, that the salvation of God will come at last, though for a time deferred. (3) Expecting God's salvation in His time; depending upon His wisdom to choose the fittest season, and His faithfulness to remember us when that season comes. (4) Serious care to be found ready whenever called to enter upon the salvation of God we have been waiting for. 4. In what respects may it be said to be good, thus to hope and quietly wait for the salvation of God? (1) As it redounds to God's glory; as it is a testimony to His power and grace, as what bears us up during our stay in this world, and fully provides for our complete blessedness. (2) As it may encourage others to put in for a share in the salvation of God; by the hope of which we are borne up amidst the difficulties of the present state, and enabled patiently to wait for the salvation of God in a better. (3) As it will be comfortable to ourselves, disposing us to meet the will

of God in a becoming manner. Application—1. Does every one of God's people say from His soul the Lord is my portion? Hence learn that real religion is an inward thing; and the power of it lies in what passes between Heaven and the heart, in transactions that only God and the soul can be witnesses to. 2. Does every one that comes into the number of the people of God say from his soul, The Lord is my portion? Of what importance is it to inquire what is the language, the sense, of my soul? 3. How great and amiable is the change that grace hath made on every saint, in leading him to take up the language of the text as his own. The Lord is my portion; and thereupon to hope, and quietly wait, for his salvation. 4. If you have chosen God for your portion, living and dying, hope in Him as such. 5. But how may it be known when this is said in truth? (1) Where any say in truth, The Lord is my portion, they have been so far sensible of His worth, and their own need of Him, as to be incapable of being satisfied without Him, or taking up with anything else? (2) The soul that has said, the Lord is his portion, has entered into covenant with Him. (3) Where the soul says, The Lord is my portion, it loves Him, above all, or with a superlative affection. (4) The soul that saith, The Lord is my portion, values communion with Him more than any sensible enjoyment. (5) The soul that saith, The Lord is my portion, cannot but delight and rejoice, so far as apprehended to be so, and is greatly thankful for the direction and grace that inclined and enabled him to make the happy choice which he would not now exchange for all the world. (6) The soul that saith, The Lord is my portion, feels the greatest grief for the apprehended loss of Him, or when in the dark as to an interest in Him. (7) The soul that saith, The Lord is my portion, will, by prayer and supplication, frequently go to Him, and be more earnest for His favour and grace than for any lower good. (8) The soul that saith, the Lord is his portion, will make Him the ground of his trust and triumph, when outward comforts may be withdrawn or denied (Hab. iii. 17, 18). (9) Where the soul saith, The Lord is my portion, there will be a care to please and serve Him with the inward man, and a fear to offend Him, even in the thoughts, or things that do not come under the eye of the world. (10) The soul that says, The Lord is my portion, is breathing after that world and state where it shall have the full enjoyment of Him; and frequently, with pleasure, taken up in the believing thoughts and hopes of it; as its chief felicity will then begin, when this world is to be for ever left, and all lower sensual delights at an end. (*D. Wilcox.*) *Choice portions* (with Deut. xxxii. 9):—The love of God changes us into its own image, so that what the Lord saith concerning us, we also can declare concerning Him. God is love essentially, and when this essential love shines forth freely upon us, we reflect it back upon Him. The Lord loveth His people, and we love Him because He first loved us; He hath chosen His saints, and they also have made Him their chosen heritage. I. "THE LORD'S PORTION IS HIS PEOPLE." 1. The Church of God is the Lord's own peculiar and special property. The whole world is God's by common right, He is Lord of the manor of the universe; but His Church is His garden, His cultivated and fenced field, and if He should give up His rights to all the rest of the wide earth, yet He never could relinquish His rights to His separated inheritance. "The Lord's portion is His people." How are they His? (1) By His own sovereign choice. As our text says, Jacob is the lot of his inheritance, or as the Hebrew has it, "the cord" of His inheritance, in allusion to the old custom of measuring out lots by a line of cord; so by line and by lot the Lord has marked off His own chosen people, "and they shall be Mine, saith the Lord, in the day when I make up My jewels." (2) By purchase. He has bought and paid for them to the utmost farthing, hence about His title there can be no dispute. (3) By conquest. (a) Upon your necks, Oh, ye tyrants of the Church, hath the Anointed put His feet; He hath dashed you in pieces with His own right hand! (b) We are Christ's this day by conquest in us. What a battle He had in us before we would be won! 2. The saints are the objects of the Lord's especial care. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole world,"—with what object?—"to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him." The wheels of Providence are full of eyes; but in what direction are they gazing? Why, that all things may "work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." It is sweet to reflect how careful God is of His Church. We are jealous of our eyes, but the Lord keeps His people as the apple of His eye. What a wonderful affection birds have for their young; they will sooner die than let their little ones be

destroyed ! But like as an eagle fluttereth over her nest, so doth the Lord cover His people, and as birds flying so doth the Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem. What love a true husband has for his spouse ! How much rather would he suffer than that she should grieve ! And just such love hath God towards His Church. Oh, how He careth for her ; how He provideth for her as a king should provide for his own queen ! How He watcheth all her footsteps ; guardeth all her motions ; and hath her at all times beneath His eye, and protected by His hand.

3. The Church is the object of the Lord's special joy, for a man's portion is that in which he takes delight. See what terms He uses ; He calls them His dwelling-place. "In Jewry is God known, His name is great in Israel, in Salem also is His tabernacle, and His dwelling-place is Zion." "For the Lord hath chosen Zion ; He hath desired it for His habitation." Where is man most at ease ? Why, at home. Beloved, the Church is God's home ; and as at home a man unbends himself, takes his pleasure, manifests himself to his children as he does not unto strangers, so in the Church the Lord unbendeth Himself, condescendingly manifesting Himself to them as He doth not unto the world. We are expressly told that the Church is the Lord's rest. "This is My rest for ever ; here will I dwell, for I have desired it." As if all the world beside were His workshop, and His Church His rest. Yet further, there is an unrivalled picture in the Word where the Lord is even represented as singing with joy over His people. Who could have conceived of the Eternal One as bursting forth into a song ? Once more, remember that the Lord represents Himself as married to His Church. The joy and love of the young honeymoon of married life is but a faint picture of the complacency and delight God always has in His people. 4. God's people are His everlasting possession. There is an allusion here to the division of the portions among the different tribes. There was a law made, that if any man should lose his inheritance by debt, or should be driven to the necessity of selling it, yet at the year of jubilee it always came back again to him ; so that you see no Israelite ever lost his portion. Now, God maps out for Himself His people. He says, "These are My portion" ; and think you God will lose His portion ? They are His, and they shall be His while time lasts ; and when time ends, and eternity rolls on, He never can, He never will, cast away His chosen people.

II. "THE LORD IS MY PORTION, SAITH MY SOUL." 1. This implies that true believers have the Lord as their sole portion. It is not, "The Lord is partly my portion," not "The Lord is in my portion" ; but He Himself makes up the sum-total of my soul's inheritance. When Martin Luther had a large sum of money sent to him, he gave it all away directly to the poor, for he said, "O Lord, Thou shalt never put me off with my portion in this life." Now, when God's children receive anything in the way of gift from Providence, they thank God for it, and endeavour to use it for His honour and glory, but they still insist upon it that this is not their portion. St. Augustine was wont very often to pray, "Lord, give me Thyself." A less portion than this would be unsatisfactory. Not God's grace merely, nor His love ; all these come into the portion, but "the Lord is my portion, saith my soul." 2. As God is our only portion, so He is our own portion : "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul." Come, brethren, have you got a personal grip of this portion ? Are you sure it is yours ? We have heard of a great man who once took a poor believer and said, "Do you look over there to those hills." "Yes, sir." "Well, all that is mine ; that farm yonder, and that yonder, and beyond that river over there—it is all mine." "Ah," said the other—"look at yonder little cottage, that is where I live, and even that is not mine, for I have to hire it, and yet I am richer than you, for I can point up yonder and say—there lies my inheritance, in heaven's unmeasured space, and let you look as far as ever you can you cannot see the limit of my heritage, nor find out where it ends nor where it begins." Oh, what a blessing it is if you and I can say, "He is my heritage !" 3. The Lord is to His people an inherited portion. "If children, then heirs ; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ ;" but if not children, then not heirs, and the heritage cannot be yours. 4. This heritage is also ours by choice. We have chosen God to be our heritage. Better to have Christ and a fiery faggot, than to lose Him and wear a royal robe. Better Christ and the old Mamertine dungeon of the Apostle Paul, than to be without Christ and live in the palace of Cæsar. 5. God is His people's settled portion. Heaven and earth may pass away, but the covenant of grace shall not be removed. The covenant of day and night may be broken ; the waters may again cover the earth, sooner than the decree of grace be

frustrated. 6. The Lord is my all-sufficient portion. God fills Himself; and as Manton says, "If God is all-sufficient in Himself, He must be all-sufficient for us;" and then he uses this figure—"That which fills an ocean will fill a bucket; that which will fill a gallon will fill a pint; those revenues that will defray an emperor's expenses are enough for a beggar or a poor man; so, when the Lord Himself is satisfied with Himself, and it is His happiness to enjoy Himself, there needs no more, there is enough in God to satisfy." 7. I think I may add—and the experience of every believer will bear me out—we have to-day a portion in which we take intense delight. I tried in a poor way to show that God had a delight in His people. Beloved, do not His people, when they are in a right state of heart, have an intense delight in Him? Here we can bathe our souls: here we riot and revel in inexhaustible luxuriance of delight; here our spirit stretches her wings and mounts like an eagle; here she expands herself, and only wishes she were more capacious, and therefore she cries, "Lord, expand me, enlarge my heart, that I may hold more of Thee." Often have we felt in the spirit with Rutherford, when he cried, "Lord, make me a heart as large as heaven, that I may hold Thee in it! But since the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee, Lord, make my soul as wide as seven heavens, that I may contain Thy fulness." 8. This is to the saints of God an eternal portion. Indeed, it is in the world to come that believers shall have their portion. Here they have none except trials and troubles; "in the world ye shall have tribulation." But as God cannot be seen, and as He is the believer's portion, so their portion cannot be seen. It is a good remark of an excellent commentator upon that passage, "For which cause He is not ashamed to be called their God." He writes to this effect: "If it were only for this world, God would be ashamed to be called His people's God, for His adversaries would say, 'Look at those people, how tried they are, what troubles they have, who is their God?' and," saith he, "the Lord speaks as if He might be ashamed to be called their God, if this life were all"; but the Scripture says, 'Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city.' " Thus may the Lord turn upon His enemies, and say, "I am their God, and although I do chasten them sore, and lead them through the deep waters, yet see what I am preparing for them—see them as they shall be when I shall wipe all tears from their eyes, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters." Hence it is in the prospect of bliss so ecstatic, joy so boundless, glory so eternal, that He is not ashamed to be called their God. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Christ is our portion.*—I. THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IS A BELIEVER'S PORTION. 1. The word "portion" is sometimes taken for a piece or part of a thing, be it a less part or a bigger part. Now our heavenly Father hath made comfortable provision, set by a competent portion for every child of His, and that portion is Christ. He hath not divided Christ among them, given a part of Him to one, and a part of Him to another. Is Christ divided? No; but He hath given Him all, all wholly and entirely to each one of them, so that each one may say, all Christ is mine, mine to all intents and purposes. 2. What in Christ is a believer's portion? All that He is, and all that He hath, both as God, and as God-man. (1) As God. All His wisdom, and power, and goodness is theirs. I say theirs, to be employed for their best benefit and advantage. (2) As God-man; as Mediator. His merit and righteousness is theirs for justification; His blood for reconciliation; His sufferings and death to make atonement. His spirit and grace are theirs for sanctification; of His fulness they receive (John i. 16). His comforts are theirs, to revive and refresh them when they are sad and drooping (Isa. l. 4). His Word is for their guidance and direction in all their doubts and difficulties, like the pillar of cloud and fire. His presence is theirs, for their preservation and protection in all their perils and dangers (Gen. xv. 1). His crown, and throne, and kingdom are theirs, eternally to reward them (Rev. iii. 21). 3. What kind of portion is Christ? (1) In general, He is a worthy portion—allusion to 1 Sam. i. 5—that is, a dainty, delicate portion, excelling all other; none like it, worthy of all acceptation, that is, to be readily accepted of, and closed with by each of us as soon as offered. (2) In particular, He is a soul portion—as here, He is my portion, saith my soul. The portion of my heart (Psa. lxxiii. 26), of my spirit, my inner man. A sufficient portion. There is enough in Him, enough and enough again to make us all happy. Merit enough, spirit enough, grace enough, glory enough. He is El-Shaddai—God, that is enough (Gen. xvii. 1). A satisfying portion. The soul that hath Him will own and acknowledge it hath enough

(Psa. cxvi. 7). A sweet portion—exceedingly pleasant and delightful. It doth not only satisfy the soul that hath it, but fills it with joy unspeakable, and full of glory (Psa. xvi. 5, 6). A suitable portion. If it were not suitable it would not be sweet; if not proper, not pleasant. A sure portion (Isa. lv. 3). A part in Christ is, therefore, a good part, nay, the best part, because it cannot be taken away from us. II. INFERENCES. 1. Then it follows that Christ is a rich Christ, who hath wherewithal to portion such abundance of people, as in all ages and generations have been portioned by Him. The apostle calls it the *unsearchable* riches of Christ (Eph. iii. 8). He is a bottomless mine of merit and spirit; a boundless ocean of righteousness and strength; a full fountain of grace and comfort. 2. Then all that are true believers are really and truly rich people. 3. Then how much doth it concern us all to make this portion ours. May we do so? We certainly may, each of us. But how? By a sincere, hearty, deliberate choice of it. Choose it, and thou shalt have it. Thus Mary did (Luke x. 42). 4. There are four sorts of persons who should especially hearken to this motion. (1) Those that are young. The days of your youth are the days of your choice, your choosing days. Now choose Christ (Eccl. xii. 1). (2) Those that are poor, and low in the world. The less we have on earth the more need there is to make heaven sure; lest we should be doubly poor, poor here, and for ever miserable. (3) Those that are convinced, whose eyes are in some measure opened, whose hearts God hath touched. (4) Those that have children (Gen. xvii. 7). 5. Then if Christ be our portion, and we can make out our title upon good grounds, and that we have thus chosen, then it is our duty to hope in Him; as here, "Therefore will I hope in Him," rely upon Him, trust to Him. If He be thy portion, He may well be thy hope, thy refuge. (1) A refuge—as to the things of this life. Thou art well provided for, thou shalt want no good thing (Psa. xxxiv. 10, cxlii. 5). (2) A refuge—as to our everlasting condition (1 Cor. xv. 19). 6. Then we should carry it as those whose souls can say the Lord Christ is their portion. In all holy obedience before Him (Psa. cxix. 57), fearing to offend Him, caring to please Him. (*Philip Henry.*) *God the portion of His people*:—I. WHAT IS MEANT BY A PORTION, AND WHAT SORT OF A PORTION GOD IS. The word is taken from the distribution of Canaan, by which each of the Israelites had a quantity of ground assigned to him and his heirs. This they called their portion (2 Kings ix. 21). According to this explanation, it is not what a man has originally of his own, but something assigned to him, by special gift or course of law. So God is the portion of the saints; not from any original right or property which they have in Him, but by His own particular and gracious appointment. God also is the portion of His people, as they have a peculiar interest in Him, of which they can never be deprived. As a portion also is that which we chiefly depend upon for our maintenance, so is God, in a spiritual respect, to His people. His favour is their life. In answer to the inquiry, what kind of a portion God is, I reply, first, that He is a spiritual portion; and for that reason little valued or sought after by the world. Let the rich man glory in his riches, "my soul shall make her boast in the Lord": let the sensualist talk of his pleasures, "the Lord is my portion, saith my soul." He is a sufficient as well as a spiritual portion: every way complete; and adequate to all the wants and desires of His creatures. The Lord is also a sure portion; and in our fluctuating world, this is a circumstance particularly interesting and encouraging. Earthly possessions and enjoyments are so precarious, that there is no dependence on them for a moment. But our Divine portion is subject to no such accidents; it is secured to us by an unchangeable covenant. The Lord is therefore an eternal portion. "He is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." After this, I may very well add, that He is a transcendent portion, excellent and glorious beyond all comparison. II. HOW CAME THE LORD TO BE THE PORTION OF HIS CREATURES? 1. First, by free gift on God's part. We durst not have asked such a thing. Or, if we had, what could we have expected, but to have our petition rejected, and our presumption and rashness punished with severity? But what we durst not ask, God has freely bestowed. 2. It is, secondly, by free choice on man's part. What God gives, we must receive; not with a cold indifference, as if we did not care whether we had it or not; but with eagerness, gratitude, and joy. 3. I add, thirdly, that it is by the gracious mediation of Christ on both parts. Whenever, therefore, you are rejoicing in the Lord as your portion, and are happy in the pledges of His presence and favour, bless God for Jesus Christ; and ascribe all to "the praise

of the glory of His grace, in which He has made us accepted in the beloved."

III. WHAT BELIEVERS MAY HOPE FROM GOD AS THEIR PORTION. They are not to hope for a total exemption from trouble. "No!" Can any that are acquainted with the Word of God, and the nature of His covenant, expect any such exemption? Is it any where promised, or hinted, that God's people shall be so privileged? But if we must not hope for an exemption from present trouble, what may we hope for? I answer, that we may expect present support and subsistence. You may hope that if your sufferings for Christ abound, your consolation by Christ shall much more abound; that if outward comforts drop off, He will grant you better instead of them; and that when He cuts off the stream, He will give you nearer access to the fountain. You may hope that when you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, He will be with you, and that His rod and staff shall comfort you. In short, you may hope that goodness and mercy shall follow you all the days of your life, and that you shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

1. If God then is the portion of His people, we infer that they are richer and happier than the world supposes them to be.

2. Is God the only satisfying portion, then the men of the world are not so happy as they appear. Not so happy!—Alas! they are in the most miserable condition.

3. Let us seriously inquire whether the Lord be our portion or not.

4. "Walk worthy" of your portion. It would be a shame for a prince to appear like a beggar; for one who is heir to a crown, to herd with the lowest of the people; and it would be equally disgraceful for you, whose treasure is in heaven, to be as vain and trifling, as careful and troubled about many things, as those who have no hope in the favour of God. (*S. Lavington.*)

God our portion:—I. HOW DOES THE LORD BECOME OUR PORTION?

1. By showing us our poverty. Sin has blotted out its amiable excellencies, and robbed the soul of all its original treasure. Poor is the Christless master of a world. Men think, with talents and honour and power, the soul is rich; but, alas! in it there is a meagre poverty.

2. By enlarging our capacities and improvements.

3. By giving Himself.

II. THE EVIDENCE WE HAVE WITHIN US OF THAT DIVINE PORTION. The expression, "Saith my soul," is fraught with instruction. "He that believeth hath the witness in himself." It is not what we hear or read or pray, that can tell us we are Christians; it is some conviction of the soul within us, not founded in presumption, nor arising from pride, but founded in knowledge, and arising from humility.

1. It speaks in meditation: not in noisy pleasure, in sallies of wit, in the hour of feasting, nor in the fascination of indulgence, which things are so dangerous to the Christian, since they confuse his religious feeling, introduce fears and doubts, and even stop for a time communion with God; but in meditation, when the thoughts are turned inwards—then the voice of the soul is heard.

2. It speaks in prayer: not in that fluency and happy way of expression which some have in prayer; not in apparent zeal, nor in aptness in quoting Scripture,—all these are nothing, except the soul is engaged in prayer. A thought, or a sigh, or a devout breathing of spirit will mount to the throne of God sometimes sooner than the wordy and eloquent appeal.

3. It speaks in trouble. Jeremiah was placed in circumstances of no common oppression, and he said, "Remembering mine affliction," &c. (ver. 19). It is in such a moment, when everything seen is found to be but vanity and vexation of spirit; when death stalks by us clad in his own terrific honours, and when our own careworn, sinful, oppressed hearts are ready to sink before the piercing eye of the Judge of the whole earth,—it is in such a moment that the renewed soul is heard uttering the convictions of its safety.

III. THE EFFECT IT PRODUCES ON THE BELIEVING MIND. "Therefore will I hope in Him." "He that hath this hope in Him, purifieth himself, even as Christ is pure." That man awfully deceives himself who fancies he has any claim to a portion in God, and yet lives in sin. Those who have that portion, will earnestly pray after increased sanctification of the spirit, through the belief of the truth. (*G. D. Mudie.*)

God the portion of the soul:—I. IMPORT OF THE WORDS.

1. A "portion" denotes whatever constitutes the stable and permanent source of our chief enjoyment, as distinguished from an occasional and transient benefit. The prophet rests in God as his portion; places on God his expectation of good; concentrates all his hopes and affections, all the sentiments of confidence and complacence, on Him, and on Him alone.

2. In a "portion" two qualities are requisite: protection from evil, and supply of good; it should be a shield to defend and a sun to bless us: and "the Lord God is a sun and a shield; He will give grace

and glory, and no good thing will He withhold." 3. Though God alone is fit to be the portion of any of His creatures, He is not such to any, unless they choose Him. Till He is fixed upon as such, and preferred to all beside, we have no part or lot in His favour and perfections. II. THOSE QUALITIES IN THE DIVINE BEING WHICH RECOMMEND HIM TO US AS OUR PORTION, AND ABUNDANTLY JUSTIFY THE CHOICE WHICH HIS PEOPLE HAVE MADE. 1. That only is fit to be the portion of any rational being, which is congenial with the nature of the mind. That which is not fitted for his thinking powers can never be the portion of a thinking being. And as we are spiritual, nothing that is not such can be our real good. The benefits and gifts of providence are not sufficient; the Divine Being Himself is required to satisfy the desires of His people: they see that, in His nature and character, which alone can fill their souls. 2. The portion which we want must be one that can make us perfectly happy. Give a man all the world, he will not be satisfied; "the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing"; the passions of sensuality, avarice, or ambition, are never satisfied by indulgence. But the Divine Being opens a field of joy in which we may expatiate to all eternity! for He is the original of all good; never can we exhaust the pleasures that arise from His power, directed by His goodness; pleasures which must satisfy every desire. 3. A portion must be, not only valuable in itself, but communicable to us. Many things may be admired, which are not communicable; they may be fit for others, yet not fit for us. But God is infinitely communicable: He has the disposition, and He has the power, to disclose Himself, to approximate Himself to His creatures. 4. A portion must be something present with us, something that we can bear about with us, and use whenever we desire. And such a portion is God! His presence is always near; "He is not a God afar off, but a God that is nigh!" His ear is always open to hear, His hand always stretched out to save us. As the stars, in consequence of their magnitude and elevation, are seen alike in places the most distant from each other; so God is the same to all His people; His presence is equally enjoyed by them in every scene. 5. That which is worthy to be our portion should be something unchangeable in its nature, not exposed to uncertain fluctuations. All things around us change. Where we expected most, we are often most disappointed. But God is the same now, as in all past generations; and Jesus Christ, in whom He manifests Himself as the Saviour of them that believe, "is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." 6. A portion, to be perfect, must be eternal in its duration, capable of surviving every change. Here the difference between God and all beside must be strikingly apparent to all. 7. In choosing God for our portion, we return to our ancient course, we reclaim and re-enjoy our original inheritance. "Return unto thy rest, O my soul!" (*R. Hall, M.A.*) *The highest good*:—I. MAN'S POSSESSION OF THE HIGHEST GOOD. "The Lord is my portion." What does this mean? How can man finite possess the infinite? To possess a person is to possess the love and friendship of another. The little child possesses his parents, he has their hearts. The father may be a monarch, swaying his sceptre over millions, yet the child has him, and with his lisping tongue he may say, "That monarch is mine, I have his heart." Thus a good man possesses the infinite. This wonderful possession—1. Answers the profoundest cravings of human nature. 2. Consummates the bliss of human nature. II. MAN'S ASSURANCE OF THE HIGHEST GOOD. "Saith my soul." Man is a duality. In his nature there is the auditor and speaker. How does the soul give this assurance? 1. By its reasoning. Its logic conducts to the conclusion—(1) That God gives Himself to souls of a certain character. (2) That it is in possession of that identical character. 2. By its consciousness. Wherever there is genuine godliness, there is, I believe, an impression apart from all reasoning of God's love and friendship. III. MAN'S CONFIDENCE IN THE HIGHEST GOOD. "Therefore will I hope in Him." To trust in Him is to trust—1. In infinite love. 2. In infallible wisdom. 3. In almighty power. 4. In unchanging all-sufficiency. (*Homilist.*) *The true portion*:—I. THE AUTHORITY UPON WHICH GOD IS CLAIMED AS THE PORTION OF GOOD MEN. It is high language for worms of the earth—sinners. Not natural relation, for that has been forfeited by sin. Not Church privileges. The Jews were mistaken in claiming the favour of God on account of Abraham, Moses, the law, and the covenant, and the promises. 1. God claims His people by right of purchase. As Christ has purchased believers for God, so He hath purchased God for believers; hence they are called "heirs of God." He is—(1) Of infinite power to support. (2) Of infinite wisdom to

direct. (3) Of infinite goodness to supply. 2. He calls His people His portion, because they choose Him; and we call Him our portion, because He chooses us.

II. THE ADVANTAGES OF SUCH AN ATTAINMENT. 1. Abundant and never-failing in its produce. 2. Satisfying in its enjoyments. 3. Eternal in possession.

III. THE DUTIES RESULTING FROM THIS RELATION. 1. Thankful acknowledgment. "The lines are fallen," &c. These thankful acknowledgments are made in private and in public. 2. Dependence upon God for every spiritual supply. As a man upon his portion. 3. To reside in it—dwell in God. 4. Defend your possession. 5. Delight in it. (*J. Walker, D.D.*)

*The portions of the unbeliever and believer contrasted:—*I. In considering THE PORTION OF THE UNBELIEVER. God has placed before us things temporal and things eternal, as containing all that He has in store for the sons of men; and the unbeliever ever chooses his portion from some one or other of the things which are temporal. But whilst there is but one way to God, there are many ways from Him; whilst we have only one method of pleasing Him, there are innumerable methods of "pleasing the flesh." 1. Pleasure, or at least what is called by that name, is the portion chosen by many; and it consists in self-indulgence in whatever form is most suited to the lusts of each carnal mind. They have chosen an empty, a worthless portion. The things after which they long, the things for which they have forsaken God, cannot support them in the hour of death, or in the day of judgment. 2. But whilst these are choosing a portion of self-indulgence, there are others who choose one of self-denial, which is not the less, on that account, an ungodly and a worldly portion. Their choice is covetousness, their portion is riches. Amongst them you may find those who are called the wise, the prudent, and the industrious, giving their diligence to everything except to make their calling and election sure. Oh! what a poor portion for an immortal being is this! It has required labour and self-denial in the acquisition; it has required care and anxiety and watchfulness in the possession; and death comes, and tears it from the grasp of the poor wretch who has desired nothing better. 3. Others seek for their portion in human applause, and the admiration which one worm bestows upon another. They can despise sensuality, they can hold riches in contempt, but praise and worldly distinction are dear to them. Let such a vainglorious sinner as this be but talked of by his fellow-sinners: let him be pointed at, and wondered at; and he has obtained his portion. And for this, which is but the breath of a worm, an immortal being is ready to make the most unremitting exertions, and to face the most appalling dangers. 4. Akin to this is another portion often chosen by the unbeliever—knowledge. The desire for this is not sinful in itself, for knowledge is certainly both useful and desirable; but when it is sought merely for its own sake, and when it is unsanctified by the Holy Spirit, it is only an idol which draws away our hearts from God, and, as such, is an injury, not a blessing, to him who attains to it.

II. THE PORTION OF THE CHRISTIAN. Pleasure, riches, fame, and knowledge, have been aimed at by the unbeliever; and for a time he has acquired, or rather seemed to acquire them: the Christian has been enabled by Divine grace to say, "The Lord is my portion," and he has acquired all these things for eternity. Whilst sensuality ever brings with it disappointment and disgust, the Christian has a comfort from above to cheer him. He has heard that voice which says, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee"; and as the sense of unpardoned sin had ever been his heaviest affliction, so his greatest pleasure arises from his being enabled to say, "O Lord, I will praise Thee; though Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away, and Thou comfortest me." Then, as he goes on, by Divine grace, walking in the ways of the Lord, how sweet to feel the Spirit bearing witness with his spirit that he is the child of God; to be taught day by day that God's dealings with him are all in mercy and in love; that his very afflictions are tokens of kindness, and that his "Heavenly Father is making all things to work together for his good"! (*R. W. Kyle, B.A.*)

*The soul's all-sufficient portion:—*If God is all-sufficient in Himself, He must be all-sufficient for us. That which fills an ocean will fill a bucket; that which will fill a gallon will fill a pint; those revenues that will defray an emperor's expenses are enough for a beggar or a poor man; so, when the Lord Himself is satisfied with Himself, and it is His happiness to enjoy Himself, there needs no more, there is enough in God to satisfy. (*T. Manton.*)

*The saint's exhaustless portion:—*To little brooks men have often gone in seasons of drought, and found only a parched bed, cracked open with the heat. But

who ever saw the Atlantic low? What ship ever failed to sail for Liverpool through lack of water? When some one urged old John Jacob Astor to subscribe for a certain object, and told him that his own son had subscribed to it already, the old man replied very dryly, "Ah, he has got a rich father." You and I have a rich Father too. You are an heir of the King of kings. (T. L. Cuyler.) **Therefore will I hope in Him.**—*Hope in the Lord*:—A man having a soul must worship something as a God; he must look upon something as the source of supply, of protection, of reliance, and trust; and if you do not give him a God in revelation, he will go to work and make one. We want a God whom we can adore. What is the character of the God of the Bible? He comes rolling up to us in infinite grandeur from of old, from everlasting: His date is eternal. Then look at His character—how sublime! He is represented as being universally present. That gives us the idea of infinite spirituality. He fills all space, is everywhere, and has this peculiar characteristic, that He can bring all the perfections of His nature to every point in space. Wherever He is, He is there the Almighty, the all-knowing, and the infinitely wise and good God. Well, now, from the universality of His presence and knowledge, He is enabled to be the God of providence. He can interpose where He sees the necessity, and where you call upon Him according to His promise to interpose in your behalf, and superintend your wants. Well, then, we have a God who can do everything, who is everywhere, and who is infinite in mind and in knowledge. Thank God, He knows everything. I think the sublimest commentary upon the knowledge of God is the declaration that He inhabiteth eternity. We have a natural admiration for that which we feel to be infinitely greater than ourselves. The fact is we feel it toward men in a measure; but as our minds expand a little we detect mistakes and see that men are not so great as we thought, and as we go on a little further we find that they do not know so much as we supposed they did; so that these men keep going down as we keep going up. We detect many errors in their policy and in their reasoning; and we find that they are nothing but men. Not so in the study of our God, who has never made a mistake. We have never detected a point of ignorance in the great Jehovah. The further we look into His works, the grander they appear; and the further we look into the Word, how much fuller it is than we perceived at first! As our minds expand they only catch glances of the infinite sweep of His mind, which rolls on to interminable meanings, and culminates in designs worth the infinite resources and plans of the infinite God of the universe. Now, if I want something to adore, give me God. I adore Him in the exercise of His power, in the displays of His wisdom, in the fountain of His goodness, and in the plans that He has projected for my own well-being. I adore Him that He has a remedial system going on over the infirmities and calamities of mankind that will terminate in the resurrection. I adore God as an infinite, spiritual, and intelligent Being, who made the whole universe, and who is full of power and goodness. That is not all I adore Him for. The text says, "Therefore will I hope in Him." I see His resources, His plans, and His purposes, and I will hope in Him. Paul celebrates God as the God of hope. This God has given me capacity to know, has given promises and ground of hope, and has also arranged everything that pertains to hope. He has authorised me to hope for eternal life, for unbounded wealth, for glory, honour, and immortality; to look to the coming period when my head shall be crowned with life, and my hand palmed with victory; when my soul shall be home in glory in the presence of God, where there is fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore. He authorises me to hope for the triumph over all my enemies, to look for the rest that remains to the people of God, and to anticipate association with the sweetest society in the universe. What sort of hopes has God arranged for? Christians have the highest hopes of any other class of beings that belong to this world. The politician hopes to reach the presidential chair, and he knows there is only one chance out of many millions, and that it is no great thing when he gets it at last, for it is mixed with heavy burdens, terrible responsibilities, and a torrent of perpetual abuse. The Christian hopes for a victory over all things; he hopes to ascend in glory, and to enter into the rest that remaineth for the people of God; he hopes for a kingdom prepared for him from the foundation of the world. Again, our God is not only the God of hope; but He is also the God of all grace. It was to pardon guilty persons, to purify defiled souls, and to provide an inheritance adequate to the wants of His children; it was to help their infirmities,

to comfort them in their distress, to enlighten them in their darkness and ignorance, to solace them with the comforts of holiness, and fit them for glory. He is the God of all grace; He has formed this system of salvation, and carries it out until we are saved from sin, trouble, toil, poverty, and ignorance. (*Bishop Kavanagh.*) *The sustaining power of hope in God*:—A crew of fifteen men once left a burning ship in mid-Pacific. They were thousands of miles from land. They left the ship so hastily that they had no time to take oars, or sail, or any other tackle or gear with which to produce motion. They were only able to snatch at some food and water. They lived for six weeks in that boat, and the last three-and-twenty days they dreamed every night of feasting, and woke every morning to the same starving comrades, vacant waters—for they passed no ships—and desolate sky. Yet these men never lost their courage, because they perceived from the outset that their boat was in the current of an equatorial ocean, a current which those who knew the geography of the sea were aware would slowly but surely carry them at last to land, which it did. Sometimes the patience of hope in the Christian life has to be exercised in that way. No oar and no sail; no strength and no light; for many days neither sun nor moon nor stars appearing, but only the magnet of faith pointing steadily to the Rock of Ages, and the current of eternal nature of Him who is what He is, bearing us on to the promised land. (*John Laidlaw, D.D.*) *The hope which fails not*:—An able seaman once said to me, "In fierce storms we have but one resource: we keep the ship in a certain position. We cannot act in any way but this. We fix her head to the wind; and in this way we weather the storm." This is a picture of the Christian. He endeavours to put himself in a certain position. "My hope and help are in God." The man who has learnt this piece of heavenly navigation shall weather the storms of time and of eternity. This confidence has supported thousands in perilous situations—where others would have given up all in despair. (*R. Cecil.*)

Vers. 25-36. **The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him.**—*Waiting for God*:—I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN WAITING FOR GOD. 1. God has work for us, and we should be ready to do it. 2. There are blessings to bestow, and we should be waiting to receive them. The fountain is flowing; let us go out and drink of it. God blesses His people not according to their worth, but according to their wants; and in proportion as you feel your parchedness, and look that it may be allayed, so will be the shower that descends from these clouds which are big with mercies. 3. In waiting for God we should wait His time. For as to certain services which He requires and rewards which He bestows, there is need that we exercise patience. He who is conscious that he deserves nothing, and that he needs much, will feel as if God were not exacting anything unreasonable in making him wait. He who knows how much is promised, and how certainly it will be granted in proper season, will be delighted to wait. 4. Waiting for God implies desire and expectation. We are longing for the blessings, as you see the husbandman looking over the whole sky for the coming shower to refresh his crops, or for the signs of dry weather to enable him to gather in his grain; as you have seen the mother in her eagerness, or the father, saying less, but not less earnest, looking out for a son or daughter who has been for years in a foreign clime, but who has promised to be at home at such a time. How is every object in the dim distance examined! how is every sound listened to! and, "Why is he so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariot?" Ah, if we were longing for spiritual blessings in this spirit, they would come, assuredly come; and our faith would insure them, and our eagerness would hasten them: for "He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." II. HOW THE LORD ENCOURAGES THEM THAT WAIT FOR HIM. 1. It is a good thing in itself thus to wait when God so requires it. It braces and invigorates the soul, and enables it to use the means to procure the expected benefit! 2. It is good to wait, inasmuch as in waiting we receive many valuable lessons. A pupil or apprentice puts himself under a master, who promises to teach him a certain branch of knowledge. Now, it is possible that, in fulfilment of his engagement, the master may just set the learner to work, and point out service after service for him. Would the scholar be thereby justified in charging his master with a breach of promise, and saying to him, "You promised to give me instruction and skill, and you set me instead to work and toil"? We see at once that if such a spirit were cherished by the pupil, it would indicate not only that he is ignorant of the branch of knowledge he wishes to learn, but

that he is labouring under a more deplorable ignorance,—that he is ignorant of his own ignorance; for it is in the very act of waiting on that master, and doing the work which he prescribes, that he is to attain the skill he is seeking. It is the same in the school of Christ. 3. The blessing is larger because we have waited for it. Why is it that man, when he has an arduous work to do, must do it when he can, and hasten to perform it? How is it that when he makes a promise he must be ready to execute it when he can, and not wait till, as he supposes, some more favourable opportunity may present itself? Plainly because his power is limited, because his time on the earth is uncertain, and if he let one opportunity slip, another may never present itself. But no such weakness is laid on the High and Holy One who “inhabith eternity,” and with whom “one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” He can allow opportunity after opportunity to pass away, till at last the “fit time,” “the set time,” “the fulness of times,” comes. All is order and beneficence amidst so much complexity and seeming irregularity. Everything is happening at its most appropriate time, amid so much apparent delay and procrastination. While nothing lingers beyond its time, nothing hastens to a premature conclusion. God delays the blessing only that it may be larger when it comes. His counsels ripen slowly, that the ear may be fuller, that the fruit may be richer and mellow. How is it that the river, which rose in so small a fountain among the rugged hills, now sweeps along so magnificently among fertile plains? It is because in its lengthened and circuitous course it has gathered contributions on either side, receiving a new stream from every valley which it passed. Thus it is that the stream of God’s bounty is made to turn and wind, only that it may receive contributions from every quarter as it sweeps along, and flow at length more largely into the bosom. Hence it is that the royal munificence of His bounty knows no limits at last. Thus it is that He is good to them that wait for Him. (*J. McCosh.*)

Seeking and waiting:—Throughout the Scriptures the two terms Seeking and Waiting run parallel as describing prayer, earnest and effectual prayer, in all its acts and offices. The command to seek the Lord and the command to wait on the Lord have the same general meaning, and the same general promises are given to each. But in this passage they are for once combined: their combination suggesting a certain difference between them, and the perfection of devotion which results from their union. Each has in it the blessedness of prayer: but each has a character of its own as qualifying the other; and both, in their unity, form the highest devotion. I. Generally, IN THE COMBINATION OF THESE TERMS EACH EXPRESSES THE PERFECTION OF ALL PRAYER AS IT IS EITHER THE ACTIVE SEEKING OF GOD OR THE PASSIVE WAITING FOR HIM; IN OTHER WORDS, WHAT MAN DOES AND WHAT HE MUST EXPECT GOD TO DO IN THE WHOLE BUSINESS OF DEVOTION. All communion with God requires this. Seeking suggests at once the idea of the soul’s activity: making God the Unknown, the Unfound, the Unseen, the Hidden, the Distant, or, better still, the Waiting God, its one great object. The spirit in man goes out, as the Scripture says, after Him, on an infinite quest; and its restless cry is, “O that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to His seat!” Alas, He is hidden from us in our natural state by a thick veil: not by distance, but by worse than distance, by a cloud of thicker than Egyptian darkness, by a veil which our sins and His justice have woven. But that veil has been rent in Christ. We know where we may find Him, where His seat is: on the mercy-seat, which is the Cross. Now, the testimony is: “He is good to the soul that seeketh Him.” But that seeking must be a waiting also. God is near at hand as well as afar off. Not only are we brought nigh by the blood of Jesus, but He also is brought nigh: and in a very different sense from that in which He is “nigh to every one of us.” The waiting soul lays hold on that great truth, and calmly expects His revelation of Himself. In that posture the wings of the seeking spirit are folded again, its voice is stilled to silence, and it thinks rather than cries: “O when will He come unto me!” No seeking will find until He make Himself present. “The Lord is good to those that wait for Him.” There is a set time for His manifestation of Himself. The seeker after God must also, in the very act of seeking, be a waiter upon Him. In the former, man does his part: in the latter, God acts alone. It will be plain, then, that the two terms express one and the same prayer throughout the whole history of devotion: from the moment when the first glimpse of God lights up the desire, through all the acts of special supplication and all the habits of communion with Deity, up to the full possession of God in the beatific vision. All our communion with heaven from beginning to end

is the union of our activity with patient dependence on the Divine fidelity to His promise. And this communion is the communion of the Holy Spirit: the New Testament secret, which we must put into an Old Testament text. He, from above, lights up the energy of seeking in our souls; and He, from above, reveals the Eternal God to our souls. But my present point is only this: that the whole business of the religious life, which is, in one word, the finding God, His goodness, and His salvation, is the union of our intense activity and of our most passive expectation. In the seeking of God you have a great work yourselves to do: in the waiting you acknowledge His absolute supremacy in your salvation.

II. AGAIN, THE SEEKING STANDS HERE AND EVERYWHERE FOR THE PLEADING BOLDNESS OF PRAYER, WHICH REQUIRES TO BE QUALIFIED BY ITS WAITING HUMILITY. Nothing is more certain than that the petitioner who brings his request to God is permitted to come with boldness. He is pledged by His immutable word and oath to do for us all that is contained in the covenant. It is wonderful how we are encouraged to plead by God's own name and honour! In every way we are told to remember that our humility must not forget its rights. Every prayer, from beginning to end, has in it the strength of the voice, the irresistible voice, of Jesus. And this idea is in the word "seek" as generally used in Scripture; as may be noted where "calling" is connected with it. So, our Lord makes the seeking an advancement on the process of asking; the knocking of bold importunity or shamelessness, in fact, being its highest character. He always encourages in every petitioner what may be called an undaunted, resolute, and bold spirit of appeal to heaven. Now, it is obvious that this requires to be carefully guarded. That boldness must be humble boldness, and must wait before God humbly pondering its own unworthiness. The seeker must learn that, after all that Christ has done to give him right of approach, the fact of his own utter vileness as respects himself remains, and will remain throughout eternity. Now, the waiting spirit is not simply the spirit that is content to tarry, but one that knows why the delay is appointed. Read it here. It is good to bear the yoke. It is good to taste of "the wormwood and the gall" before we think of the "cup of salvation." The lesson of penitence must be thoroughly learnt; the lesson of impotence. Waiting is self-examination. Here is the secret of the Divine delay and the deferred hope. It is not that He delighteth not in mercy, that He forgets to be gracious. But it is the eternal law of the covenant of grace that salvation is given only to those who profoundly feel their need, their unworthiness, and their utter helplessness: I do not say that they be reduced to despair; for that is not the waiting, but the ceasing to wait. Hence, the combination of these is the perfection of acceptable prayer: the Scripture terms it "humble boldness." Boldness is sure that the blessing is there, and is the confidence of faith; humility can hardly be persuaded that the point of personal preparation is fully come. The union is the achievement of the Holy Ghost; groanings that seek, but use an unuttered language. Now you must apply this to your case as a penitent seeker of salvation: indeed, it is to your case as such that all this specially applies. You have come to know that you have one sole business before you: to acquaint yourself with God being the one thing needful. Before you think of anything else in heaven or earth, that supreme matter must be settled: on that your eternal destiny depends. Now, you have to seek in the prayer of confession, pleading the promises ratified in Christ, and urging your plea day and night continually. But you must wait as knowing that pardon is a deliberate act of God, to be attested by the Holy Ghost, when all the conditions are perfect. When your seeking and waiting are both one in the perfection of entire self-renunciation and simple faith, God will certainly show Himself good: but not till then. Here is the secret of the Divine delay. On the other hand, though you merit not that God should look at you, much less that He should embrace and love you as a child, your seeking must be imperfect if you cannot rejoice in His mercy. You need to be aroused: "Be of good courage: rise, He calleth thee." Always be sure of this, that "The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him." III. Once more, THE TWO TERMS SIGNIFY THE FERVOUR AND EARNESTNESS OF PRAYER JOINED TO PERSISTENCY IN THAT FERVOUR; AND THE RARE COMBINATION OF THESE GIVES THE HIGHEST CHARACTER TO THE TONE OF OUR DEVOTION. In almost every instance in which the seeking is commanded, it is connected with the idea of intense ardour. This is the spirit of devotion generally into which our acceptance introduces us. The man has become a man of God, which is, in other words, a man of prayer. "I—prayer": the whole being is one active desire for the gifts of God and for God

Himself; and whether we regard the value of the gifts or the infinitely greater value of the God who gives, it is obvious that the undivided soul must be engaged in the seeking. "Then shall ye find Me when ye seek Me with your whole heart." It is the continuing instant in prayer. It is the concentration of every faculty in its utmost strength on seeking spiritual good as hid treasure. But spiritual good is God Himself. There is literally no limit to the degree in which the desire after God may kindle the human spirit. The waiting habit is as constantly commended to us as the seeking: first, as the test of real earnestness, and, secondly, as its stimulant. 1. It is its test. There is a vehemence which deserves not to be called earnestness: clamorous indeed and excited for a season, but cooling very soon under the withering influence of delay, if, indeed, its own excitement does not consume it. There is nothing which we need to have more deeply impressed on our minds than this, that strong desires, lively feelings, and the rush of superficial ardour are not themselves evidences of the indwelling of the true spirit of prayer. They may coexist with a very slight feeling of humility and with a very inadequate sense of the value of what we ask for. But the sure test is the necessity of waiting: this God knows how to apply. We apply it very often to each other. We wait to see what will come of the vehemence of our fellows; and too often we find that it is only "the cracking of thorns." Continuance is the infallible test. Blessed is that deep fervour of spirit which no time changes; which no delay can dull. 2. But waiting is also the stimulant to seeking. And doubtless that is the secret of the discipline of the Holy Ghost. The perfection of the spirit of prayer is the permanence of strong and deep emotion in all devotional exercises. This is what St. Paul calls "continuing instant in prayer": "instant," that is, ardent and vehement; "continuing," instant, that is, keeping up that blessed glow at all times and under all circumstances. Now, the injunction to wait simply means this. We are to make it our study to keep up this ardour. And how is that done but by feeding our desire in the pondering which studies our own weakness and keeps alive the intense longing by considering our impotence without heavenly grace? There is, indeed, a waiting which itself defeats this end: which indolently acquiesces in the Divine delay; leaves all to the set time of grace; and folds its wings too closely. But the true waiting of the spirit of prayer only feeds desire, and gives it strength and permanence. The soul that meditates much upon the greatness of the blessing sought spends no waiting time in vain. Let us mark the combination as it is enforced and exemplified in Scripture, and apply it to ourselves. There is nothing which our Lord has more constantly and affectingly taught us than this. Almost all His lessons pointed "to this end"; that men must pray always and not faint, though "God bear long with us." But He always impresses the combination as such. The man whom we remember in His parable sought and waited: but his waiting only rendered him desperately importunate and "shameless." See how the Master of prayer applies His own parable with a difference: every one who asks receives, but the reserved mysteries of blessing are for those who wait and knock at the innermost gate of heaven. So in that parable of real life. How did the Lord keep the Syrophenician waiting! And why? She asked and received something, though we see it not; she sought and found something, strength to knock; she knocked at the door of His heart, and it opened to her. The entire history of devotion in Scripture illustrates this combination. We see how the earlier and the later saints showed forth the spirit of prayer which was in them; ardently seeking always and always patiently waiting. From Abraham, and Job, and Jacob, that night-long wrestler with the angel, and Hannah, and Samuel, and David, and Daniel, and our Jeremiah, down to the Great Exemplar and those whom He taught to pray, we see the utmost intensity of seeking desire combined with the tranquil waiting of silent awe and patient expectation. Their intensity is not measured by the multitude of pleading cries; for it rather tends always to few words, again and again repeated, and even towards the limit of perfect speechlessness. With deepening fervour they wait, and their groanings become unutterable; their transports of desire are prolonged, and perfected into the most passive tarrying for God. Be determined, therefore, to cherish at all costs this sacred spirit of prayer. Learn it of our Master's precepts, and learn it of His example. But remember here two things of great importance. First, that the lesson of this union is to be practised in the inner man of the heart. There is the true place of prayer, where all the sacred arts of devotion are to be learnt. There alone can we "pray without ceasing," seek without interruption, and wait without leaving the Divine presence. There we may have ardour without

vehemence, waiting without indolence: the combination which belongs rather to the spirit and frame and tone of devotion than to its direct acts. Therefore, preserve your spirit by all means in that posture and condition: whatever it costs you. And, secondly, keep it ever in view that the Holy Ghost is your teacher. He is the Spirit of intercession within us. And if you always let Him guide you, the great lesson shall be learnt. He will prompt you to such earnestness, and stimulate you to such deepening fervours, as you cannot now conceive; and yet keep you in so tranquil a spirit that the groanings shall not be uttered. IV. WE MAY NOW PROFITABLY APPLY OUR TWO WORDS TO THE CONFIDENCE AND SUBMISSION OF PRAYER AS IT HAS TO DO WITH THE SEEKING AND WAITING FOR SPECIAL BLESSINGS. This is a further stage in our present subject: it is not now the general union of seeking and waiting as belonging to all prayer, to the prayer that seeks salvation, to the spirit of prayer in the regenerate: but as specifically concerned with the individual requests of our religious life. Throughout Scripture we are exhorted to seek everything we need from God. Our wants are endless. For everything God will be inquired of; the permission is as broad as the care of life: "be careful for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known." Here the seeking is the seeking unto the Lord as an oracle; as to a hand for ever stretched out: as to an inexhaustible treasury. But we must not misunderstand this. Our confidence is simply the making known our requests with certain faith that they are heard: no more. Then submission comes in. We must blend waiting with our seeking; and leave to God the whether, the when, and the how of His granting. He may not bestow what we ask in some cases; and there is no true prayer which does not leave to His supreme wisdom and love the decision as to the propriety of granting its request. Now, the confidence of prayer is only required to wait in this sense when it is asking the innumerable good things which we think to be good, but which are directly connected with our providential allotment. We wait only to know His will. He may have His own methods of granting our requests. This applies to both orders of blessing. And this is the supreme lesson we have to learn. We pray in confidence that our prayer is heard; but the method of Divine answer demands our waiting. Let us now see this gracious combination in its effects. The perfect union of confidence and submission will have a most happy influence on our life of prayer, as it is a life of supplication. It will dispose and enable us to pray for temporal good and earthly deliverances with entire submissiveness to the will of God: confident that we are heard, but leaving the answer to His wisdom. The illustrations of this are endless; but let the context suffice now. The seeking and waiting to which Jeremiah referred was the seeking for deliverance from sore temporal troubles blended with the pure resignation of waiting which accepted the denial of God. We need not ask what the keen trial was which in this chapter pours out its exceeding bitter cry. Jeremiah is a typical man of sorrows: and these lamentations are the lamentations of humanity. He was in his meditation taught the blessedness of simply giving the case up to God. The very waiting is good: "It is good that a man quietly wait." It teaches thankfulness that matters are not worse: "This I recall to my mind. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed." Sometimes the earthly good is granted. But what was true of providential interposition is also true of the delay of granting many most important spiritual requests. We must plead for them, and yet learn in waiting the reason why they are withheld. In other words, they are granted in an indirect manner, and in the discipline of graces more valuable than the gifts themselves. This refers especially to the petitioning for special manifestations of favour: which are very often denied, but strangely granted even in the denial. So, St. Paul had not the thorn removed; but a glorious manifestation of Divine strength was made perfect in his weakness. By waiting upon God for any great blessing, we discipline the waiting graces: trust, hope, faith, reverence, obedience, humility, submission. These, though we seek them not, are precious results of waiting. There is, however, a combination of seeking and waiting which rises to the pitch of assured hope of immediate bestowment. The seeking and waiting are one in the present faith. This cannot be doubted with the Lord's words in our mind. If this were not added, we should be unjust to the covenant. The Great Teacher of prayer does not make faith always its own reward. There are blessings which He makes unconditionally ours, if we seek and wait in assurance that they are ours. Now, in all these cases, He by His Spirit prompts us to believe that they are given and must be given. "Believe that ye receive them, and ye

shall have them." Of what blessings is such a large word spoken? Of such certainly as concern the honour of our Lord in our present salvation. These blessings are not to be waited for so much as demanded. V. Lastly, THE COMBINATION OF WHICH SO MUCH HAS BEEN SAID FORMS IN ITS HIGHEST PERFECTION THE DEVOTIONAL STATE OF THE SOUL, IN WHICH BOTH THE SEEKING AND THE WAITING GO BEYOND THEIR FORMER MEANINGS, AND BLEND INTO THE HABIT RATHER THAN THE ACT OF COMMUNION WITH GOD. Remember that this is not a state which leaves behind the outgoings of seeking and waiting in express supplications; it includes all that has been spoken of; but it superadds something of much importance to the higher spiritual life. In the state of soul I refer to, God Himself is an ever-present internal Reality, neither to be actively sought nor passively waited for: the spirit lives in God; it is purely filled with a desire that needs no words, and is always sensible of His influence without needing to tarry for it. In such devotion the seeking is the silent aspiration that is ever deepening towards infinity; and the petitioner rather waits on the Lord than waits for Him. The soul has returned to its rest. It dwells in God and God in it: and the consequence of that mutual indwelling speaks for itself. That must in the nature of things be the tranquillity of perfect waiting: it must be in the nature of things the ardour of ceaseless longing. But it must be the aspiration of every one of us to reach that perfectness of union with God in which seeking and waiting are one. The Triune God will come and "make His abode with us." Thus shall we live where all seeking and waiting are one in abiding communion with the Supreme Good. It has been said that such habitual silent communion with God does not supersede the acts and habits of formal worship: it graciously pervades them all. We must be on our guard against an exaggeration of this deep truth which reckons it the perfection of the devout estate to be free from every desire, and to keep every feeling and impulse of the heart under such restraint as to be absolutely dead and quiet before God, indifferent about everything that is His or from Him, and intent only upon possessing Himself. Whether this is the perfection of heaven, we know not; it is not the perfection of earth. We must not set such an unauthorised and impracticable standard before us. If we follow this high and tranquil spirit of devotion into the public ordinances, or rather, if we are so happy as to carry it into them, we shall feel how good it is to pray for ourselves and for others, seeking earnestly what the Lord waits to give. But our seeking will be one with the waiting which ponders the Divine perfections, worshipping Him while we are asking His gifts. The whole service will be an act of seeking and waiting combined: all adoration and praise, while all is seeking and prayer. If we retire with it into secret, what is its effect there but such a combination of active petition and passive meditation as makes the peculiar blessedness of closet devotion? There the laws are very free; no rules are laid down in Scripture; the Spirit bloweth where it listeth. There the seeking and waiting are or may be blended in a most gracious way. Sometimes the soul united to God is drawn out in vehement requests which will not be denied; happy are you when this is the case. But at such times, even when you are praying, "with strong crying and tears," you must be, you will be, waiting to be heard "in that you fear" with humble reverence. Finally, this habitual union of waiting and seeking in the presence of God makes the whole of life one constant preparation for the final fulfilment of the promise of the text. After all, the highest reaches of devotion below are only the seeking of what cannot be fully found on earth, the waiting for what heaven alone can reveal. This is the very blessedness of the seeking-waiting life, that its object is too good for time. The end is not yet: however perfect may be the destruction of sin and the peace of God in the soul. Make it the great law of your earthly existence that it shall be ruled by this boundless expectation. Expect much in this world, but not too much. Render to earth what belongs to earth, and to heaven what belongs to heaven. (*W. B. Pope, D.D.*) *God's goodness to them that wait*:—1. Illustrate this by the ease of sorrow. "The heart knoweth its own bitterness," and none knoweth it beside. Sorrow is not to be painted or described, or quite imagined. When it is heard of, it is known to be serious; when it is felt, it is found to be misery. It is often a choice heart which is thus chosen for sorrows. When the sorrow is godly, borne well by the soul which bends under it, then it brings a true turning from the past: a living faith in the promises is itself a very close communion with Christ. After such a trial we go softly all our days; so softly that we can hear those voices, unheard or unheeded before, which tell us "the Lord is good unto them that wait for

Him." 2. Take, again, the case of ill-health. At first, when the health has failed, life seems to have lost its meaning. All occupations have to be changed, new and unknown expedients adopted. The patient groans in weariness, "Surely against me is He turned. He turneth His hand against me all the day." But in silent watchings and long dreary hours gleams of comfort gradually enter the soul, till at last it is found; weakness has been a sort of watch-tower, with an outlook heavenward, and after many longings, many sighs and prayers, we have seen and felt on the sick-bed that "the Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, unto the soul that seeketh Him." 3. We might take other and frequently recurring cases in the anxiety of business—the feeling that one has a too heavy work to do, that one is bound to a career which is not congenial, has to do what one is not adapted for, or placed where one is not best placed, that one has not the necessary means, openings, or conditions of success, no certainties in the future, no prospect of really advancing, or eventually holding one's own, that one cannot get one's family well out in life, that if we are taken away we know not what will become of them. How many, too, have to see things go wrong through the folly of others, and cannot help it! How many have to watch for bad tidings which are already pluming the wing for a heavy flight, to sit about with a sinking heart where they would long to be near to help! When such trial is upon us, our heart complains with the unreasoning sincerity of suffering, "Thou hast removed my soul far off from peace; I forget prosperity." We forget prosperity in trial, as we forget the Giver of good gifts in prosperity; we do not regard what we had or what is left to us; we see that, and only that, which is taken away. Then the school hour begins, and the lessons, at first irksome, are settled down to at last. The Christian comes to a more patient docile waiting upon God, a remembrance that man does not live by bread alone; that the hand which clothes the flower and feeds the bird will not forget us; that our issues are with Him, and that, if our prosperity has grown poor, Jesus was poorer; that our true riches lie hid in His salvation. 4. Take the case of the besetting sin, known, deplored, wrestled with, yet besetting still; a thorn in the spirit, buffeting and laying low—the contrasting shadow of our better self following us year after year along life's road—a breach in the battlements of the inner life, where the enemy at his will cometh in as a flood. Wait; bear on; by and by your infirmity will heal up, and the Lord will so lift the load that in a day you may be free from it for ever. 5. Or, take the trial of religious doubt—the shadow of the intellect projected on the page, discord in the ear, and therefore the music out of tune. Why does not the system which has satisfied the most gifted satisfy us? Why does not the path where the most gracious have walked secure give me some ease? I wish to do service, but there again intrudes upon me the irritating problem. My difficulty is nothing to another; his difficulty is none to me; yet there we are, both in difficulties alike. "So all these things worketh God oftentimes with man," and His object is still the same: to bring back his soul from the pit to be enlightened with the light of the living. (*T. F. Crosse, D.C.L.*)

Awaiting God's working:—"I stood one evening last summer watching the pure white flowers on a creeper encircling the veranda. I had been told that the buds that hung with closed petals all day, every evening near sunset unfolded and sent out a peculiar fragrance. The miracle was more than I had anticipated. A feeling of silent awe possessed me as I saw bud after bud, as if under the touch of invisible hands, slowly fold back its leaves until the creeper was filled with perfect blossoms, most beautiful and sweet. And I said, 'If the finger of God laid upon these, His flowers, can do this in a way beyond the power of human study to explain, cannot the same Divine touch, in ways we know not of, do as much for human hearts?' Shall the flowers teach a lesson of patient waiting and holy trust for the coming blessing? There are hearts for whom we have prayed seemingly closed as yet to every influence of the blessed Spirit; but let us be patient; we have sown the good seed; God's rain and sunshine through His own providences are nourishing the plant; the breath of prayer always surrounds it; surely by and by the Divine touch will in a way we can least understand bring forth the perfected flowers of His grace." (*John Hall.*)

Waiting and reliance upon the Unseen:—When William Marconi, sitting among his instruments on the eastern coast of Newfoundland, with the great skeleton tower of wires rising high into the air, waited confidently for his first message across the broad Atlantic by wireless telegraphy,—waited, and got it,—he furnished to all time a noble illustration of faith in an unseen reality. And so, when a message from

God comes to the believer's soul, though God is unseen and the message unrecorded, save upon the unseen tables of his heart, none the less—not one particle the less—does the believer perfectly confide in it. Nothing can do more for a person than this reliance on an unseen world. It more than doubles his resources. It adds the other and greater world to this, and makes him master of both. *The grace of patience*:—Oh, impatient one! Did the leaves say nothing to you as they murmured when you came hither to-day? They were not created this spring, but months ago; and the summer just begun will fashion others for another year. At the bottom of every leaf stem is a cradle, and in it is an infant germ; and the winds will rock it, and the birds will sing to it all summer long; and next season it will unfold. So God is working for you, and carrying forward to the perfect development all the processes of your life. (*H. W. Beecher.*) *Waiting rewarded*:—I saw the proprietor of a garden stand at his fence, and call to his poor neighbour, "Would you like some grapes?" "Yes; and very thankful," was the ready answer. "Then bring your basket." The basket was quickly handed over the fence. The owner took it and disappeared among the vines; and I remarked that he deposited in it rich clusters from the fruitful labyrinth in which he hid himself. The woman stood at the fence quiet and hopeful. At length he reappeared with a well-filled basket, saying, "I have made you wait a good while; but there are all the more grapes." *To the soul that seeketh Him*.—"How good to those who seek!"—I do not know whether it has ever struck you what a grand man Jeremiah was. It is the prophet Jeremiah, in his Book of Lamentations, who says to you who are seeking the Lord, "The Lord is good to the soul that seeketh Him." You do not need to take any discount off his words of cheer. Depend upon it, what he says is true. If he of the weeping eyes, if he of the sorrowful spirit, yet nevertheless, in all the bitterness of his misery, bears testimony that the Lord is good to the soul that seeketh Him, then, depend upon it, it is so. I. DESCRIBE A SEEKING SOUL. 1. He is under a sense of need,—a need which he could hardly describe, but which, nevertheless, weighs very heavily upon him. He wants something very great, but he hardly knows what it is. He feels guilty, and He wants pardon. He feels sinful, and he wants renewing. He feels everything that he ought not to be, and he wants to be changed, to be made a new man. 2. This seeker, also, is one who, though he does not know it, has a measure of faith, for he believes, deep down in his heart, that if he could once get to God, all would be well with him. 3. Further, this seeker sometimes seeks very unwisely. When a soul wants God, and wants salvation, it will begin to seek the Lord by its own doings, by its own feelings, by its own strange eccentricities, perhaps. Some of you think that you must have a remarkable dream, others expect an angelic vision, some are waiting to hear a very extraordinary sermon, and to feel very singular emotions. This is the nature of seekers, that they often seek in a very unwise way; but still, they do seek; and it is a mercy that they do seek, for "the Lord is good to the soul that seeketh Him." 4. I will tell you what true seekers do when they act wisely. I notice that they often get alone. When a stag is wounded, it delights to hide in the recesses of the forest, that it may bleed and die alone; and when God has shot His arrow of conviction into a human heart, one of the first signs of the wounding is that the man likes to get alone. 5. I will tell you another thing about the true seeker. You will find that he begins to bring out his Bible, that much-neglected book. 6. And as, perhaps, in his study of the Scriptures he meets with difficulties, you will find that this seeking young man is anxious to go and hear the Word preached; for the Word rightly preached has a warmth about it, and a vividness, which are not always so manifest to the seeker in his reading of the Word. 7. And there is another sign of the true seeker that I always love to see; he likes to get into godly company. 8. There is another mark of a seeker that is better still: "Behold, he prayeth." Possibly, he used to repeat a form of prayer; but he has given that up, and now he talks to God straight out of his heart, and asks for what he really wants; and he not only does that morning and evening, but he is praying during most of the day. 9. I think there will be one more mark that you will see upon a sincere seeker: he will quit all that is evil as much as possible, and he will seek after that which is good, and especially, he will seek after faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. You will see him now trying to believe, very much like a little child tries to take his first steps in walking alone. If, poor trembling seeker, your faith should bring you no comfort, because it is so weak, yet keep on trusting to Christ. II. ASSURE

THE SEEKING SOUL THAT THE LORD IS GOOD TO HIM. "The Lord is good to the soul that seeketh Him." 1. It is good of Him to have set you seeking at all. He might have left you in your sins as He has left so many thousands of your fellow-men. 2. God is also good to the seeker in giving him some gleams of comfort. Did you say that you had been seeking the Lord for months? Well, how is it that you have kept on seeking? I think it must be because you have sometimes had a few rays of light. 3. I think that He is also good in not letting us rest short of Himself. Often, the surgeon, when he has a bad case, will not let the wound heal. "No, not yet," says he; "if that wound heals too soon, there will be more mischief coming from it." So he lets in his lancet again, and cuts out a bit of proud flesh; and our Lord will not let us close up the wound that sin hath made lest it be but a sorry healing that will end in a worse wound than before. 4. But He is much better to them that seek Him than you have ever imagined, for He has given such rich promises to seekers. Oh, the blessed invitations of Christ! 5. He is also good to seekers because He has made the way of salvation so plain. A man with an intellect not much above that of an idiot may understand this Gospel, and enjoy it, while a man with the greatest mental powers cannot understand it any better; nay, he cannot understand it at all, unless the Spirit of God shall reveal it to him. 6. Then, once more, is it not very good of the Lord in being found of seekers in due time? III. But, lest I weary any seeker where I want to win him, I shall close by FURTHER CHEERING HIM ON IN HIS SEEKING. 1. Friend, be of good comfort, Christ is seeking you. You are drawing nearer to each other every hour, and it will not be long before your arms are about His neck, and His arms about yours; you will be rejoicing in Him, and He will be rejoicing over you. 2. It may not be long before you find the Saviour; it may, indeed, be so little a while, that, before the clock strikes again, you will have found Him. 3. And mark you this, when the blessing comes, it will be worth waiting for. The joy and peace through believing which come from Christ are a wonderful off-set against the tears and sorrows that we have endured while we have been seeking Him. 4. This is my closing thought: thou hast no need to go about seeking Christ any longer. Thou hast no need to wait even five minutes ere thou findest Him, for it is written, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." Dost thou know what it is to believe on Him, to trust Him? Do so now. "It would be a great venture," says one. Then venture on Him. "Would He save me?" Try Him. You have heard, I dare say, of the African who came over to England. Before he came, the missionary told him that sometimes it was so cold in England that the water grew hard, and men could walk on it. Now, the man had heard a great many things that were not true which he had believed; but this, he said, he never would believe. It was "one great big lie; for nobody ever could walk on water." When he woke up, one December morning, and the stream was frozen over, he still said that he would not believe it. Even when his friend went on the ice, and stood there, and said, "Now you can see that what I told you was true; this is water, yet it is hard, and it bears me up," the African would not believe it, till his friend said to him, "Come along," and he gave him a pull, and dragged him on the ice, and then he said, "Yes, it is true, for it bears me up." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 26-36. **Hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.**—*Quiet waiting*.—Having struck a rich vein, our author proceeds to work it with energy. He sees that he is not alone in enjoying the supreme blessedness of the Divine love. The revelation that has come to him is applicable to other men if they will but fulfil the conditions to which it is attached. In the first place, it is necessary to perceive clearly what those conditions are on which the happy experience of God's unfailing mercies may be enjoyed by any man. The primary requisite is affirmed to be "quiet waiting." The passivity of this attitude is accentuated in a variety of expressions. It is difficult for us of the modern western world to appreciate such teaching. No doubt if it stood by itself it would be so one-sided as to be positively misleading. But this is no more than must be said of any of the best lessons of life. The Church has learnt the duty of working—which is well. She does not appear so capable of attaining the blessedness of waiting. Our age is in no danger of the dreaminess of quietism. But we find it hard to cultivate what Wordsworth calls "wise passiveness." And yet in the heart of us we feel the lack of this spirit of quiet. The waiting here recommended is more than simple passiveness, however, more than a bare negation of action. It

is the very opposite of lethargy and torpor. Although it is quiet, it is not asleep. It is open-eyed, watchful, expectant. It has a definite object of anticipation, for it is a waiting for God and His salvation; and therefore it is hopeful. Nay, it has a certain activity of its own, for it seeks God. Still, this activity is inward and quiet; its immediate aim is not to get at some visible earthly end, however much this may be desired, nor to attain some inward personal experience, some stage in the soul's culture, such as peace, or purity, or power, although this may be the ultimate object of the present anxiety; primarily it seeks God—all else it leaves in His hands. Thus it is rather a change in the tone and direction of the soul's energies than a state of repose. Quiet waiting, then, is the right and fitting condition for the reception of blessing from God. But the elegist holds more than this. In his estimation the state of mind he here commends is itself good for a man. It is certainly good in contrast with the unhappy alternatives—feeble fussiness, wearing anxiety, indolent negligence, or blank despair. It is good also as a positive condition of mind. He has reached a happy inward attainment who has cultivated the faculty of possessing his soul in patience. His eye is clear for visions of the unseen. To him the deep fountains of life are open. Truth is his, and peace and strength also. To his reflections on the blessedness of quiet waiting the elegist adds a very definite word about another experience, declaring that "it is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth." It is impossible to say what particular yoke the writer is thinking about. The persecutions inflicted on Jeremiah have been cited in illustration of this passage; and although we may not be able to ascribe the poem to the great prophet, his toils and troubles will serve as instances of the truth of the words of the anonymous writer, for undoubtedly his sympathies were quickened while his strength was ripened by what he endured. If we will have a definite meaning, the yoke may stand for one of three things—for instruction, for labour, or for trouble. The sentence is true of either of these forms of yoke. But now the poet has been brought to see that it was for his own advantage that he was made to bear the yoke in his youth. How so? Surely not because it prevented him from taking too rosy views of life, and so saved him from subsequent disappointment. Nothing is more fatal to youth than cynicism. The poet's reflections on the blessedness of quiet waiting are followed by direct exhortations to the behaviour which is its necessary accompaniment—for such seems to be the meaning of the next triplet, verses 28 to 30. The revisers have corrected this from the indicative mood to the imperative, "Let him sit alone," &c., "Let him put his mouth in the dust," &c., "Let him give his cheek to him that smiteth him," &c. Who is the person thus indirectly addressed? The grammar of the sentences would invite our attention to the "man" of the twenty-seventh verse. If it is good for everybody to bear the yoke in his youth, it might be suggested, further, that it would be well for everybody to act in the manner now indicated—that is to say, the advice would be of universal application. We must suppose, however, that the poet is thinking of a sufferer similar to himself. Now the point of the exhortation is to be found in the fact that it goes beyond the placid state just described. It points to solitude, silence, submission, humiliation, non-resistance. It is hard to sit in solitude and silence—a Ugolino in his tower of famine, a Bonivard in his dungeon; there seems to be nothing heroic in this dreary inactivity. It would be much easier to attempt some deed of daring, especially if that were in the heat of battle. Nothing is so depressing as loneliness—the torture of a prisoner in solitary confinement. And yet now there must be no word of complaint because the trouble comes from the very Being who is to be trusted for deliverance. There is a call for action, however, but only to make the submission more complete and the humiliation more abject. The sufferer is to lay his mouth in the dust like a beaten slave. A yet more bitter cup must be drunk to the dregs. He must actually turn his cheek to the smiter, and quietly submit to reproach. We cannot consider this subject without being reminded of the teaching and example of our Lord. It is hard to receive even from His lips the command to turn the other cheek to one who has smitten us on the right cheek. But when we see Jesus doing this very thing the whole aspect of it is changed. What before looked weak and cowardly is now seen to be the perfection of true courage and the height of moral sublimity. What a Roman would despise as shameful weakness, He has proved to be the triumph of strength. This advice is not so paradoxical as it appears. We are not called upon to accept it merely on the authority of the speaker. He follows it up by assigning good reasons for it. The first is that

the suffering is but temporary. God seems to have cast off His afflicted servant. If so, it is but for a season. The second is to be found in God's unwillingness to afflict. He never takes up the rod, as we might say, *con amore*. Therefore the trial will not be unduly prolonged. Since God Himself grieves to inflict it, the distress can be no more than is absolutely necessary. The third and last reason for this patience of submission is the certainty that God cannot commit an injustice. (W. F. Adeney, M.A.) *The advantage of hoping and waiting for the salvation of God*.—I. WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE SALVATION HERE SPOKEN OF. 1. A salvation from every kind and degree of evil—sin, temptations, the troubles of this world, and future everlasting miseries (Rev. xxi. 3, 4). 2. The being put into the possession of all good (2 Tim. ii. 10; 1 Peter i. 4, 5). Every desire filled up, every prayer answered, and all changed into the most exalted, everlasting praise and thanksgiving. II. WHY IS IT CALLED THE SALVATION OF THE LORD? 1. It is a salvation worthy of Him (Heb. xi. 16). 2. It is designed, prepared, and promised by Him (Rev. ii. 10). 3. It is a salvation that will consist in the enjoyment of Him. III. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN HOPING AND PATIENTLY WAITING FOR IT? 1. Having the heart fixed by faith on the salvation of God as real, though out of sight (Heb. xi. 1). 2. A full persuasion that the salvation of God will come at last, though for a time deferred. 3. Expecting the salvation of God in His time; depending upon His wisdom to choose the fittest season, and His faithfulness to remember us when that season comes. 4. Serious care to be found ready, whenever called to enter upon the salvation of God, which we have been waiting for. IV. IN WHAT RESPECTS IT MAY BE SAID TO BE GOOD, THUS TO HOPE AND QUIETLY WAIT FOR THE SALVATION OF GOD. 1. It is good, as it redounds to God's glory; as it is a testimony of his power and grace. 2. As it may encourage others to look, and wait for this salvation. 3. As it will be comfortable to ourselves, disposing us to meet the will of God in a becoming manner. (Pulpit Assistant.) *Hope and patience*.—I. WHAT IS MEANT BY THE "SALVATION OF THE LORD." The "salvation of the Lord" here is something else than the first view which a sinful man obtains of pardon and peace, through "the great God our Saviour." It is the salvation which a man needs in any crisis of life, where he suffers under trial or is threatened with it. And, in these trials, hope and quiet waiting do not come at once into their fullest exercise. As long as human means can avail, it is a man's duty, trusting to Divine help, to employ them. To sit and wait, where effort can avail, is to insult God's providence. The "salvation of the Lord" is when all conceivable means have been employed, and have failed. We may struggle on with a blind despair, and, as long as strength remains, we must struggle on; but this power, too, seems to be failing. It is then that the case rises distinctly into "the salvation of the Lord." Nothing can save us but His marked interposition, and the heart must put itself in the attitude of "hope and quiet waiting" for it. There may be some who are using every endeavour to secure subsistence and an honourable position for themselves and those dependent on them; and yet all their efforts are unsuccessful. If some change does not quickly come, they feel that temporal ruin is on them. It is a time not to relax effort, but to look out more intently for deliverance from God, and to have the heart resting on it. Or there may be some one who has the presence of a constant difficulty in the spiritual life,—perhaps the want of that sense of religious comfort which is felt to be so desirable, or the obtrusion of some painful doubt about doctrine or duty, through which no present light can be seen. No exertion to reach light is to be neglected, but there may be a more implicit confidence in Him who is the Father of lights,—holding steadfastly to what is felt to be true, and waiting for illumination on what is doubtful—"casting out the anchor and wishing for the day." Perhaps there are some who are deeply interested in the spiritual welfare of a soul dear to them as their own. Their prayer has been rising, like that of Abraham for Ishmael, "O that he might live before God!" But all means have appeared to fail. Then this remains to us,—to take all our endeavour, and leave it with God, in whose hand are the hearts of all men, who can follow the wanderer wherever his feet or his thoughts may carry him, and can bring him again to himself, and to his Father's house. Or it may be there is some life which has lost all the relish it once possessed,—where wasting sickness has undermined the strength,—or friends who were the hue and perfume of it have been taken away,—or hopes that hung on its horizon like a coming glory have melted into thin air,—and existence seems to have no more an object, and duty sinks into a dull mechanical round, and the

night comes down dark and starless, and the morning rises cold and colourless. It is hard to say what can restore to such a life its vigour and freshness, for the mind comes oftentimes to have a morbid love of the gloom which is its misery, and to reckon it treason to its past hopes to turn its eye from their sepulchre. God only knows the remedy, and it is a special time to call up higher duty to our aid—the duty of turning to Him, and striving to feel that He has it in his power, though we may not see how, to save us over the grave of our most cherished hopes, without causing us to forget them, and to shine in with a reviving light upon the dulllest and bleakest of earthly walks. II. WHAT IS MEANT BY THESE EXERCISES OF THE SOUL TOWARDS GOD'S SALVATION,—“TO HOPE, AND QUIETLY TO WAIT.” Every one of us knows, without any laboured definition, what it is to hope. But if we are to set ourselves to practise it in a Christian way, it may be useful to look at some of its elements. The foundation of hope may be said to lie in desire. It differs from desire in this, that desire pursues many things that can never be objects of hope to us. We can only hope for that which is felt to be possible and reasonable. This, then, is the first thing for us to do, if we would strengthen hope, to see that its objects are right and good,—that is, accordant with the Divine will, and beneficial for us. We may learn this by consulting God's Word, and our own thoughtful experience. The next element in Christian hope is faith. Hope differs from faith in this, that we believe in many things in regard to which we do not hope. Hope is faith with desire pointing out the objects. If we have sought to make these desires Christian and reasonable, then we may consistently call in the aid of faith. “The Lord shall give that which is good.” When we have sought to purify our desires and to make them the subject of faith, as far as they are right and good, there is still a third element to be added to make our hope strong—that of imagination. It is that power of the soul which gives to hope its wings. Let it but rise from the desire of what is true and good, and be chastened by the faith of what God has promised, and it can lift up the soul above the most terrible trials, and put it already in possession of the unseen and heavenly. Every true Christian has the soul of the poet latent in his nature, and if many are kept depressed and earth-attracted, it is because they do not strive enough to free this power from sinful and worldly encumbrances, and to give it wings to soar to its native home. The next exercise of soul which we are to cherish toward God's interpositions is “quiet waiting.” It is the part of hope to seek the future; it is the duty of patience to rest calmly in the present, and not to fret—to be satisfied to be where God appoints, and to suffer what God sends. It is fitly placed after hope, because it follows it in the natural course of an educated Christian life. Hope belongs to youth; patience is the lesson of maturity. As there are means for stimulating hope, so there are also for strengthening patience, and there is, in some measure, a correspondence in them. One means is common to both—the employment of faith. It will enable us more quietly to wait if we have confidence in the all-wise and all-merciful arrangements of God. He can make all its wastes to be as Eden, and bring out the best spiritual results from what seem to us the most barren spots. In other respects, the means for growing in patience are very different from those that help hope. If hope is nursed by desire of what we have not, patience is maintained by contentment with what we have. Our duty may be, when desire of something lost or longed for is consuming us, to bend our look more intently on the present, and try to discover how many things, and how precious, God has left to us. Again, we must cultivate patience by a calm attention to duties. Quiet waiting is not inaction. We may be waiting for one object, while we are steadily working for another. It is a kind law of our nature, that labour expended on any object gives an interest in it; and it is a still kinder law of the kingdom of God, that the tamest and most insignificant of daily duties may be made noble and Divine, when the thought of God and the will of Christ are carried into them. III. THE BENEFIT OF UNITING THESE.—“It is good both to hope and quietly to wait.” Every Christian heart feels how it can be going forward in thought to some blessing God has promised, and yet resting, while it is withheld, in submission to the Divine will,—as John, in Patmos, walked the streets of the heavenly city, and listened to its songs, and yet abode in his solitary exile, and was satisfied to be there as long as God required.

1. The one is needful to save the other from sinking into sin. If hope possessed the Christian heart alone, it would be ready to flutter itself into impatience. On the other hand, if we had quiet waiting without hope, it would be in danger of settling into stagnancy. The object of its waiting would disappear, and trials

without any end in view would benumb and paralyse it. The one is needful to raise the other to his full strength. The Saviour still leaves us, as He left His first disciples in the garden, with the words, "Tarry ye here and watch," and promises to come again. If hope can lay hold of this promise, and keep it fast, patience will maintain its post like a sentinel who is sure of relief at the appointed hour, and if the hour seems long, will beguile it with those words, which have passed like a "song in the night" through many a weary heart,—“For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.” Then, as hope strengthens patience, patience in turn will strengthen hope. Patience brooding over its own quiet spirit, which yet it feels is not its own, has the presentiment and augury of an end beyond itself. In the deep well of a tranquil heart, the star of hope is lying,—ever clearer as the calm is deepening,—reflected down into it from God's own heaven. This is God's manner, first, to give the inward peace of soul, and afterwards the final deliverance. He came into the ship and calmed the disciples' fears, and then He spoke and calmed the storm: "I will be with thee in trouble"; and then it follows, "I will deliver thee." And now, if it be possible to unite these two, and if it be so needful, it should be the lesson of our life daily to aim at it, to hope without impatience, and to wait without despondency,—to fold the wing in captivity, like a caged bird, and be ready to use the pinion when He breaks our prison. We shall find increasingly "how good it is." It is good now in the depth of the soul,—in the conscious assurance that it is better to rest in the hardest of God's ways than to wander at will in our own. "Behold, we count them happy who endure." We shall find it good in the growth of all the Christian graces, under the shadow of patience. We shall find how good is in the enhancement of every blessing for which we have to wait. God's plan of providing blessings for us is to educate the capacity which is to receive them. We are straitened in ourselves, and must be kept waiting till our minds and hearts enlarge. "Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise." Of all the motives to hopeful endurance, surely this last is not the smallest, that He who lays the duty upon us has Himself given the example of it. He asks nothing from us that He has not done for us, and done by a harder road, and with a heavier burden. (*John Ker, D.D.*) *Quietness and hope*:—Whether it was Jeremiah himself after he had taken refuge in a grotto near the Damascus gate of Jerusalem, or as he stood over-against the city in an attitude of grief which a great artist has immortalised, or a godly man of the next generation, who poured out this dirge over the miseries of his country, it makes very little difference in regard to the abiding value of the words, and therefore also to their ever-recurring usefulness. They come from a very remote past, stamped with the finger of God; and they contain a bit of wisdom, in favour of which might be quoted probably the whole experience of our race. I. Apart from the actual contents of such a statement, beneath it and running through it there is clearly implied AN INTENSE CONVICTION THAT GOD RULES THIS WORLD, AND THAT HE RULES IT IN THE INTERESTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. In verses like the 37th and the 64th, such a conviction finds vigorous expression: And it is still true that, in order to bear mystery and sorrow in peace and without any serious disturbance of thought or spirit, a man cannot do better than cling to these fundamental truths. Nature in some of their moods will have made most men feel, in the certainty of her processes, the inerrancy with which her life unfolds in ever higher forms of fitness and beauty, that—

The whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.

History, too, if it reveals anything, reveals the throne of God above the nations, and methods of government by which in the long run righteousness is always vindicated. And unless conscience is to be regarded as inexplicable, a haunting mystery whose immortal sanctions are simply meaningless, there must be in this world, and over it, a living and active God, the primary source of all pure morals, whose rule in everything makes for righteousness. It is not possible, indeed, always to see that such is the case. For human experience is full of discords. 1. Occasionally all that men can do, in the assaults of doubt to which they are inclined to give no place, is to cry unto God with the prophet, "Verily, Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour," and then the old assurance comes back, solving all difficulties, charming every doubt away: "That the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from Thee: shall not the Judge

of all the earth do right ? " Therefore " I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth His face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for Him." 2. It is not difficult to determine the effect upon the feelings and state of heart that ought in reason to follow this conviction and to be produced by it. Here is a God whose rule is righteous, so absolutely righteous that under His rule men always reap the fruit of their own ways. Just as, therefore, disaster must overtake the wicked, salvation must come to the God-fearing man. Again, therefore, he may venture to regard it as certain, and, however unlikely it seems, to hope and quietly to wait for it. What particular form the salvation assumes is of little importance, provided it is one which relates to the real interests of the soul. 3. But this important little word " quietly " must not be overlooked. There are some qualities or possible accompaniments of hope that altogether spoil it, and make it anything rather than a minister to comfort and salvation. Of these undesirable companions, the worst are perhaps impatience and suspense, for indifference, as being almost the negation of hope and fatal to vigour, need not be considered. Impatient hope, weary of slow process and gradual growth, eager to grasp the prize before it has been fairly earned, and to pluck the fruit before the sun and the showers have had time to ripen it—it is met with often enough in the ordinary life. Most Christians will have found themselves disposed now and again to complain that the influences of grace have not more quickly perfected them, that the first brief prayer has not been followed by the flight of every temptation. The Divine rule is, alike for peace and for progress in religion, " Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." God's care for His people, His effective interference for their protection and safety, the completion of the work that is being done by His sanctifying Spirit,—these things, as far as the operation of His grace is concerned, do not admit of any doubt. " Hope quietly "—that is, without any excitement and with full confidence of success. The salvation of the Lord is certain ; and accordingly the prophet bids us treat it as certain, not worry or make a noise about our difficulties, but go steadily on day after day, doing our duty, making the best of our troubles, strangers to fear. 4. That, says the prophet, is " good " for a man—which word, in his usage, which is not unlike the modern ethical usage, denotes the blessed combination of dutifulness and personal satisfaction. In this verse almost every phrase implies the possession of some main element of happiness. He who hopes " quietly for the salvation of the Lord " will be tranquil in spirit, exercising self-control, will have the sense of security and the knowledge that a God is caring for him and is gradually disciplining him into Godlikeness ; and it is no wonder the prophet pronounced that to be good for a man. II. Jeremiah did not feel any necessity to limit and qualify his advice, or to exclude any section of a sincere life from its application. It sets forth therefore the attitude which a Christian man may venture to maintain uniformly towards matters that may be a source of perplexity to all, and also towards those which only his own temperament or his own tendencies of thought make alarming. Not least of all does it apply to the controversies concerning Church and faith, scripture and doctrine, which because of their complexity are apt to be invested with needless terrors, and because of their connection with personal religion seem sometimes to threaten and imperil the most sacred convictions. 1. With respect to the unexaggerated difficulties in doctrine or in organisation that do exist, such questions as those of inspiration, of the authorship of various parts of the Old Testament and its bearing upon the authority of the New, of the relationships of the Churches and the methods of worship, this verse prescribes the way in which we should regard them—not shut our eyes to their existence, or be frightened at them, but " hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." 2. With the political and social problems of the day, the cares of enterprise, and of children and home, the perpetual disappointments and troubles that are crowded into every man's life, the same rule holds good, that Christian men should not worry, or despond, or doubt, but remember the throne of God over all, and quietly wait for His salvation. If obedience to that rule is not always easy, it is always reasonable and a blessed ministry of strength and peace. Few troubles continue unendurable, when a man knows that through them the grace of God will be with him, and that after them will come such a blessed and permanent reversal of experience as will more than compensate for all. (*R. Waddy Moss.*) *The Christian's hope and patience :—*

I. WHAT IS MEANT BY THE SALVATION OF THE LORD. Salvation literally means the act of delivering any one from danger or misfortune ; and implies at once

some misery or peril from which deliverance is needed, and some power sufficient to work that deliverance out. And the statement that there is salvation with God, is a declaration of the miserable condition in which we are by nature, and an announcement that God has set before us a means whereby we may escape, and that His mighty hand is put forth to render those means effectual. II. WHEREFORE IT IS GOOD THAT A MAN SHOULD HOPE FOR THIS SALVATION. There are many who cannot be properly said to hope for it;—they appear to be certain that they shall attain to it, although not one of the marks of Christ's flock be visible upon them. Others, again, are manifestly utterly careless about it; they pass through life without showing a single desire for salvation, or a single anxiety respecting the state of their souls. And others yet again appear to despair;—they seem to acknowledge their need of salvation, but to think that it is not possible that they can ever lay aside those sins which separate them from God. Now, none of these can be said to hope; because hope is a mixture of desire to obtain, of fear of coming short, and of belief in the possibility of attaining the "salvation of the Lord";—and those who have not fixed their minds upon it, in the sense of their own guilt, and of the power and willingness of the Lord to forgive, are as yet utterly destitute of this Christian grace. But the awakened sinner, along with that conviction of his sins which the Holy Spirit has wrought in him, receives the hope that God will be merciful to him, for the sake of a crucified Saviour; and this draws him to that Saviour. III. WHEREFORE IT IS GOOD THAT A MAN SHOULD QUIETLY WAIT FOR THIS SALVATION. This almost appears to contradict the former part of the text;—because nothing can seem more opposed to hope than quietly waiting. But this contradiction is only in appearance. The reason that there is so much impatience connected with all human wishes and expectations is, that our hopes with respect to this world are ever uncertain. But it is otherwise with respect to "the salvation of the Lord." In it there is nothing doubtful; for He Himself has promised to give it;—in it there is no deceit; for Jesus the Author and the purchaser of our salvation is indeed "a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." In clinging then to Him, and laying hold on His salvation, the poor sinner finds that he receives the fulfilment of all the promises;—and as the sweetest and the best of these hold out to us deliverance not only from the punishment but from the dominion of sin, he looks on the very disposition to wait quietly, so contrary to unconverted human nature, as a part of the salvation for which he hopes. The Christian should therefore "quietly wait"; but he should do so in the diligent use of the means for growth in grace; stirring up the gifts which have already been bestowed on him, of faith, whereby he lays hold on the promises,—of hope, whereby he looks for their fulfilment,—of prayer, whereby he expresses that faith and that hope to God, and seeks to have the crowning grace of love shed abroad on his heart. And this he may well do, if taught by the Spirit of God that his heavenly Father deals more wisely with him than he would deal with himself, were the freedom of choice allowed him. It is true that it is not so pleasant to remain in this state as it would be to have at once the fulness of spiritual joy; but it is more profitable to the heir of immortality to be trained to the habitual exercise of patience and submission to the Divine will, as this must be the best preparation for heaven. (R. W. Kyle, B.A.) *The advantages of a state of expectation*:—Our incapacity of looking into the future has much to do with the production of inquietude and unhappiness. Under the present dispensation we must calculate on probabilities; and our calculations, when made with the best care and forethought, are often proved faulty by the result. And if we could substitute certainty for probability, and thus define, with a thorough accuracy, the workings of any proposed plan, it is evident that we might be saved a vast amount both of anxiety and of disappointment. Yet when we have admitted that want of acquaintance with the future gives rise to much both of anxiety and of disappointment, we are prepared to argue that the possession of this acquaintance would be incalculably more detrimental. If we could know beforehand whatever is to happen, we should, in all probability, be unmanned and enervated; so that an arrest would be put on the businesses of life by previous acquaintance with their several successes. We shall endeavour to prove, by the simplest reasoning, that it is for our advantage as Christians that salvation, in place of being a thing of certainty and present possession, must be hoped and quietly waited for by believers. We can readily suppose an opposite arrangement. We can imagine that, as soon as a man were justified, he might be translated to blessedness, and that thus the gaining the title, and the entering

on possession, might be always contemporary. But the possibility of the arrangement, and its goodness, are quite different questions; and whilst we see that it might have been ordered, that the justified man should at once be translated, we can still believe it good that he "both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." Our text speaks chiefly of the goodness to the individual himself; but it will be lawful first to consider the arrangement as fraught with advantage to human society. We must all perceive that, if true believers were withdrawn from earth at the instant of their becoming such, the influences of piety, which now make themselves felt through the mass of a population, would be altogether destroyed, and the world be deprived of that salt which alone preserves it from total decomposition. Whilst the contempt and hatred of the wicked follow incessantly the professors of godliness, and the enemies of Christ, if ability were commensurate with malice, would sweep from the globe all knowledge of the Gospel, we venture to assert that the unrighteous owe the righteous a debt of obligation not to be reckoned up; and that it is mainly because the required ten are still found in the cities of the plain that the fire-showers are suspended, and time given for the warding off by repentance the doom. Over and above this, it is undeniable that the presence of a pious man in the neighbourhood will tell greatly on its character; and that, in variety of instances, his withdrawal would be followed by wilder outbreaks of profligacy. It is, however, the goodness of the arrangement to the individual himself which seems chiefly contemplated by the prophet. Now, under this point of view, our text is simpler at first sight than when rigidly examined. We can see at once that there is a spiritual discipline in the hoping and waiting, which can scarcely fail to improve greatly the character of the Christian. We take the case, for example, of a man who, at the age of thirty, is enabled, through the operations of grace, to look in faith to the Mediator. By this looking in faith the man is justified: a justified man cannot perish; and if, therefore, the individual died at thirty, he would "sleep in Jesus." But, after being justified, the man is left thirty years upon earth—years of care, and toil, and striving with sin—and during these years he hopes and waits for salvation. At length he obtains salvation; and thus, at the close of thirty years, takes possession of an inheritance to which his title was clear at the beginning. Now, wherein can lie the advantageousness of this arrangement? We think that no fair explanation can be given of our text, unless you bring into the account the difference in the portions to be assigned hereafter to the righteous. We bring before you, therefore, as a comment on our text, words such as these of the apostle: "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." We consider that when you set the passages in juxtaposition, the working power, ascribed by one to affliction, gives satisfactory account of the goodness attributed by the other to the hoping and waiting. We are here, in every sense, on a stage of probation; so that, having once been brought back from the alienations of nature, we are candidates for a prize, and wrestlers for a diadem. It is not the mere entrance into the kingdom for which we contend: the first instant in which we act faith on Christ as our propitiation, sees this entrance secured to us as justified beings. But, when justified, there is opened before us the widest field for a righteous ambition; and portions deepening in majesty, and heightening in brilliancy, rise on our vision, and animate to unwearied endeavour. We count it one of the glorious things of Christianity, that, in place of repressing, it gives full scope to all the ardour of man's spirit. It is common to reckon ambition amongst vices: and a vice it is, under its ordinary developments, with which Christianity wages interminable warfare. But, nevertheless, it is a staunch, and an adventurous, and an eagle-eyed thing: and it is impossible to gaze on the man of ambition, daunted not by disaster, wearied not by repulse, disheartened not by delay, without feeling that he possesses the elements of a noble constitution; and that, however, to be wept over for the prostitution of his energies, for the pouring out this mightiness of soul on the corrupt and the perishable, he is equipped with an apparatus of powers which need nothing but the being rightly directed, in order to the forming the very finest of characters. Christianity deals with ambition as a passion to be abhorred and denounced, whilst urging the warrior to carve his way to a throne, or the courtier to press on in the path of preferment. But it does not cast out the elements of the passion. Why should it? They are the noblest which enter into the human composition, bearing most vividly the impress of man's original formation. Christianity seizes on these elements. She tells her subjects that the rewards of eternity,

though all purchased by Christ, and none merited by man, shall be rigidly proportioned to their works. She tells them that there are places of dignity, and stations of eminence, and crowns with more jewellery, and sceptres with more sway, in that glorious Empire which shall finally be set up by the Mediator. And she bids them strive for the loftier recompense. She would not have them contented with the lesser portion, though infinitely outdoing human imagination as well as human desert. And if ambition be the walking with the staunch step, and the single eye, and the untired zeal, and all in pursuit of some longed-for superiority, Christianity saith not to the man of ambition, lay aside thine ambition : Christianity hath need of the staunch step, and the single eye, and the untired zeal ; and she therefore sets before the man pyramid rising above pyramid in glory, throne above throne, palace above palace ; and she sends him forth into the moral arena to wrestle for the loftiest though unworthy of the lowest. There would seem nothing wanting to the completeness of this argument, unless it be proof of what has been all along assumed, namely, that the being compelled to hope and to wait is a good moral discipline, so that the exercises prescribed are calculated to promote holiness, and, therefore, to insure happiness. We have perhaps only shown the advantageousness of delay ; whereas the text asserts the advantageousness of certain acts of the soul. Yet this discrepancy between the thing proved, and the thing to be proved, is too slight to require a lengthened correction. It is the delay which makes salvation a thing of hope, and that which I am obliged to hope for, I am, of course, obliged to wait for ; and thus, whatever of beneficial result can be ascribed to the delay may, with equal fitness, be ascribed to the hoping and waiting. Besides, hope and patience—for it is not the mere waiting which is asserted to be good ; it is the quietly waiting ; and this quiet waiting is but another term for patience—hope and patience are two of the most admirable of Christian graces, and he who cultivates them assiduously cannot well be neglectful of the rest. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *Hoping and waiting* :—There are three things named here, and they reach a sort of climax in the third—to hope, to wait, and to wait quietly, or in silence. It is sometimes hard to hope when there are no signs of promise, and no break in the clouds ; it is harder to wait. And the heart gets sick with deferred hope, and still the end seems no nearer ; but the hardest thing is to wait without a word of anger, reproach, or impatience, though the eyes have got wearied with watching—watching for what never comes. And yet this hardest thing is the best if we can attain to it. “It is good that a man should both hope and wait,” and wait in silence. I. **PATIENT WAITING.** This is a Divine virtue. It is that quality in man which makes him most like God. It is commended to us in every part of the Bible as the distinguishing quality of the faithful. It is needed in every age, but we especially need it in this particular age, for the times in which we live are characterised by rush, fever, and haste. That is the paramount feature of the time. We want to force the pace, to break the record, and to make God’s machinery, as well as human machinery, move faster. It is a fast age ; life is in a ferment of activity, the nerves are too highly strung, the brain is in a whirl, and we cannot bear delays. We want to see the dawn breaking while it is still midnight, and to clear away all our obstructions, difficulties, and troubles by one stroke. We want to be rich without any loss of time ; to reach to top places without the disagreeable necessities of slow climbing, and oh ! that some prophet would fix the day and the hour for us ; how handsomely we would pay him if he would fix it early and antedate God’s time, for the “mill of God” does grind so slowly, so slowly. But here comes the sweet, tender, chiding answer : “It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.” II. **HOPE DEPENDENT ON WAITING.** Without hope life has no sky ; it is a plant which virtually dies for want of nourishment, light, and air. When hope goes, energy goes, and all earnest hope, and any emotion of joy, and there is nothing left to live for. The pessimist says, “Is life worth living ?” and I answer him emphatically, “No, it is not—to one in your mood.” Hope always perishes where there is no patient waiting. If you cannot bear to have your hopes delayed, you soon come to the conclusion that every hope is a deception, every promise is a delusion, and every prayer a mockery ; and then presently you are found repeating with grim despair that most dismal of all proverbs, “Blessed is the man that expecteth nothing.” Pessimists are always men who have lost their hopes and lost their hearts because their hopes have not been speedily fulfilled. III. **WAITING THE TEST OF MANHOOD.** It marks the highest type

of man, it distinguishes the man from the child, the thinking man from the intellectual weakling, the higher races from the lower races, the civilised man from the savage. The savage is always like a child, impatient; you can hardly persuade him to till the ground, because he would have to wait six months for the harvest; he kills the goose which lays the golden eggs, because he cannot wait for a slow return. And there are hundreds of young men who are as senseless as the savage in that respect: they burn the candle of pleasure at both ends, and in the middle too, heedless of darkness that is coming in future years, if they can only make a big glaring flame at the present moment. But as soon as ever you lift men up in the scale of being, they begin to build and plant and labour, though the results may not be seen for years; and you can always measure the strength and nobility and the very magnitude of a man by this: Does he know how to wait? We are told of the astronomer Kepler that when his great discoveries were announced, but rejected and scorned by all the learned and religious world, he quietly said, "If the Almighty waited six thousand years for one man to see what He had made, I may well wait two hundred years for one man to understand what I have seen." There was a great soul behind that utterance. IV. THE BLUNDERS OF IMPATIENCE. Men become like wild creatures in their hurried haste to be rich; they want to win in a day what honest industry would only win in years, and then craft takes the place of toil; astute cunning and sleight of hand the place of diligence and perseverance; madness engulfs sober reason, greed devours all human feeling, and manhood perishes; and often the only end of it is bankruptcy, ruin, and disgrace. These are the works of impatience; and am I not right in saying that nearly all the follies of political life and the blunders which great nations commit are the result of impatience? Just think what a wretched coil of trouble was made for us in the Transvaal some years ago by the strong-headed men—nay, the hot-headed boys—who raided and failed: mad haste and long repentance for them and others—that is what comes of it. And now through all this crisis we hear voices urging the same mad haste. Strong and sober and level-headed men have been saying throughout, and are saying now, "Be firm, press your just claims, do not draw back, but above all things be patient." It is patience that wins in these difficulties, and especially when justice is on its side. V. THE REWARD OF WAITING. If you labour on and do not lose heart, and bind yourselves fast to that hard, just master, Duty, you win your proper place in time. If God sees the fitness in you, the world will see it by and by. Nothing can keep a man permanently down if the higher voice is bidding him "Come up higher." It is only a question of time and patience, if you labour and do always the thing that is right. The Christian work that has been so disappointing and unprofitable will at last yield the fruits of righteousness. And your own besetting sins, too, against which you fought and prayed so long, will at last be trampled down by Him who subdues all things unto Himself. (J. G. Greenhough, M.A.)

Ver. 27. **It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.**—*The best burden for young shoulders*:—Yoke-bearing is not pleasant, but it is good. It is not every pleasant thing that is good, nor every good thing that is pleasant. Sometimes the goodness may be just in proportion to the unpleasantness. Even apart from the grace of God, and apart from religion, it is a great blessing for a man to bear the yoke in his youth! that is to say, first, it is good for us when we are young to learn obedience. It is half the making of a man to be placed under rule, and taught to bear restraint. It is good for young people to bear the yoke, too, in the sense of giving themselves in their early days to acquire knowledge. If we do not learn when we are young, when shall we learn? It is good for young people, too—we are now talking about the natural meaning of the passage—good for them that they should encounter difficulties and troubles when they begin life. The silver spoon in the mouth with which some people are born is very apt to choke them. It is not, however, my business to preach about these matters at any length; I am not a moral lecturer, but a minister of the Gospel. I have fulfilled a duty when I have given the first meaning to the text, and now I shall use it for nobler ends. I. **IT IS GOOD TO BE A CHRISTIAN WHILE YOU ARE YOUNG.** It is good for a man to bear Christ's yoke in his youth. 1. For, see, first, the man whose heart is conquered by Divine grace early is made happy soon. That is a blessed prayer in the psalm, "O satisfy us early with Thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days." 2. Besides, while

early piety brings early happiness, let it never be forgotten that it saves from a thousand snares. Eleventh hour mercies are very sweet. But what a double privilege it is to be set to work in the vineyard while yet the dew is on the leaves, and so to be kept from the idleness and the wickedness of the market-place in which others loiter so long. 3. It is good for a man to bear Christ's yoke in his youth, because it saves him from having those shoulders galled with the devil's yoke. Sins long indulged grow to the shoulders, and to remove them is like tearing away one's flesh. 4. There is this goodness about it, again, that it gives you longer time in which to serve God. Blessed be His name, He will accept eventide service; but still, how much better to be able to serve the Lord from your youth up, to give Him those bright days while the birds are singing in the soul, when the sun is unclouded, and the shadows are not falling; and then to give Him the long evening, when at eventide He makes it light, and causes the infirmities of age to display His power and His fidelity. 5. There is this goodness about it yet further, that it enables one to be well established in Divine things. I bless God that a man who has believed in Jesus only one second is a saved man; but he is not an instructed man, he is not an established man. He is not trained for battle; nor tutored for labour. These things take time. 6. And then, let me say, it gives such confidence in after life to have given your heart to Jesus young.

II. IT IS GOOD FOR YOUNG CHRISTIANS THAT THEY BEAR THE YOKE OF JESUS. 1. It will be for your good as long as ever you live to render to Jesus complete obedience at the very first. Every young Christian when he is converted should take time to consider, and should say to himself, "What am I to do? What is the duty of a Christian?" He should also devoutly say to the Lord Jesus, "Lord, show me what Thou wouldst have me to do," and wait upon the Holy Ghost for guidance. 2. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth, by attaining clear instruction in Divine truth. We ought to go to the Lord Jesus Christ to learn of Him, not merely about ordinances and actions, but about what to think and what to believe. 3. It is good for young converts also to bear the yoke by beginning to serve Jesus Christ early. There is work for every believer to do in Christ's vineyard. "Ah," says one, "I shall begin when I can preach." Will you? You had better begin writing a letter to that young friend with whom you went to school. You had better begin by dropping a tract down an area, or by trying to speak to some young person of your own age. 4. It is also good that when we begin to serve God we should bear the yoke in another sense, namely, by finding difficulties. It is a good thing for a true worker for the devil to labour to put him down, because if God has put him up, he cannot be put down, but the attempt to overthrow him will do him good, develop his spiritual muscle, and bring out the powers of his mind. 5. It is good to meet with persecution in your youth. A Christian is a hardy plant. Many years ago a larch was brought to England. The gentleman who brought it put it in his hothouse, but it did not develop in a healthy manner. It was a spindly thing, and therefore the gardener, feeling that he could not make anything of it, took it up and threw it out upon the dunghill. There it grew into a splendid tree, for it had found a temperature suitable to its nature. The tree was meant to grow near the snow; it loves cold winds and rough weather, and they had been sweating it to death in a hothouse. So it is with true Christianity. It seldom flourishes so well in the midst of ease and luxury as it does in great tribulation. 6. I believe it is good for young Christians to experience much soul-trouble. It is much better on the whole that a man should be timid and trembling than that he should early in life become very confident. "Blessed is the man that feareth always" is a scriptural text—not the slavish fear, nor yet a fear that doubts God, but still a fear. These ordeals are of essential service to the newborn believer, and prepare him alike for the joys and the sorrows of his spiritual career.

III. PRACTICALLY WE ARE ALL OF US IN OUR YOUTH. None of us will come of age till we enter heaven. We are still under tutors and governors, because we are even now as little children. 1. It is good that we who have gone some distance on the road to heaven should still have something to bear, because it enables us to honour Christ still. If we do not suffer with Him, how can we have fellowship with Him? If we have no crosses to carry, how can we commune with our Lord, the chief cross-bearer? 2. It is good for us all to bear the yoke, too, because thus old Adam is kept in check. Sheep do not stray so much when the black dog is after them; his barkings make them run to the shepherd. Affliction is the black dog of the Good Shepherd to fetch us back to Him, otherwise

we should wander to our ruin. 3. Besides, it makes you so helpful to others to have known affliction. I do not see how we can sympathise if we are never tried ourselves. 4. Once more, is it not good to bear the yoke while we are here, because it will make heaven all the sweeter? What a change for the martyr standing at the stake burning slowly to death, and then rising to behold the glory of his Lord! What a change for you, dear old friend, with all those aches and pains about you, which make you feel uneasy even while you are sitting here! (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Good to bear the yoke in youth :—The figure is taken from farm life. If a ploughing ox is to be well adapted for its labour, and make a good furrow, it must be disciplined while it is quite young. If this be neglected, it is vain to attempt it by and by; the beast will only be fretted and irritated, and any work it is put to will be a failure. A traveller in the East graphically describes, as an eye-witness, the difficulty of getting an untrained ox to perform agricultural work. "I had frequent opportunities," he says, "of witnessing the conduct of oxen, when for the first time put into the yoke. They generally made a strenuous struggle for liberty, repeatedly breaking the yoke, and attempting to make their escape. At other times such bullocks would lie down upon their side or back, and remain so in defiance of the drivers, though they lashed them with ponderous whips. Sometimes, from pity to the animal, I would interfere, and beg them not to be so cruel. 'Cruel!' they would say, 'it is mercy; for if we do not conquer him now, he will require to be so beaten all his life.'" I. It is good for a man to bear in his youth the yoke of **SUBJECTION TO AUTHORITY**. The unkindest thing you can do to a child is to throw the reins over his shoulders, and let him do as he likes. If you wish to ruin his prospects, and to develop a mean, selfish, over-bearing nature, never contradict him, never oppose him, let his every freak and fancy be gratified. But it is not only for little children that the yoke of subjection to authority is wholesome. It is quite possible that the yoke may be removed too soon. Until the character is fairly formed, and the judgment is stronger than the will, and the mind and conscience have ascendancy over the lower nature, the controlling influence of another should be felt. II. It is good for a man to bear in his youth the yoke of **SELF-RESTRAINT**. However widely we may differ in appetite and temperament—some, of course, finding the needful self-control much harder than others—there are, with all of us, desires and tendencies which we have sternly to resist, and the denying of which is part of the training by which we are fitted for a noble and useful life. The very lusts, passions, appetites, and tempers of which, more or less, we are all conscious, may be turned to real service in our moral equipment for life; for, in the steadfast resistance of them, and victory over them, we become stronger men than had there been no conflict at all. III. It is good for a man to bear in his youth the yoke of **DIFFICULTY AND TOIL**. Nothing like having to "rough it a bit" in early life. It is very far indeed from being an advantage to a man to have been "born with a silver spoon in his mouth." It is good for us all to have to work for our bread. Our Creator intended us for labour, and not for indolence. Many is the prosperous man of business who will tell you that he can never be too thankful for having had to bear in his youth the yoke of genuine hard work. It was this that developed his energies, strengthened his muscle, and, under God, made his life successful and happy. IV. It is good for a man to bear in his youth the yoke of **LIVING GODLINESS**. It is to this that our blessed Saviour invites us when He says, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me." It is good for a man to become a decided Christian in early life. Now it is perfectly true that, as Christ says, "this yoke is easy, and this burden light"; and yet it would not be called a yoke at all if it did not mean something that the flesh does not readily take up—something that is contrary to our fallen nature. It is not natural to us to be Christians. Like the bullock, we have to bend, we have to stoop, that the yoke may be put upon us; and this stooping is what none of us like. Our proud wills must be humbled; our old self must be crucified. V. It is good for a man to bear in his youth the yoke of a **PUBLIC CHRISTIAN PROFESSION**. The first thing, of course, is to be a Christian; but the next thing is to avow it. It is good in a thousand ways—good for yourselves now; good for others; good for the cause of Christ; good for the glory of God; good for your own future comfort and joy, that, without delay, you step right over to the ranks of the Lord's people, and openly attach yourselves to the Christian Church. VI. It is good for a man to bear in his youth the yoke of **CHRISTIAN SERVICE**. It will help your own faith wonderfully to be engaged in some real labour for the Lord. Drop

a solemn word in the ear of some careless companion, and see how the Lord helps you in that. Link your arm with some thoughtless young fellow, and try to bring him with you to the house of God. Write a kind letter to your cousin who is getting tinged with infidelity, and tell him of the nobler and better way.

VII. It is good for a man to bear in his youth the yoke of PERSONAL AFFLICTION. Many an one has thanked God all his days for some heavy cross he had to carry when he was young. In the memoir of Dr. Norman McLeod it is stated that nothing produced a greater effect upon him during the whole course of his life, than the death of a favourite brother, when they were both quite young men. There are many other forms of trial, as you well know: there is the breaking up of a happy home; the coming away from all the tender associations and hallowed scenes of infancy; the solitude of a great city where all are strangers to you; the loss of a situation, or disappointment in your efforts to obtain one: all these things are trying, and may prove a heavy yoke to bear; but, believe me, it is good to bear them in one's youth. You may be the better all your days for the bitter discipline. (*J. T. Davidson, D.D.*)

On bearing the yoke in youth:—

1. There is, for example, the yoke of home. Woe to that home which lays no yoke upon its inmates! That is the very office of the family towards its young and inexperienced members. To turn the current of the young life into a right channel—to make good habitual by use, and (to that end) to insist upon conformity to a good rule—to require, as the condition of maintenance, as the condition of protection, as the condition of life, that this and not this shall be the conduct and the speech and the temper and (down to very minute particulars) the mode of living—this is the duty of a home, in order that it may bring after it God's assigned and certain blessing. Now all this implies compulsion; for it demands of the young life that which it cannot give, and cannot be, without constraint.
2. But the home must at last send out its sons and its daughters into a rougher school of experience, and the half-way house on this journey is, first, the school, with its discipline, longer or shorter as the case may be, either of elementary or classical learning, and then in some form or other that which comes for most young men afterwards, the more special training for a particular profession or trade. Here too there is a yoke, and a yoke-bearing; or else a refusal of the yoke, with many sad consequences of sorrow and shame. A day is coming for you, even in this life, when you will give God thanks for every day's trial, for every day's privation, for every day's hardship, which you have honestly and bravely borne.
3. Many suffer seriously throughout their life by not having borne in their youth the yoke of a Church. It is not well to be entirely at large in these matters. Who is the person looked to for counsel, who is the person privileged to advise, who is the person bound to reprove—and do not all young people need these offices from some one?—if the young Christian is sometimes at church, sometimes at chapel—sometimes at this church or this chapel, sometimes at that—thus evading, by a perpetual shifting of the scene, all the responsibilities and all the accountabilities of each and of all?
4. There is One who uses this very figure concerning His own Divine office, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me." Certainly of this yoke it must be true that it is good for a man to bear it in his youth. No age is too young for it: He Himself declared that infant children were not too young to put it on: He Himself dealt tenderly and lovingly with the young man who came to Him to be taught the way of life: and there is no doubt that, unless it is put on in youth, it never will sit quite easily, and it never will be without some galling pressure in later years, just because there is always some spiritual wound in the shoulder, or some effeminate softness in the arm of him who has tried other yokes first, of him who has begun by serving self, sin, or the world, and only comes late and in pain to submit himself to the healing and guiding and saving hand of Christ. (*Dean Vaughan.*)

Bearing the yoke:—

1. Men rarely if ever feel prepared to bear the good yoke the moment it is presented to them.
2. The qualification for bearing the yoke is obtained in bearing it. Practical skill comes only by practice.
3. Those who refuse to gain qualification for a place by working in that place, always fail of qualification and of usefulness anywhere. He who will be a tramp in religion must not expect the glory of immortality.
4. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth, because then he will not suffer from having wasted time.
5. In view of all this, how beautiful the Saviour's call, "Take My yoke upon you," for if men take not the yoke of Christ, then they must take the yoke of sin and everlasting despair. (*O. T. Lanphear, D.D.*)

*The good of early obedience:—*There is a threefold yoke which it is good for a man to

bear in his youth. I. The yoke of AFFLICTION. 1. Good for all kinds of men. 2. Enlightening. 3. Preparatory to grace and conversion. 4. Strengthens spiritual convictions. 5. Stirrs up the heart to prayer. 6. Teaches the emptiness of the creature. II. The yoke of CONVICTION OF SIN. 1. The sooner it is borne the easier it is borne. 2. Those who are subjects of early convictions grow rich in grace. III. The yoke of SUBJECTION AND Obedience TO CHRIST. 1. He has his yoke. 2. It is the concern of every one to take his yoke in youth, because of the call of God, the claims of Christ, the invitation of the Spirit; sin gets advantage by continuance; the earlier the easier; it has the kindest acceptance with God; it is the fittest season for religion; the danger of delay. (*M. Mead.*) *The yoke of religion*.—I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN BEARING THE YOKE HERE SPOKEN OF. We naturally run wild, like a wild ass's colt upon the mountains; with respect to our understanding, in speculation and error; our will, in stubbornness, disobedience, and rebellion; our affections, in irregular and inordinate love, desire, hope, joy, &c. True religion, when put on in reality, and, as it were, buckled close upon us by faith, restrains our disposition to wander from God. 1. The subjection to which it obliges us. Naturally we wear Satan's yoke, and are in subjection to him (Eph. ii. 2); to the world (Gal. i. 4); to the flesh (Rom. vii. 5, 23); to sin (John viii. 34); to death, and the fear of it (Heb. ii. 15). True religion delivers us from these other lords, and brings us into subjection to Christ, whose loyal subjects we become, and He reigns in us by His grace, and over us by His laws (Rom. xiv. 17). 2. The service in which it engages us. We are yoked, not to lie down and sleep, or stand still, but to work, not only in the use of every means of grace, for our own salvation, especially prayer, watchfulness, self-denial, faith, obedience to all known duty, and a "patient continuance in well-doing"; but for the glory of God, in endeavouring to make Him known and feared by all men; and for the good of our neighbour, in all works of justice, mercy, charity. 3. The associates with which it connects us. A bullock is not yoked that it may draw alone. We are united to the people of God, and in conjunction with them, should serve the Lord in the fore-mentioned particulars. 4. The patience and submission to which it obliges us, under our various chastisements (Jer. xxxi. 18). Oxen, when brought under the yoke, are untoward, or refractory, or lazy, and, therefore, have need of the goad. We have need of it also for similar reasons. "The words of the wise are as goads"; and so are the various trials and troubles which we meet with. II. HOW IT APPEARS THAT IT IS GOOD FOR A MAN TO BEAR THE YOKE, AND THAT EVEN IN HIS YOUTH. 1. It is reasonable. It becomes us, and is our duty, that we should come under the restraint before described; that we should be in subjection to and the servants of Christ; that we should be united with God's Church; and be patient and submissive under His chastisement. 2. It is honourable. A yoke of some kind we must wear, and a yoke we do wear; and is it not more honourable to wear that of Christ, than that of Belial? Is it not an honourable thing to be a subject of a very great, powerful, and gracious King? a servant of a rich, noble, and benevolent Master? a friend, a brother, nay, and the spouse of the Prince of the kings of the earth? 3. It is advantageous. (1) As to this life. "Godliness hath the promise of the life that now is." Does the husbandman feed his bullocks, and shall not God provide for those that draw in His yoke? They shall have all things needful (Matt. vi. 32, 33); all things useful (Psa. lxxxiv. 11); evils turned into good (Rom. viii. 28). (2) As to the life to come, they enjoy the favour of an infinite and eternal Being; they are adopted into His family; restored to His image; hold communion and fellowship with Him; have peace of mind; a lively hope of eternal life; and an earnest thereof in their hearts, "until the redemption of the purchased possession"; but they will reap still greater advantages after death, in the intermediate state, at the day of resurrection and final judgment, and for ever. 4. It is easy and pleasant. What; to bear a yoke? Yes; a yoke lined with love. "His commandments are not grievous" to a loving heart, to a new nature. III. HOW WE MAY BE ENABLED TO DO SO. 1. Come out from among the carnal and wicked, and be separate. For, "a companion of fools shall be destroyed." 2. Associate with the people of God (Prov. xiii. 20). 3. Use much retirement, and read, and meditate on the Scriptures (2 Tim. iii. 15). 4. Pray. The wisdom and strength of man is utterly insufficient; but "they that wait on the Lord," &c. (Isa. xl. 31). 5. Be always watchful and circumspect (Eph. v. 15). 6. Deny yourself, and take up your cross daily (Matt. xvi. 24). (*J. Benson.*) *On the duty of restraining the young*.—I. The restraints of which I speak at present, are only THOSE WISE AND

NECESSARY RESTRAINTS WHICH SERVE TO GUARD THE INNOCENCE AND TO DIRECT THE ACTIVITY OF THE EARLY MIND. Even a child soon learns to distinguish the restraints that are dictated by a sincere regard to his happiness, from those which have their origin in caprice. To the former, indeed, he may not at all times submit with becoming cheerfulness ; but against the latter he will perpetually rebel. One of the worst effects which excessive severity produces on the minds of the young is, that it tempts them to the violation of truth ; and hence it sometimes happens that parents are less acquainted, than even the most indifferent persons, with what passes in the minds of their children. Beware of this fatal error. Provoke not your children to wrath ; tempt not your children to falsehood. I am aware, however, that this is not the extreme in which parents are most apt to err. Their natural affection for their children will generally be sufficient, without any other motive, to preserve them from too rigorous an exercise of authority. The danger is that this affection may transgress its proper bounds, and betray them into an opposite error, not less fatal to the interests of their children. It is surely necessary that the young be restrained from every species of vice, and directed to such pursuits and studies as may prepare them for being useful in the world. For this purpose they must be early taught that they have serious duties to perform ; they must be accustomed to submit to discipline, and limited even in those innocent pleasures which would interfere with their more important concerns. Let the rules, which you prescribe, be such as are proper in themselves ; and let them be uniformly and steadily executed. Steadiness and consistency of conduct is the great secret in the management of the young. It begets respect and reverence, and ensures a willing obedience. When the duty of the child is clearly marked out to him, and the performance of it regularly exacted, he is, in no case, at a loss to discover what will please, and what will offend. In proportion as his faculties open, he perceives the propriety of the discipline through which he is made to pass. He admires the wisdom and consistency of the plan by which his most important interests are promoted. He finds that the authority which, in his youth, he hath been taught to acknowledge, is the mild and regular dominion of reason ; and is prepared, as his years advance, to exchange the dominion of reason in the breast of his parent, for the dominion of reason in his own mind.

II. SOME OF THE ADVANTAGES WHICH THIS DISCIPLINE IS FITTED TO YIELD. Even in our maturer years, our industry needs often to be animated by looking forward to the distant advantages which it is fitted to yield. This, however, is a reflection which seldom occurs to the young. They think only of the moments as they pass. They perceive not how much their characters, and their advancement in the world, depend on their present application. But you, who are parents, perceive it. Your observation hath long ago taught you that attention and diligence in youth are the only sure foundation on which a respectable manhood can be reared. To you, therefore, it belongs, by the judicious exercise of authority, to remedy the inexperience of the young, and to urge them on in the path in which, at present, perhaps, they walk with reluctance, because they see not the end to which it leads. The success of your children in the world is an object which deserves your attention ; but it is not the only object that is worthy of a parent's care. Their virtue is their highest interest ; and this, also, is most likely to be promoted by discipline. In order that the mind may be formed to virtue, it must be accustomed to submit to restraint ; for what else is virtue but the habit of self-government, the power of regulating our affections and passions by the dictates of reason and conscience ? To live according to rule is not a task for the young alone ; it is a duty incumbent on all ; it is that which, in every period of life, distinguishes the virtuous from the vicious. Now, this is the very habit to which the mind of the child is formed by the exercise of parental authority. How many useful lessons doth he learn from the discipline of his father's house ! He is prepared, by obedience to his parents, to obey his conscience and his God. He will be meek, for he hath learned to bear contradiction ; he will be just, for he hath learned to moderate his desires ; he will be temperate, for he hath learned to resist the solicitations of pleasure ; he will be generous, for he hath learned, at the call of duty, to forego his own ease and comfort, and he is prepared for every sacrifice which benevolence may require him to make. Happy, surely, is the man who hath thus borne the yoke in his youth ! (*W. Moodie, D.D.*)

The trials of youth :—To bear the yoke is to be in subjection ; to be compelled to walk in certain lines at the will of another, to be prevented from choosing for ourselves and being our own masters. The compulsion which is most commonly

felt in youth is the compulsion of circumstances. Without being in absolute poverty, the majority of young men find that they have no choice, but must at once try to earn a livelihood. And the limitations thus prescribed by circumstances are often very serious, and press very heavily on the mind of the aspiring youth. Still, if there is a spark of real manhood, a leaven of generosity in the spirit, it will be found good to bear this yoke. To throw a boy into the water is a rough-and-ready lesson in the art of swimming, but with a boy of spirit it is likely to be successful. The training which straitened circumstances give is one which no money can purchase. A lad is put upon his mettle, and if there is grit in him at all, it will appear. He is conscious that it depends entirely on himself whether he is to succeed or to fail. He feels himself face to face with the world, and is compelled to use all his faculties and powers to save himself from defeat. The habits of industry, the love of work, the delight in mastering difficulties, the ability to put pressure on himself, and the independence of character which a lad thus acquires, pass into his nature as its permanent and most valuable ingredients. It must also be considered that the privations which press so heavily on some families, and which in some unhappy instances benumb affection, do in the main afford opportunities for self-sacrifice and considerateness and concern for the common good which bind families together, and give a richness and beauty to the family life which you might have sought in vain had circumstances been easy and calling for no sacrifice. But in other senses it is good that a man bear the yoke in his youth. He must put himself under control and discipline if he is to get the full benefit of his youth. All this control and discipline is intended to fit him for liberty afterwards, as all drill and gymnastics are meant to give the body freedom of movement, and to give a man the perfect use of all his powers. To allow passions, cravings, propensities, to rule us and govern and determine our conduct is to become the worst of slaves. Freedom comes through discipline; through absorbing into our own will the laws which govern our life; to be our own master is to exercise self-control, and allow that in us to rule which was intended to be supreme. When we submit ourselves to the rule of conscience and come into harmony with God's laws, approving them in our heart, then only are we free. You yourself are something nobler and better than any of your members or any faculty in you; these are your organs and instruments whereby you work on the world around you, but you yourself are different from these, and are called to rule all these. Thus only is it possible to become your own master. Coming to detail, then, we must exercise self-control in respect of all unworthy pleasures. The youth of a certain kind and brought up in certain companies thinks he is scarcely a man till he has tasted pleasures which he knows to be forbidden. The very fact that they are forbidden makes them objects of desire. The true corrective of this bias towards unworthy pleasures is to be found in filling our life with worthy pursuits. Of course knowledge also helps. When one has seen a little more of life, the pleasures which attract the mass of young men seem so very childish, so false and tawdry, so positively repulsive in many respects, that one wonders where the charm is. In the cloak-room of many a place of entertainment you must with your coat leave your self-respect, and all respect for humanity, and necessarily come out a poorer man, with less fitness for life. But even when the pleasures that attract are recognised to be such as no men of any real stature and dignity could possibly stoop to, our self-control needs some other aid than that of knowledge. It is good to say to ourselves, these scenes I am asked to join are degrading and delusive. Instead of proving my manhood by entering them, I show distinctly that my manhood is poor and weak, easily deceived, easily led, ignorant and undeveloped. It is good to cherish and strengthen our self-control thus, and by reading such healthy writers as Thackeray, whose scorn of all that is base and foolish and filthy and profane communicates itself to the reader and makes that seem contemptible which is contemptible, and that be repulsive to us which in itself is repulsive. But the true safeguard is to fill the heart and life with higher things, to commit ourselves cordially to the Christian life, recognising its attractiveness and finding in it enough and more than enough to interest, to stimulate, to satisfy. It is in Christ's service you find true life and true freedom and true manhood. Another detail in which self-control must be exercised is in the books we read. Happily, English literature is rich enough to make it quite unnecessary for us to open one suspected volume. Form your taste on Scott and Thackeray, Carlyle and Emerson, and you will have no relish for unclean and corrupting literature. Here again, if you feel you are losing

something by not reading what others read, exercise self-control, and remember that what you lose is well lost, a tainted mind, a lowered tone, a polluted imagination, while you gain self-respect, manliness, and purity. But again, those who have too much self-respect to find any attraction in such undesirable knowledge, sometimes show a similar craving, but in a higher and purer sphere. It is not uncommon to meet with persons who have a silly ambition to be recognised as having passed through a severe struggle with doubt and spiritual perplexity. Now there are two kinds of doubt which are very different in their origin and character, and which must be treated differently. There is the doubt which is almost invariably begotten in a strong and independent mind when that mind first applies itself to the solution of the mysteries of nature, of life, and of God. There is also the doubt which is assumed, like any other manner or habit which finds favour in society; sometimes there is an affectation of weariness and ennui, sometimes of indifference, and so in some circles there is an affectation of doubt. It is "the thing" to talk disparagingly of traditional belief, and to assume a sceptical attitude towards miracles and other objects of faith. The fictitious or imitative doubter may always be distinguished from the true doubter by his frivolous and ignorant manner of meeting proposed solutions of his doubts. He who merely apes doubt and seems to consider it a desirable mental condition, shrinks from conviction and seeks to perpetuate his uncertainty. To such as fancy that sceptical difficulties are symptoms of enlightenment may be commended the words of the great philosopher who may be said to have consecrated doubt. After describing how he stripped himself one by one of all beliefs, he goes on to say, "For all that, I did not imitate the sceptics who doubt for doubting's sake, and pretend to be always undecided; on the contrary, my whole intention was to arrive at certainty, and to dig away the drift and sand until I arrived at the rock beneath" (Descartes in Huxley, 122). It is not through the understanding so much as through the conscience and the heart that a man becomes a Christian. And so long as any one is loyal to Christ because he is conscious that in Him he is brought into harmony with God, and because he desires to live in fellowship with Christ and to serve Him, it is not essential that he should believe all that he has been taught. There is room in the Church of Christ for questioning spirits as for docile and credulous spirits; and as there is work for the one class, so is there work for the other. What is wanted much more than acceptance of traditional belief is tolerance, based on the clear perception that many articles of our creed are not certain, and that thoughtful men cannot but have different opinions regarding their truth. Until we fight against sin as the allies and subjects of Christ, as well as for our own sake, we seem to fight not in Christ's strength, but in our own. And if we think of our sin as mainly our affair, if we hate it mainly for the shame it brings upon us, then when we are tempted by it and when our own view of it is changed, the advantage and pleasure of it being now clear and the shame of it remote and dimly seen, there is absolutely nothing to restrain us from it. But if we habitually live with Christ and consider His will in all things, and that our sin brings grief to Him, when we are tempted, though our own view of sin is altered, we are conscious that His view of it remains the same, and in sympathy with His judgment we also condemn it. Every evil habit you suffer to find place in you lowers your energy throughout life, weights and burdens you, and holds you back from what you aspire to. The sin you admit into your life is not like a stone in a horse's hoof, that cripples for a few steps but can easily be knocked out and leave no trace: it is a morbid growth, it is in your blood, it taints your whole system, and is a weakness to the end. Turn then from all that is low, and defiling, and secretive, and ungenerous, turn from what is ungodly—be sure you are gladly living under the great law of human life, dependence on Jesus Christ, and with Him there will enter your life, "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, . . . just, . . . pure, . . . lovely, . . . of good report." (*M. Dods, D.D.*)

Yoke bearing:—I. A BROAD ASSERTION WHICH REQUIRES TO BE QUALIFIED. It is not good to bear the yoke of—1. Civil despotism. 2. Spiritual despotism. 3. Sinful despotism. **II. AN ASSERTION TO BE READILY RECEIVED.** 1. The yoke of affliction. 2. The yoke of genuine religious principle. 3. The yoke of Christ. **III. WHY IT IS SO GOOD TO BEAR THIS YOKE IN YOUTH.** 1. It is a check to the presumption of youth, which, like a vessel without ballast, would soon be endangered. 2. It is a safeguard against the dangers of youth. 3. It often proves a fitting preparation for eminent usefulness. 4. It is often the precursor of high character and of exalted enjoyment. **IV. HINTS TO THOSE WHO HAVE TO BEAR**

THE YOKE. 1. Place your mercies over against your trials. 2. Recollect that God has wise and kind designs. 3. Let affliction lead you to God as your proper and changeless portion. 4. Recollect the brevity of the season in which the yoke is to be borne. (*Homiletic Magazine.*) *Bearing the yoke in youth:—I. THERE IS A YOKE WHICH IT IS NOT GOOD FOR A MAN TO BEAR IN HIS YOUTH.* 1. The yoke of civil bondage. 2. The yoke of ceremonies and superstitions. 3. The yoke of sin. A bad habit acquired in youth grows with a man's growth, and strengthens with his strength. **II. WHAT YOKE IS IT GOOD FOR A MAN TO BEAR IN HIS YOUTH?** 1. The yoke of affliction. There is a natural exuberance in youth which needs to be reduced—a luxuriousness which requires pruning—an impetuosity which needs to be checked. And what will effect this like affliction when sanctified by God? 2. The yoke of subjection to legitimate authority. 3. The yoke of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is a yoke which every man must take upon him at some period of his life, or perish everlastingly. (*John Hambleton, M.A.*) *A sermon to young men* (with Matt. xi. 29):—The yoke! The very word has a sound of severity in it! Yet Christ spake it—He, whom all ages since His advent have accepted as the ideal of gentleness! He who alone, amid the boasted culture of the nineteenth century, can bestow real liberty. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty”—there alone. We gain freedom from false dominions by accepting the kingship of Christ. **I. YOUNG MEN WHO ACCEPT THE YOKE OF CHRIST ARE BEST FITTED FOR AN EARTHLY CITIZENSHIP.** England prospers or perishes by character! Selfishness slew Sparta. Cruelty corrupted Athens. Lust laid low the power of Rome. Material wealth does not constitute our prosperity, nor the genius of statesmanship, nor the facilities for commercial intercourse—character makes a nation! and to this hour I know of no power which can create holy character, purify the heart, cleanse the conscience, and inspire a truly heroic life but the Gospel of Christ—it is the power of God unto salvation, and as such it manifests no over-weening confidence to say “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.” Upon its social side, our earthly citizenship will be beautiful just in the proportion that Christ reigns in our hearts! Your safety is in making harmony with the spirit and purpose of Christ, the ruling law of all. **II. YOUNG MEN WHO ACCEPT THE YOKE OF CHRIST ARE FULFILLING THE HIGHEST IDEAL OF LIFE.** Each man has some ideal of life. It is natural to suppose that we do not eat, work, and sleep, with no other aim than the day contains; we were unworthy of the majesty of manhood not to have some conceptions of duty and destiny. Christ found men full of the ideals of life. There was the pharisaic ideal, which combined ecclesiastical hauteur and Jewish privilege; there was the publican ideal, that “money makes the man,” and that once wealthy, men could invite wit, genius, and learning to their board; there was the Roman ideal, which was prowess in arms, pride of military pomp, and glory of military fame; there was the Philosophic ideal, which mingled contempt for ignorance, with superiority in the schools; there was the commercial ideal, which meant illimitable luxury, and a merchant prince's palace on the Tiber banks; there was the gladiator's ideal, which meant earnest eyes looking down upon the fight, and beauty and fashion craving the victor's love. Everywhere around the Christ were ideals of life! and what was His own? “The cup which my Father hath given Me to drink, shall I not drink it.” “Father, not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” This was Christ's ideal of life! an ideal that had in it the only true happiness. “My meat and my drink is to do the will of Him that sent Me.” **III. YOUNG MEN WHO ACCEPT THE YOKE OF CHRIST PRESERVE THEIR MORAL INDEPENDENCE.** They are bound by the law of Christ, and the law of Christ alone. They are not compelled to accept all the yokes, either sanctioned by Puritan custom, or by Ecclesiastical tradition; nor will they look to the law of Christ as to a legal statute book. “Thou shalt not's” would fill not only this world, but the whole stellar system with books which they could not contain. The spirit of Christ is our only safeguard, our only life, our only law, and it is enough. **IV. YOUNG MEN WHO ACCEPT THE YOKE OF CHRIST PASS THE GREAT CRISIS OF LIFE.** All things are ready! The Atonement has opened wide the door of mercy, the Spirit of the living God has awakened the conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come; the soul is close to the Kingdom—almost saved. Oh! moment of appalling interest; here is an act we can delegate to none, the acceptance or rejection of Christ, on that moment hangs for each soul all the immortal sanctities of heaven, or the wailings of infinite grief. If probation come again in some future state, it is revealed in some Bible of which I have no

copy and is a Divine secret of which I have no key. Viewed in such a light as this, are you prepared now, yes! now; whilst Christ looks with the wistfulness of Divine love in your face, to obey His voice, "Take My yoke upon you." V. **YOUNG MEN WHO ACCEPT THE YOKE OF CHRIST MAKE A BLESSED USE OF THE FORMATIVE PERIOD OF LIFE.** "It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth." He is supple and sinewy in mind and body. Moreover it is not only the age of a rare enthusiasm, but of unenriched experience, the age when we too often obey a quick impulse, rather than a quiet conscience; an age too when we are apt to despise service as service. Let men be proud of work, proudest of it when it takes the form of service. Let us never forget that our Master came not to be ministered unto, but to minister; that the Lord of angels took on Him "the form of a servant." Never let service be considered vulgar! It is good to bear the yoke in youth; good not to begin where our father's left off, good that we should have something better than an ignorant physical athleticism, and be moral athletes, able to cope with difficulty, preferring an escutcheon with a spade on it to a purchased coat of arms. If, however, it is good to bear the yoke early, in earthly duties, it is good to give of our time, strength, and substance in early youth to the cause of the Redeemer. The great day alone can reveal how much depends upon our onlisting the rising manhood of England in the intelligent service of the Church. May God the Holy Ghost inspire the conviction, that loyalty to Christ demands not only the mental admission of His claims, but the moral wearing of His yoke. VI. **YOUNG MEN WHO PUT ON THE YOKE OF CHRIST GIVE PROMISE OF THE OUTCOME OF SALVATION.** The age is not wanting in appreciation of Christian life. The Church, however, in some of its most fervent Evangelical teachers, has made justification the only tenet in its creed. Christianity is life in God; it is more than the first paroxysm of penitential grief, more than the most passionate confession of sin, more than the thrill of a first love, more than occasional rhapsodies of glad emotion, more than an exquisite appreciation of the life of Christ: by this alone can the world know we are Christ's disciples, that "we keep His commandments." This is the true outcome of salvation, the test is not emotive in our feelings, nor mental in our intellectual belief alone, but practical, in yoke-bearing after Christ. (*W. M. Statham, M.A.*) **Yoke-bearing in youth:**—We adopt the principle of yoke-bearing in youth in the matter of intellectual education: why not in the matter of the higher moral training and chastening? Who puts off the learning of the alphabet until he is well advanced in life? Who at middle life could begin to commit to memory the things which almost seem to grow up in the mind of childhood and to abide there for ever? Yet the child must be constrained to undergo the discipline needful to the acquisition of elementary knowledge. His play must be curtailed, his inclinations must be rebuked, his indolence must be overcome; it is for the child's good that his parents should insist upon the acceptance of the yoke, otherwise the child will grow up to be an ignorant man. Is it not also true that in youth passion is most violent, and might hurry the young life into the uttermost excesses were it not curbed or cooled or in some degree restrained? Hence it is important that young life should be filled with work, should be almost exhausted at times by long-continued labour. The profit is not seen in the labour alone; behind all the labour there are moral advantages which can hardly be described in words: passion is subdued, pride is mortified, the energy of the will is turned into the right direction, and labour so treated becomes in the end pleasant, as music is pleasant, and easy as breathing is easy. What may be expected from one who has borne the yoke well in his youth? Chastened but not extinguished energy. Paul the apostle must be as energetic as was Saul of Tarsus, but the energy must be expressed along different lines. Mature saints are not expected to be demure, exhausted, feeble, indolent, or lacking in interest in the pursuits and ambitions of youth: they are expected to take a right view of those pursuits and ambitions, to set a proper estimate upon them. No man has borne his own yoke well who has lived without sympathy for those who are still feeling the burden. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) **Yoke-bearing:—**This is as good as a promise. It has been good, it is good, and it will be good for me to bear the yoke. 1. Early in life I had to feel the weight of conviction, and ever since it has proved a soul-enriching burden. Should I have loved the Gospel so well had I not learned by deep experience the need of salvation by grace? Jabez was more honourable than his brethren because his mother bare him with sorrow, and those who suffer much in being born unto God make strong believers

in sovereign grace. 2. The yoke of censure is an irksome one, but it prepares a man for future honour. He is not fit to be a leader who has not run the gauntlet of contempt. Praise intoxicates if it be not preceded by abuse. Men who rise to eminence without a struggle usually fall into dishonour. 3. The yoke of affliction, disappointment, and excessive labour is by no means to be sought for; but when the Lord lays it on us in our youth it frequently develops a character which glorifies God and blesses the church. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The necessity and advantage of early afflictions* :—The crosses we meet with are not the effects of blind chance, but the results of a wise and unerring providence, which knoweth what is fittest for us, and loveth us better than we can do ourselves. There is no malice or envy lodged in the bosom of that blessed being whose name and nature is love. He taketh no delight in the troubles and miseries of His creatures: He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. Holiness is the highest perfection and greatest happiness we are capable of: it is a real participation of the Divine nature, the image of God drawn on the soul; and all the chastisements we meet with are designed to reduce us to this blessed temper, to make us like unto Himself, and thereby capable to be happy with Him to all eternity. I. This will more clearly appear if we reflect on THE NATURAL TEMPER OF OUR MINDS, AND THE INFLUENCE WHICH PROSPEROUS OR ADVERSE FORTUNE IS WONT TO HAVE UPON THEM. 1. We are naturally proud and self-conceited; we have an high esteem of ourselves, and would have everybody else to value and esteem us. This disease is very deeply rooted in our corrupt nature: it is ordinarily the first sin that bewrays itself in the little actions and passions of children; and many times the last which religion enables us to overcome. Pride alone is the source and fountain of almost all the disorders in the world; of all our troubles, and of all our sins: and we shall never be truly happy, or truly good, till we come to think nothing of ourselves, and be content that all the world think nothing of us. Now, there is nothing hath a more natural tendency to foment and heighten this natural corruption, than constant prosperity and success. Sanctified afflictions contribute to abate and mortify the pride of our hearts, to prick the swelling imposthume, to make us sensible of our weakness, and convince us of our sins. 2. Another distemper of our minds is our too great affection to the world and worldly things. We are all too apt to set our hearts wholly upon them; to take up our rest, and seek our happiness and satisfaction in them. But God knows that these may well divert and amuse a while, they can never satisfy or make us happy; that the souls which He made for Himself can never rest till they return unto Him, and therefore He many times findeth it necessary either to remove our comforts or imbitter them unto us; to put aloes and wormwood on the breasts of the world, that thereby we may wean our hearts from it, and carry them to the end of their being, the fountain of their blessedness and felicity. 3. Another bad effect which prosperity is wont to produce in our corrupt natures, is, that it makes us forgetful of God, and unthankful of His mercies. We put very little value on our food and raiment, and the ordinary means of our subsistence, unless we have been sometimes pinched with want. We consider not how much we are indebted to God for preserving our friends, till some of them be removed from us. How little do we prize out health, if we have never had experience of sickness or pain! Where is the man who doth seriously bless God for his nightly quiet and repose? And yet, if sickness or trouble deprive us of it, we then find it to have been a great and invaluable mercy, and that it is God who giveth His beloved sleep. 4. Prosperity rendereth us insensible of the miseries and calamities of others. But afflictions do soften the heart, and make it more tender and kindly; and we are always most ready to compassionate those griefs which ourselves have sometime endured: the sufferings of others make the deepest impressions upon us, when they put us in mind of our own. II. TAKE NOTICE OF THE SEASON WHICH IS HERE MENTIONED AS THE FITTEST FOR A MAN TO BEAR AFFLICTION. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. We are all willing to put off the evil day; and, if we must needs bear the yoke, we would choose to have it delayed till we grow old. We think it sad to have our morning overcast with clouds, to meet with a storm before we have well launched forth from the shore. But the Divine wisdom, which knoweth what is fit for us, doth many times make choice of our younger years, as the most proper to accustom us to the bearing of the yoke. 1. It is then most necessary. For youth is the time of our life wherein we are in greatest danger to run into wild and extravagant courses: our blood is hot, and our spirits unstayed and giddy; we have too much pride

to be governed by others, and too little wisdom to govern ourselves. The yoke is then especially needful to tame our wildness and reduce us to a due stayedness and composure of mind. 2. Then also it is most supportable. The body is strong and healthful, less apt to be affected with the troubles of the mind; the spirit stout and vigorous, will not so easily break and sink under them. Old age is a burden, and will soon faint under any supervenient load. The smallest trouble is enough to bring down grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. And therefore, since we must meet with afflictions, it is certainly a favourable circumstance to have them at the time of our life wherein we are most able to endure them. 3. And, lastly, the lessons which afflictions teach us, are then most advantageous when we learn them betimes, that we may have the use of them in the conduct of our after lives.

III. THE PARTICULAR ADVANTAGE OF AFFLICTIONS WHICH IS MENTIONED IN THE TEXT: "He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him." The words are capable of a twofold interpretation, and both suit well with the purpose: for we may either understand them properly, of solitude and silence; or metaphorically, of patience and quiet submission; both of which are the good effects of sanctified and well-improved afflictions: and accordingly we shall say something to both. 1. Nature hath made us sociable creatures: but corruption hath carried this inclination unto excess; so that most persons think it an intolerable burden to be any considerable time alone. Though they love themselves out of measure, yet they cannot endure their own conversation; they had rather be hearing and discoursing of the most naughty and trivial things, than be sitting alone and holding their peace. Outward prosperity heightens this humour. When the heart is dilated with joy, it seeketh to vent itself in every company. Crosses, on the other hand, render a man pensive and solitary; they stop the mouth, and bind up the tongue, and incline the person to be much alone. (1) He who considers, on the one hand, the guilt we are wont to contract, and the prejudice which we sustain, by too much conversation with others, and, on the other hand, the excellent improvement we may make of solitude and retirement, will account it a good effect of afflictions, that they incline and dispose us unto it. In considering the evils of frequent conversation, we are not to prosecute the grosser and more scandalous vices of the tongue. We rather choose to mention such evils as are wont to be less noticed, and can be more hardly avoided. And, first, experience may teach us all, that much conversation doth ordinarily beget a remissness and dissolution of spirit; that it slackeneth and relaxeth the bent of our minds, and disposeth us to softness and easy compliances. Another prejudice we receive by society, is, That it fills our minds with noxious images, and fortifies our corrupt notions and opinions of things. When we are alone in a sober temper, and take time to reflect and consider of things, we are sometimes persuaded of the vanity and worthlessness of all those glittering trifles whereunto the generality of mankind are so sadly bewitched: but when we come abroad, and listen to the common talk, and hear people speak of greatness, and riches, and honour with concern and admiration, we quickly forget our more sober and deliberate thoughts, and suffer ourselves to be carried away with the stream of the common opinion. And though the effects be not so sudden and observable, yet these discourses are still making some secret and insensible impressions upon us. Thus also is our judgment corrupted about the qualities and endowments of the mind. Courage and gallantry, wit and eloquence, and other accomplishments of this nature, are magnified and extolled beyond all measure; whereas humility, and meekness, and devotion, and all those Christian graces which render a soul truly excellent and lovely, are spoken of as mean and contemptible things: for though men have not the impudence formally to make the comparison, and prefer the former; yet their very air, and way of discoursing about these things, sufficiently testifies their opinion. I shall mention but another of those evils wherewith our conversation is commonly attended. The most ordinary subject of our entertainments are the faults and follies of others. Were this one theme of discourse discharged, we would oft-times find but little to say. I scarce know any fault whereof good persons are so frequently guilty, and so little sensible. (2) But solitude and retirement do not only deliver us from these inconveniencies, but also afford very excellent opportunities for bettering our souls. The most profane and irreligious persons will find some serious thoughts rise in their minds if they be much alone. And the more that any person is advanced in piety and goodness, the more will he delight in retirement, and receive the more benefit by it. Then it is that the devout soul takes its highest flight in Divine contemplations and maketh its nearest

approaches to God. Little doth the world understand those secret and hidden pleasures which devout souls do feel when, having got out of the noise and hurry of the world, they sit alone and keep silence, contemplating the Divine perfections, which shine so conspicuously in all His works of wonder; admiring His greatness, and wisdom, and love, and revolving His favours towards themselves; opening before Him their griefs and their cares, and disburdening their souls into His bosom; protesting their allegiance and subjection unto Him, and telling Him a thousand times that they love Him; and then listening unto the voice of God within their hearts, that still and quiet voice, which is not wont to be heard in the streets, that they may hear what God the Lord will speak: for He will speak peace unto His people, and to His saints, and visit them with the expressions of His love. (3) But I would not be mistaken, as if I recommended a total and constant retirement, or persuaded men to forsake the world, and betake themselves unto deserts. No, certainly; we must not abandon the stations wherein God hath placed us, nor render ourselves useless to mankind. Solitude hath its temptations, and we may be sometimes very bad company to ourselves. It was not without reason that a wise person warned another, who professed to delight in conversing with himself. Have a care that you be keeping company with a good man. Abused solitude may whet men's passions, and irritate their lusts, and prompt them to things which company would restrain. And this made one say, that he who is much alone, must either be a saint or devil. Melancholy, which inclines men most to retirement, is often too much nourished and fomented by it; and there is a peevish and sullen loneliness, which some people affect under their troubles, whereby they feed on discontented thoughts, and find a kind of perverse pleasure in refusing to be comforted. But all this says no more, but that good things may be abused; and excess or disorder may turn the most wholesome food into poison. And therefore though I would not indifferently recommend much solitude unto all; yet, sure, I may say, it were good for the most part of men that they were less in company, and more alone. 2. Thus much of the first and proper sense of sitting alone and keeping silence. We told you it might also import a quiet and patient submission to the will of God; the laying of our hand on our mouth, that no expression of murmur or discontent may escape us. We cannot now insist in any length on this Christian duty of patience, and submission to the will of God; we shall only say two things of it, which the text importeth. (1) That this lesson is most commonly learned in the school of afflictions. (2) That this advantage of afflictions is very great and desirable; that it is indeed very good for a man to have borne the yoke in his youth, if he hath thereby learned to sit alone and keep silence when the hand of the Lord is upon him. There is nothing more acceptable unto God, no object more lovely and amiable in His eyes, than a soul thus prostrate before Him, thus entirely resigned unto His holy will, thus quietly submitting to His severest dispensations. Nor is it less advantageous unto ourselves; but sweeteneth the bitterest occurrences of our life, and makes us relish an inward and secret pleasure, notwithstanding all the smart of affliction: so that the yoke becomes supportable, the rod itself comforts us; and we find much more delight in suffering the will of God than if He had granted us our own. (*H. Scougal, M.A.*) *The necessity for early yoke-bearing*:—If a bullock is not broken in when it is young, it will never be worth much for the plough. The work will be galling for itself, and most unsatisfactory for the husbandman. If this be neglected, it is vain to attempt it by and by; the beast will only be fretted and irritated, and any work it is put to will be a failure. A traveller in the East graphically describes, as an eye-witness, the difficulty of getting an untrained ox to perform agricultural work. "I have frequent opportunities," he said, "of witnessing the conduct of oxen when for the first time put into the yoke. They generally made a strenuous struggle for liberty, repeatedly breaking the yoke, and attempting to make their escape. At other times such bullocks would lie down upon their side or back, and remain so in defiance of the drivers, though they lashed them with ponderous whips. Sometimes from pity to the animal I would interfere, and beg them not to be so cruel. 'Cruel,' they would say, 'it is mercy, for if we do not conquer him now, he will require to be so beaten all his life.'" (*J. Thain Davidson.*) *Deferring the yoke leads to regret in after years*:—It was the sorrow of Samuel Rutherford's later years, as it was of St. Augustine's, that he allowed himself to reach manhood before he yielded his heart to God. "Like a fool as I was," he says, "I suffered my sun to be high in the heaven, and near afternoon." Few things in the "Letters" are more

beautiful than the earnestness with which he beseeches the young to consecrate their freshest hours to eternity. "It was a sweet and glorious thing for your daughter Grissel to give herself up to Christ, that He may write upon her His father's name and His own new name." "I desire Patrick to give Christ the flower of his love; it were good to start soon in the way." He would have none to imitate him, "loitering on the road too long, and trifling at the gate." (*Alexander Smellie.*) *Youth the time for taking Christ's yoke*:—Live the bullock, we have to bend, we have to stoop, that the yoke may be put upon us, and this stooping is what none of us like. Our proud wills must be humbled; our old self must be crucified. There are few men who enter into the light and liberty of happy believers without knowing something of this inward conflict. It is well to have it over in early life. I remember an old and godly man who was much tried in the latter years of his life with spiritual depression, saying to me, "Ah, sir, it is not good to have to bear the yoke in one's old age." (*J. Thain Davidson.*) *Ideal education*:—Writing upon "Uppingham School" a recent author says: "Here a boy drops rank, wealth, luxury, and for eight or ten years, and for the greater part of these years, lives among his equals in an atmosphere of steady discipline, which usually compels a simple and hardy life, and in a community where the prizes and applause are about equally divided between mental energy and spiritual vigour. Here respect and obedience become habitual to him; he learns to regard the rights of others and to defend his own; to stand upon his feet in the most democratic of all societies—a boy republic. Above all, he escapes the mental and moral suffocation from which it is well-nigh impossible to guard boys in rich and luxurious homes." (*H. O. Mackey.*)

Vers. 28, 29. **He sitteth alone, and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him. He putteth his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope.**—*Solitude, silence, submission*:—Thus the prophet describes the conduct of a person in deep anguish of heart. When he does not know what to do, his soul, as if by instinct, humbles itself. He gets into some secret place, he utters no speech, he gives himself over to moaning and to tears, and then he bows himself lower and yet lower before the Divine Majesty, as if he felt that the only hope for him in the extremity of his sorrow was to make complete submission to God, and to lie in the very dust before Him. 1. In the time of great trouble HOLY SOLITUDE is commended to us. "Let him sit alone." I earnestly advise you who are under concern of soul to seek to get alone, and to be quiet and thoughtful in your solitude; not merely to be alone, but to sit by yourself like a person in the posture of thought. 1. I commend solitude to any of you who are seeking salvation, first, that you may study well your case as in the sight of God. If a true shepherd will not neglect his flocks and his herds, should not a wise man care about his thoughts, his feelings, and his actions? I implore you, do not let your ship go at full steam through a fog; but slacken speed a bit, and heave the lead, to see whether you are in deep waters or shallow. Sit alone a while, that you may carefully consider your case. 2. Get alone again, that you may diligently search the Scriptures. Alas, the dust upon many men's Bibles will condemn them! I beseech you, as sensible and reasonable beings, do not let God speak to you, and you refuse to hear. 3. Get alone, further, that you may commune with your God. After we have once learnt the way, we can commune with God anywhere,—amidst the roar and turmoil of the crowded city, or on the top of the mast of a ship; but, to begin with, it is best to be alone with the Lord. Oh, speak with Him at once! Perhaps five minutes' earnest speech with Him may be the turning-point of your life. 4. Get alone also, that you may avoid distraction. How often may even godly and gracious people talk upon some theme that may rob their fellow-believers of all the good they have received in God's house; and, as for unconverted persons, I am sure that, if they ever feel impressed under the Word, it will be their utmost wisdom to take care of that first impression, and not let it be driven away by foolish or frivolous conversation. Some of us are old enough to recollect the day before there were matches of the kind we now use, and early on a frosty morning some of us have tried to strike a light with flint and steel, and the old-fashioned tinder-box. How long we struck, and struck, and watched, and waited, and at last there was a little spark in the tinder, and then we would hold the box up, and blow on it very softly, that we might keep that little spark alight till we had kindled the fire that we wanted. That tenderness over the first spark is what I invite every-

one to practice in spiritual matters. II. The text goes on to say, that we should practice **SUBMISSIVE SILENCE**. "Let him sit alone and keep silence." 1. If the burden of sin is pressing upon thee, be sure to abstain from all idle talk; for if the idle talk of others, as I have reminded thee, can distract thy thoughts, how much more would thine own! 2. Keep silence also in another respect. Do not attempt to make any excuse for your sin. Oh, how ready sinners are with their excuses! There was a negro who used to get drunk, and he said that it was his besetting sin; but his brother negro said, "No, Sambo, it is your upsetting sin"; and so it was. He that does not want to get wet should not go out into the rain. Instead of your excuse making your case any better, it makes it worse; therefore, keep silence before thy God. 3. Keep silence from all complaining of God. No man is truly saved while he sets himself up as the judge of God; yet this is the practice of many men. Go, thou guilty one, sit thee still, and hold thy tongue, and bring thy rebellious heart to submission. Shall the flax contend with the fire, or the stubble fight with the flame? What canst thou do in warring with thy Maker? 4. Sit thou alone, and keep silence, next, from all claims of merit. There is no way of mercy for any one of us until we shut our mouths, and utter not a single boastful word, but stand guiltily silent before the Lord. 5. I think it is well, too, when a poor sin-burdened soul is silent before God, and unable to make any bold speeches. It would have been well if Peter had been silent when he said to his Lord, "Although all shall be offended, yet will not I." I like a man who knows, not only how to speak, but how to sit still; but that latter part is hard work to many. There came a young man to Demosthenes to learn oratory; he talked away at a great rate, and Demosthenes said, "I must charge you double fees." "Why?" he asked. "Why," said the master, "I have first to teach you to hold your tongue, and afterwards to instruct you how to speak." The Lord teaches true penitents how to hold their tongues. III. Now I shall ask your special and patient attention to the third point, which is, **PROFOUND HUMILIATION**. What can this expression mean? "Let him put his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope." 1. It means, first, that there must be true, humble, lowly, confession of sin. You say that you have been praying, yet you have not found peace; have you confessed your sins? This is absolutely necessary. Do not cloak or dissemble before the Almighty. Let all your sins appear. Take a lowly place; not simply be a sinner in name, but confess that thou art a sinner in fact and deed. 2. Further than that, when it is said that we are to put our mouths in the dust, it means that we are to give up the habit of putting ourselves above other people, and finding fault with others. I believe a sincere penitent thinks himself to be the worst man there is, and never judges other people, for he says in his heart, "That man may be more openly guilty than I am, but very likely he does not know so much as I do, or the circumstances of his case are an excuse for him." 3. It also means that we realise our own nothingness in the presence of God. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Vers. 31-36. **The Lord will not cast off for ever.**—*Comfort for the sorrowful*.—I. A **CHEERING ASSURANCE GIVEN**. 1. That God's abandonment of His people is only temporary. 2. That the favour with which he will visit them will be signal and abundant. II. AN **IMPORTANT REASON ADDUCED**. "For He doth not afflict willingly," &c. This may be inferred from, 1. His character. He is a God of love. 2. The relationship He sustains to His people. He is their Father. 3. Their sufferings are attended with many alleviations. Had He any pleasure in punishing us, so much mercy would not be mingled with judgment. 4. The object He has in view in afflicting His children. It is for their profit, that they might be partakers of His holiness. 5. His readiness to remove His chastening hand when the visitation has answered the end intended. III. A **GRACIOUS LIMITATION SUBJOINED**. "To crush under His feet all the prisoners of the earth, to turn aside the right of a man," &c. Whenever He afflicts, it is—1. Within the bounds of moderation. To "crush," expresses what is extreme and destructive (Isa. xxvii. 8; Jer. x. 24, xli. 28). 2. Never in violation of the principles of equity. "To subvert a man in his cause, the Lord approveth not." He is the righteous Lord, that loveth righteousness, and all He doeth is in accordance therewith. (*Expository Outlines*.) *Divine mercy in human affliction*.—I. THE **RELUCTANCE WITH WHICH THE AFFLICTION PROCEEDS FROM GOD**. "He doth not afflict willingly." Suffering is repugnant to His

benevolent nature, why then does He allow it to come? 1. Because it is according to the benevolent laws of the universe. Love has linked indissolubly suffering and sin together. The greatest calamity that could happen to the universe would be a dissolution of this connection. 2. Because sufferings have a disciplinary influence. They tend to quicken spiritual thought, loosen interest in the material, and throw the soul back upon itself, the spiritual and the everlasting. II. THE LOVING-KINDNESS WITH WHICH AFFLICTIONS ARE EVER ATTENDED. "Yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies." Divine mercy is always seen in sufferings. 1. In the slightness of the suffering compared both with the deserts and the enjoyments. How much misery does the sinner deserve? Let his own conscience answer. How little are his sufferings, compared with this! How much happiness does he enjoy every day! What are his pains, compared with the bulk of his enjoyments? 2. In the alleviations and sustaining ministries afforded under suffering. How much to alleviate suffering has the greatest sufferer, how many relieving ministries at hand—loving friends, medical science, &c., &c. (*Homilist*.) He doth not afflict willingly.—*Reasons for affliction*:—I. AFFLICTIONS ARE PECULIARLY INSTRUCTIVE. Grievances and pains are very unacceptable. Most men find it difficult to bear them with commendable patience. And as the mind is troubled under them, nothing is more natural than to inquire whence they come and why they are sent. And thus the mind is led away to God, and reminded of the justice of His character. If there had been no suffering here, if all around us was fair, and bright, and happy, every face dressed in smiles, and every heart bounded with joy, men would have asked where is there any proof of God's anger? of His aroused and operative justice? of His great displeasure against sinners? And by such courses of thought the natural atheism of the human heart would have fortified itself against the truth. II. GOD SENDS AFFLICTIONS UPON MEN FOR THE SAKE OF THEIR INFLUENCE AS THEY BEAR UPON THE PASSIONS AND PURPOSES OF LIFE. 1. Amid the prosperities of life, when pains, disappointments, and distress are strangers, pride is very apt to be strong and influential. The miseries of this life are sent to repress this pride. They rebuke it. They check it. They stand in its way and hinder its influences. Pain and pride do not thrive well together. Far from it. There is little manifest arrogance and haughtiness, or even ambition, on Cæsar's bed of sickness. When amid the burnings of his fever he cries: "Give me some drink, Titanius," like a sick girl, he is a very different man and different example from what he was at the head of his legions, his strong hand upon his sword. He cares very little now for his eagles—very little for glory. 2. These afflictions of life also repress worldliness of spirit. What a lecture a fever gives to it! or a funeral! What a lesson the graveyard reads in its ears! What a rebuke when the man bears to the tomb the son for whom he thought he was hoarding his thousands! 3. These miseries, too, have an influence upon disappointed ambition, envy, and such like. They are seen to be impartial. 4. Our miseries, too, affect our purposes. Indeed there are very few of our lost purposes that are formed without them. 5. Our afflictions tend strangely to impress us with a sense of our dependence on God. III. THE AFFLICTIONS EXPERIENCED BY THE PEOPLE OF GOD FURNISH OPPORTUNITY AND MEANS FOR THE CULTIVATION OF THE HIGHEST AND MOST DIFFICULT VIRTUES. If there were no instances of distress, we should have nothing to excite our pity. If there were no instances of want, there would be nothing to call forth our charity. If nobody injured or offended us, we should have nobody to forgive. Aside from something to distress or annoy us, the virtue of patience would not be called into action and cultivated. Our fortitude, if not much of our faith, could never be exercised at all, if there were no burdens to bear, no distresses to endure, no furnaces of trial to burn upon us. IV. HOW COULD YOU, THEN, JUDGE WHETHER YOU WERE A CHILD OF GOD OR NOT? The temper we have and the demeanour we exhibit in afflictions, and toward the afflicted, constitute more just criterions of our character than any other. If there were no afflictions here, we should have no "good Samaritan" to copy, and no "priest and Levite," whose irreligious example to shun. God may have sent us trials and filled His world with sorrows, not willingly, but to furnish us opportunity to test our faith and find whether we are on the way to heaven. V. AFFLICTIONS MAKE DEMONSTRATIONS OF MEN, PROOFS, EXHIBITS TO THE WORLD, OF THE POWER AND DIVINITY OF FAITH. The world needs such demonstrations. The wicked are not to be convinced by principles merely.

In trial grace brightens—it shines—it demonstrates. For this reason God sends trials. VI. IT IS JUST IN TIMES AND BY MEANS OF AFFLICTIONS, THAT GOD BESTOWS UPON YOU HIS MOST PRECIOUS GIFTS. (*I. S. Spencer, D.D.*) *Afflictive dispensations*.—I. THE SOURCE WHENCE THEY PROCEED. “He causes grief.” not the enemy of souls, but the Friend of sinners; not the tyrant of the hour, but the eternal Sovereign of the skies. Not a needless sigh ascends from the human bosom; not one unnecessary tear, which God originates, flows down the face of man. We are sure of this—1. From the infinite benevolence of His nature, and the mercy that characterises all His dispensations. 2. From the fewness of our afflictions compared with our deserts. 3. From the large aggregate of happiness which we all enjoy. 4. From the fact that many of our sorrows are self-originated. 5. From the direct statements of the written revelation. II. THE DESIGN FOR WHICH THEY ARE SENT. Their ordinary uses are—1. To discipline character. “This is all the fruit, to take away sin.” While we are under affliction, we are under a process of cure. 2. To prove principle. It does this to ourselves and to others. 3. To increase usefulness. Who visits the sick? Chiefly those who have suffered affliction. 4. To detach from the vanities of earth, and prepare the soul for heaven. III. THE ALLEVIATIONS BY WHICH THEY ARE ACCOMPANIED. 1. In the appointment of them you are privileged to discern and acknowledge the Divine hand. 2. In the endurance of them you are often favoured with peculiar supports and consolations. 3. In the final review you will assuredly have occasion to bless God for all. IV. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH THEY SHOULD BE MET. 1. An inquiring spirit. “Show me wherefore thou contendest with me.” Inquire into their causes, their tendency, and especially the influence which they exert upon your character. 2. A prayerful spirit. There is no time more favourable for the exercises of devotion, no time in which we are more likely to obtain the richest blessings, than the time of affliction. This is eminently a time in which God may be found. 3. A submissive spirit. 4. A thankful spirit. 5. A spirit of cheerful expectation and hope of better days hereafter. (*S. Thodey.*) *Origin of evil*.—I. THE EXISTENCE OF MISERY RECONCILED WITH THE BENEVOLENCE OF GOD. 1. You were created happy, by your own faults you became miserable; your Creator, notwithstanding, redeemed you from this state; and the only penance for your guilt is a mixture of misery with happiness, in that short interval which passes between the cradle and the grave. 2. Those sufferings to which we are exposed in this world, are absolutely necessary for the recovery of that perfection in which we were first created, and for the regaining of that dignity and purity which we forfeited by the fall. II. THE UNREASONABLENESS AND INGRATITUDE OF DISCONTENT AND DESPONDENCY. 1. They were not originally designed for us, but having been introduced by the folly and guilt of our first ancestor, they are necessary and unavoidable; and not only so, but they are in a high degree salutary and medicinal. 2. Though it must be allowed that some portion of misery will fall to the share of all men; that no prudence, virtue, or good fortune can entirely escape it; yet I believe that it may be assumed, and will hold true for the most part, that the hours which we spend in ease and happiness are greatly superior, in number, to those which are passed in misery and pain. 3. Many of the evils which are the subject of our hasty complaints, are brought on us by our own imprudence; disappointments frequently arise from unreasonable expectations; poverty is the general product of idleness; sickness is, in many instances, caused by intemperance; the loss of reputation, by vice or folly: in these cases, shame, one would think, should silence our murmurs, and prevent us from attributing to the constitution of human affairs what is only to be imputed to ourselves. (*G. Haggitt, M.A.*) *Nature and design of affliction*.—I. ALL AFFLICTION COMES FROM GOD. Every arrow which wounds the sons of men receives its commission from the skies, and never fails to strike its appointed mark: while infinite wisdom appoints, unerring power executes: and so it is, whether intermediate instrumentality be employed or not. Wicked men and wicked spirits are continually made the unconscious instruments of furthering the merciful designs of Almighty God, in this world of irregularities. They mean evil; but He overrules their agency for good: and so long as His watchful eye is upon them, and they act under His control and permission, in afflicting the children of men, the Church may say, with her Redeemer, in the depths of His expiatory sufferings, “The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?” II. AFFLICTION SHOULD BE REGARDED BY CHRISTIANS AS

NEEDFUL DISCIPLINE, OR AS SALUTARY CHASTISEMENT. It is true that if God saw fit, He could as effectually carry on the work of grace in the hearts of His people, and as speedily ripen them for the bliss of heaven, without, as with, the instrumentality of affliction: but then, we know that His general plan is to convey the promised influences of His Spirit through the medium of naturally operating causes. He brings persons under the sound of the Gospel, and then He makes the faculty of hearing a means of their becoming wise unto salvation: He softens a man's heart by affliction, and then, as in a prepared soil, He sows that precious seed which springs up in a rich and abundant harvest. And this is all that we mean, when we speak of trials as necessary for the people of God: they are necessary on the principle of that analogy which pervades the various dispensations of the Almighty, both in Providence and in grace. His watchful eye detects some irregular desire beginning to operate in the breast, or some evil passion which, like a flower in the bud, only waits to be acted upon by the influence of temptation, in order to be brought to maturity: and hence, like a wise and affectionate parent, He kindly interposes to prevent the threatening danger.

III. AFFLICTION, WHETHER IT COMES UPON THE BELIEVER IN THE WAY OF DISCIPLINE OR OF CHASTISEMENT, IS REGULATED, FROM FIRST TO LAST, BY INFINITE WISDOM AND UNBOUNDED MERCY. To Him all hearts are open: He is intimately acquainted with the peculiar temperament of individual experience: and He determines, with unerring accuracy, when, and how, and to what extent, the discipline or the chastisements of His grace are necessary, in each separate instance. (*W. Knight, M.A.*) *The infliction of evil upon mankind*:—Sorrow, pain, change, and death, affecting ourselves, affecting others, everywhere prevail. This fact we cannot alter. But in the manner in which we view it, our happiness, our improvement, are deeply concerned. That God could terminate such a state of things, is certain. That He does not, is equally certain. And yet, "He doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men." I. THE PROOFS OF THIS DOCTRINE. 1. The first proof that He cannot afflict willingly, or, as it is in the Hebrew, "from His heart," is found in His nature. Love can take no delight in our afflictions, and must ever be ready to mitigate or remove them. 2. We can trace all misery up to causes independent of the will and appointment of God. 3. In all cases we find more of mercy than judgment. You have sickness, but how much more health! pain, but how much more ease! disappointment, but how many gratifications! You sigh for a good which you have not; but how many do you actually enjoy! 4. The success of prayer in removing afflictions. II. MUCH AFFLICTION WILL BE FOUND TO REMAIN AFTER ALL; AND WE STILL WANT THE REASON OF IT. 1. To keep man in mind that God notices his sins, although He may delay their final punishment. Sin is no trifling evil. 2. To give a spiritual direction to our affections, by showing to us the vanity of the world. 3. To call good principles into exercise, and thus to prepare us for heaven. Faith, patience, sympathy for others, are all strengthened in affliction. III. THE LIMITATIONS BY WHICH IT IS GRACIOUSLY REGULATED. 1. He does not so afflict and grieve, as to crush under His feet the prisoners of the earth. Oh no. Our Lord has purchased liberty for the prisoners of the earth, and the Gospel is the proclamation of it. We are called forth into light and liberty, into joy and hope. 2. He doth not so afflict as "to turn aside the right of a man before the face of the Most High." The face of the Most High; the Shechinah, or visible glory of the Lord; symbolising the throne of grace in heaven; God accepting the oblation and offering of His Son for our sake, and appointing Him our Mediator, and giving us the covenant right of approaching to Him, with all our guilt and misery, that we may obtain the provided deliverance. And never does God turn away the exercise of this gracious right. In darkness, ask His light; in sorrow, inward joy; in temptation, strength and victory; in all pressing circumstances, help in thy time of need; in sickness, patience; in death, life; in all, submission. (*R. Watson.*) *The evils of life*:

—I. MANY OF THE EVILS WITH WHICH MEN ARE VISITED, BEING THE INSEPARABLE ATTENDANTS OF VICE AND FOLLY, ARE TO BE ASCRIBED TO THEIR OWN MISCONDUCT. Whence, for example, the disease and wretchedness of the voluptuous? Whence the ignominy that overwhelms the false and the unjust? Whence the fears that disturb the breasts of the guilty, and the heavy punishment that follows atrocious wickedness? Are they not evils into which men wantonly plunge? and do not they form a great proportion in the number of human woes? But while the evils which follow guilt are to be ascribed to the misconduct of

the guilty, they serve an important purpose in the moral government of the world; they set bounds to the destructive progress of vice, and often are the source of unspeakable good to the guilty themselves. Often they destroy our relish for sinful enjoyments, and turn the heart into another course. By withdrawing us for a little from the hurry of our guilty pursuits, they give us time to pause and consider, and thus the careless may be led to sober thought, and the criminal stopped in the midst of a career which would have ended in irrecoverable ruin. Even when remorse is awakened, though its pangs be severe, it is often the commencement of a new era in a man's life, and the forerunner of virtue and peace. II. WITH RESPECT TO THOSE EVILS WHICH DO NOT ARISE FROM GUILT, BUT ARE COMMON TO THE GOOD EQUALLY WITH THE BAD, THEY ARE USEFUL FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF OUR MINDS, AND FOR THE TRIAL AND CONFIRMATION OF OUR VIRTUE. Were there no hardships in our lot, no dangers to be encountered, no injuries nor calamities to be experienced; our contentment, our fortitude, our forgiveness, our resignation, virtues which so adorn the human character, would be untried and unknown. We may add on this point, that the frequent repetition of evils, sometimes in a milder, and sometimes in a more formidable shape, not only calls forth but confirms the virtue of good men. It is well known that when frequent returning opportunities of sinning are indulged, they produce a general tendency to vice: the heart becomes enslaved to corruption, and the fetters which retain it in bondage become too strong to be broken, without the most vigorous efforts. In like manner with respect to our good qualities, each succeeding act of virtue promotes the general tendency to goodness, and by repeated exercise, virtuous dispositions at length acquire a prevailing influence. III. THE EVILS OF LIFE ARE OFTEN THE IMMEDIATE SOURCE OF SOME OF OUR MOST REFINED ENJOYMENTS, CALLING FORTH THOSE EXERTIONS OF SYMPATHY WHICH ARE SO GRATEFUL TO THE SUFFERER. Visit the abode where such a man is labouring under the pressure of calamity, and where will you find a more improving spectacle? Are they not the best feelings of the heart, which dictate the prayer of resignation that ascends to God? Are they not the most sacred and endearing exertions, when affection marks the supplicating eye, and hastens to relieve, shares and alleviates the weight of sorrow, watches perhaps the last moments of the departing spirit, and sweetens the slumber of death? IV. THE EVILS OF LIFE SERVE A FURTHER IMPORTANT USE, BY LESSENING OUR ATTACHMENT TO THE PRESENT WORLD. Were heaven revealed in its full splendour, it would excite a fervour of mind amidst which the world would be utterly forgotten. But it is the will of God that our present duties be fulfilled, and therefore He hath drawn a veil over the glories of immortality. On the other hand, lest we should sink low amidst the pleasures of this life, and rest satisfied with them, we are visited with disappointment and calamity. Thus, without overwhelming us with the view of heavenly felicity, means are provided to make the prospect welcome to us, means peculiarly suited to a state of moral discipline; and think how much the hope of immortality would be banished from men's minds, if nothing occurred to weaken their attachment to the world. You may observe, moreover, the wise accommodation of sufferings to the period of life which we have attained. In youth, some strokes of adversity are sent to touch and awaken our minds. But as we advance in life, cares multiply, the things of this world present themselves in their true light, and we discover that trouble and uncertainty are part of the lot of man. When old age comes, and the period of our departure is at hand, the prospect is more and more clouded. Our earthly hopes fail, and what remains but to look beyond the approaching limits of our pilgrimage, and steadily to fix our wishes on the world to come? Of how much importance it is, that while we continue under our present preparatory discipline, our views should be directed forward to what finally awaits us, must be abundantly obvious. It assists us in opposing the power of temptation; it provides a rich treasure of pure enjoyment, it imparts an elevating and sanctifying influence to our minds, and thus corresponds with the great purposes for which our present state is appointed. (T. S. Hardie, D.D.) *Afflictions not accidental*:—A more melancholy, dirge-like plaint than that of this heart-broken prophet never fell from human lips. The lofty confidence of this suffering man in the fidelity and compassionate rule of God, his own bitter grief notwithstanding, is not less majestic than his sorrow is plaintive (vers. 22-26). Then comes this grand prophecy of a triumphant faith in the providence of a Divine compassion, under which all suffering is being

ministered with a purpose and mixed with a tenderness out of which emerge definite and healing results, as it is given in the text: "For the Lord will not cast off for ever: but though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion. For He doth not afflict willingly." This apparent contradiction between the Divine compassion and our human griefs, is to-day what it has been from the beginning, the standing problem, the bitter tragedy of human life. It has but one solution. Man as he actually is, is under a providential training for what it is possible for him to become. There are not two Gods, as the old Persian theosophy imagined, one good and the other evil, contending for man; but one God, contending with the evil that is in man. I. HERE, THEN, IS THE FACT THAT GRIEF IS THE HERITAGE OF MAN. 1. "The whole creation," said the apostle, "groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." Things have not altered much in their outer aspect in this matter since the apostle's time. Life is still the natural history of sorrow—man's life the bitterest of all. Man is born into a world where he does not so much find the trouble, as the trouble finds him. He is born into it, as the insect is born into the air. There are troubles which belong to the lot of individual man. And in this form they are the impartial inheritance of the race. All men, in whatever other things they may differ, agree in this, that they are alike born heirs to a patrimony of sorrow. If we escape it in one form, it meets us in another. There are the troubles which afflict the community, which fall upon the mass in its aggregation of families, neighbourhoods, communities, and nations; in which men indiscriminately seem to be the victims of a common affliction, of which no account can be given. The air gets contaminated, and chokes them wholesale with its pestilential fevers. Then there are the troubles which overtake us not unfrequently in the form of sudden calamities, the "terrible things" which, in the shape of accidents, explosions, fires, and shipwrecks, strike dumb a nation's heart. The judgments of God, or some strange license in the physical agencies of the universe, seem embattled against the interests and the safety of man. Suffering, like sin, has no vacation: it keeps no holiday. If in this huge complex of human grief it were true that the guilty only suffered, or that the profane and the incorrigible were chiefly its victims, one might suppose that a natural providence were somehow at work to guard the rights of the virtuous against the wrongs of the sinning. But as we have seen, "there is no discharge in this war." "There is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked." 2. Let us bear in mind that we have been speaking only of facts, not of causes or theories. And, further, let it be remembered that these facts are independent of any belief or disbelief as to their origin or purpose, and as to the relation, if any, which man holds to a moral government. They are not the creations of our Christian philosophy; and they are not the coinage of our Christian faith. They are a difficulty to the Christian philosopher; but they are equally so to the sceptic. They are to both equally facts. They pertain as much to the newest infidelity, as they do to the oldest Christian belief. Nor will atheism itself, the doctrine that chance or fate rules the destinies of men, afford its advocates even a momentary relief from the perplexing enigmas of fact. That doctrine, indeed, deprives us of a personal God, and, consequently, of all intelligent provision in the arrangements of the universe; it cuts us adrift from all relation to a fatherly providence. Instead of "the living God," "our Father in heaven," whose "tender mercies are over all His works," it gives us an unconscious, unintelligent, and eternal nature. In the place of creative law and a final purpose, it sets up a grim and remorseless fate. But it mitigates no evil; alleviates no pang; dries no tear in the sorrowful history of man. You ask: Why, if there be not only goodness but an Almighty justice reigning over the world and men, does it not stretch forth its hand to rescue and save from suffering? But why, if there be an Almighty chance, or fate, does it not do that? If thinking matter, or materialised thought be God, still it is a God under whose creative auspices man is born into a world of trouble. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Man is a fallen being, a self-ruined intelligence—poised and quivering between two infinities; from the one of which he is banished, for the other of which he is being trained. He is God's child, in exile. He suffers as a disrowned king. That is the one interpretation. Suffering and guilt are correlated facts. They mutually involve and explicate each other. II. WE HAVE, SECONDLY, THE DIVINE COMPASSION, IN ITS RELATION TO SUFFERING. "He doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men."

1. And here, first, it is claimed that all human suffering comes within the foreknowledge, and is under the control of God. While, as a fact, suffering in its origin and infliction does always hinge on to secondary causes in the fatalities and falsities of man; those secondary causes in their action do always, immediately or remotely, fasten on to the purpose of God. Afflictions are not an accident. "The curse causeless shall not come." The writers of the Old Testament Scriptures are never more emphatic than in their assertion of this double parentage of human sorrow. If they knew but little of the scientific set-up and mechanical movements of the laws of nature, they knew a great deal inspirationally of the supreme life, of which those laws were the appointed expression. They never ignore the immediate presence of God in His works; they never unfasten His governing hand from the smallest or the greatest events. They neither substitute the sovereignty of the Divine will for natural law; nor put natural law in the place of the Supreme will. As these writers uniformly teach, the plan of Providence takes in the universe as a whole. The individual is never forgotten in the multitude or the magnitude of the Divine cares. The interests of the man have a place in the complications of his actings in the world. "His eyes behold, his eyelids try the children of men." Even in what are held to be the accidents of life, those strange, unforeseen, and as we are apt to think, purely fortuitous events, which anticipate all our foresight and calculation, and which entail so constantly so large a measure of suffering upon the man and the community, the inspired writers have a place for the anticipation and the activity of a prescient providence. They are contingencies to us, a mere chapter of accidents; but not to the foreplanning and all-seeing mind of God. Surely there can be no absenteeism, no indifference, no incapacity in the all-perfect infinite God. Along the myriad antecedent lines of concatenated human agency at any point of space or time, He, indeed, is alone able to look. But that the first link and the last link and each intermediate link in the chain of human causes leading to that and similar catastrophes fasten on to the foreknowledge and governing will of God, we can accept on the testimony of His Word. We are speaking of foresight, of that prescient outlook of Providence, which takes all human occurrences out of the run of chance surprises, and puts them amongst foreseen and permitted events. There can be no accidents in the scheme of infinite thought; there can be no surprise to the intelligence that infinitely knows. We see only results. To God the beginning, with its antecedents all hidden and remote, is a presence.

2. Many of our troubles, probably most of them, have their causes in ourselves. They come within the Divine plan not as visitations which God foreordains, or directly inflicts; but as actualities which He foresees, emergent in the history of man. They would be equally facts if they were not foreseen: that they are foreseen does not necessarily make them facts. This is not to shut out all direct intervention on the part of God from the sufferings of man; it only puts in a protest against the notion that makes all suffering the direct and arbitrary infliction of God. Providence is the action of God through law; and, as a general rule, providential laws work best for him who works the best with them. They work—it may be silently and in secret—but they work surely against the man who works against them. There are laws of health, physical, and mental, which, if a man wilfully disregard or habitually transgress them, will work directly against and not for him. A man is intemperate in his habits; he lives in excess. Very well. Subsequent temperance may alleviate, but it cannot wholly exonerate him from the penalty of a long course of riotous living. In how many ways, and with what a perverse tenacity of wilful ignorance, we are violating these laws and are suffering bitterly and hopelessly in consequence, can be known only to God. That we do violate them, that many of our sad experiences are due to such violations, it would be idle to dispute. This suicidal raid on the economies of life, in spite of the warnings and protests of God, is one of our deadly sins. So, too, in what is called the mystery of sudden death. In the case of many a successful man of business, the cup is dashed from his lips just when its fragrant sweetness is being filled to the brim. Of course, everyone is shocked at the mystery of Providence which, in so arbitrary a manner, puts its arrest on the life of such a man. To God, it may be, all the mystery of the case is explained in that man's dogged determination to crowd the work of two lives into one. The engine-work of the brain was driven at high pressure; and so the machinery broke down.

3. But now there are troubles and afflictions—and these not few—which we must

consider only as the punishment of sin. "The Lord doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men." But then He does afflict and grieve them, when they offend. "He will not cast" them "off for ever." He will have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies." But the compassion is in the use of the rod, not in the withholding of it. We thus suffer because we sin. And, presumably, we all suffer in some form and at some time, because we have all sinned against some law or commandment of God. Do a wrong thing, with a bad intent,—and though you put the breadth of creation between you and it, the penalty will reach you. "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished." In the Old Testament Decalogue we have a summary of the moral statutes under which man is placed. And as these were intended to determine the actions of men and do determine them, all men keeping or breaking, or alternately breaking and keeping them; so the providence of God, as the guardian of law, deals retributively with men. May we not expect that God will claim the right to be heard, and to vindicate Himself and His works against the insults of men? No: God will not abdicate His throne because of the atheism of men. We may refuse to see any convincing proofs of His busy presence with us. We may openly deny that any such presence exists; or we may distress ourselves with a superficial reading of the many mysteries which are burdening the air with shrieks or breaking human hearts with grief. But that presence, if unseen and unrecognised by men, is immanent and real. God works in silence. He works and waits, on lines that stretch into the eternal. And now, what, in view of these conclusions, is the first sentiment with which we ought to fill our minds? Is it not that of profound thankfulness for that revelation in which the origin and the purpose of all human suffering are made known? In the meantime, let us always recollect this,—that the dealings of God with men are regulated and are to be interpreted by the fact that we are a race of sinners. And, finally, let us also remember that the issues of this strife between God and man are not all played out in the present world. They do not expire always in the waste of health, in the loss of friends, the wreck of property, the crumbling down of the pride of man. The last settlement will cover all the future; as it will explain all the past. Let us then be patient and submissive. "The Lord is at hand." (*John Burton.*) *God's afflictive dealings with His people*:—Whoever will consider the state of the world and human experience cannot but conclude that God is more concerned to make men holy than happy; for many are able to rest in their sorrows for the sake of their use and end, but no one finds rest in unholy delights. In sinful pleasure God follows man with a scourge; in sorrow, with balm. (*J. Pulsford.*) *God has no delight in human suffering*:—God is the greatest of Kings and potentates, but yet has nothing of a tyrant in His nature. It is no pastime to Him to view the miseries of the distressed, to hear the cries of the orphans or sighs of the widow. He seems to share in the suffering while He inflicts it, and to feel the very pain of His own blows while they fall heavy upon the poor sinner. Judgment is called God's "strange work," a work that He has no proneness to, nor finds complacency in. He never lops and prunes us with His judgments, because He delights to see us bare, but because He would make us fruitful. Common humanity never uses the lance to pain and torture, but to restore the patient. But now the care and tenderness of an earthly parent or physician is but a faint shadow and resemblance of that infinite compassion which God bears to His children, even in the midst of His severest usage of them. (*R. South.*)

Ver. 35. To turn aside the right of a man.—Man's rights and wrongs:—
I. MAN HAS RIGHTS. 1. Man has an inalienable right to the enjoyment of that happiness for which he was created. What is necessary to this? (1) Physical health. Where there is a diseased, enfeebled body there cannot be happiness. But what millions in this free country of ours, who have committed no crime, are doomed by the tyrannic force of commercial cupidity, and by the injustice of legislation, to spend their time in filthy garrets and in fœtid alleys. (2) Intellectual culture is essential to happiness. We have a mind as well as a body; nay, we are mind. There is no paradise for man where the tree of knowledge does not bloom, knowledge gives a new interest to life, a new meaning to the universe, a new sphere for the full play of our faculties. If, then, knowledge is essential to happiness, what is necessary to knowledge is a right. (3) A good conscience is a necessary element of happiness. He who surrenders his conscience to the dictates of others,

degrades his nature ; and he who is forced to lend his support to principles contrary to his own convictions is an insulted and an injured man. (4) Social respect is another element in happiness. Whatever tends to degrade a man in the estimation of his contemporaries is an infringement of this right. 2. Man has an inalienable right to those conditions essential to the discharge of his obligations. Duty meets us everywhere, it is ubiquitous, it meets us at home and abroad, in solitude and society, in business and in pleasure. The cardinal duties of our being may be put into three groups, domestic, civil, and religious. (1) The domestic group. The duty of filial reverence and love meets us at the beginning of our history, and is enjoined both by nature and the Bible. "Honour thy father and thy mother," is a mandate that not only rings in the Decalogue, but echoes ever more through natural reason and conscience. It is not incumbent on any child to honour morally ignoble parents, or to love those whose characters are false, and mean, and corrupt. Nor could they do so. Parental government, therefore, is based upon the right that children have to expect from parents the spiritually noble and pure. (2) The civil group. Outside of the domestic sphere, but lying close to its door, there is the great world of our fellow-creatures which we call society. This society has its institutions, its laws, and government. We live in this world, and we cannot live without it. Whoever is the chief administrator of the laws that govern society, whether placed in his supreme position by lineage or suffrage, for his whole life or for a certain period, he is the king, and we are commanded to honour and obey him. But this duty implies that the king is honour-worthy, and that his laws are righteous. (3) The religious group. The great duty that grows out of our relation to our Maker is this, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," &c. But this supreme obligation of humanity implies rights on man's part. If the Supreme Being requires me to love Him supremely He must furnish me with a revelation of Himself, and with capacities capable of understanding and appreciating that revelation. He must appear as the infinitely lovely One, the altogether beautiful, in order to kindle my highest affections. Now in relation to Him our rights are equal to our obligations. He has given us all that we require to fulfil the duties He demands. II. MAN HAS WRONGS. His wrongs are the antitheses—or rather, deprivations and violations of his rights. 1. How man's wrongs are inflicted. The despoilers of his rights may be divided into two classes, the external and the internal. (1) The external. Who and what outside of man deprive him of his rights ? Unrighteous government. Who can look at some of the laws of England without denouncing them as unrighteous ? Take the laws in relation to land. Take the laws in relation to labour. Honest labour is an institution of heaven. And is not that law unrighteous which, to support regal luxuries, and gorgeous pageantries, government pensions, huge naval and military establishments, despoils the honest worker of much of the produce of his labour ? Secular monopoly. Vast as are the resources of this earth, they are not boundless. It is the purpose of our Maker that all men should have an adequate, if not an equal participation in them. He, therefore, who appropriates to his own personal use an amount which would be sufficient to supply the wants of a number, is a monopolist, and interferes with the rights of the multitude. Social chicanery. It has been said that so rife is the ravenous greed and the unscrupulous dishonesty in society, that one can scarcely have a business transaction with any man without the liability of being cheated. Justice between man and man is generally torpid, and often extinct. The spirit of fraud and falsehood fills the air. (2) The internal. There are elements or forces in the human soul that are perhaps greater despoilers of rights than any that are without : in fact, the external tyrants derive their energy and continuance from them, outward despots would scarcely live were it not for the inward. Indolence. Perhaps in most men naturally the desire for rest is stronger than that for action. The lazy hang on others, they will fawn on and flatter tyrants, only let them have a little more "folding of the hands in sleep." Servility. This, indeed, is an offspring of the former. It means the loss of all sense of manly independency. Credulity is also the child of indolence : not until men rouse themselves to intellectual study so as to become qualified to form an independent judgment, will they free themselves from those fraudulent forces and impostures that "turn aside the right of a man." Intemperance in either form, eating or drinking, is one of the greatest despoilers of human rights. 2. How man's wrongs are to be removed. (1) Not by violent declamation against existing authorities. Demagogism has ever done more harm than good. (2) Nor yet can you regain your

rights by physical force. The real chains that fetter men are too subtle to be cut by the sword. (3) How then? By the promotion of sound knowledge. Popular ignorance is the cradle of tyrannies. By sound knowledge I mean primarily, a knowledge of the ethics of Christ. (*Homilist.*) *Might and right*:—I. *PITY SHOULD ALWAYS TEMPER PUNISHMENT.* 1. To prevent despondency. Despondency unmans men. 2. Punishment should always be tempered with pity that it may prove a discipline. The good have that comfort in adversity, that the worst that meets them here is intended for their good. 3. Punishment should always be tempered with pity, in consideration of the dignity and great possibilities of man's nature. He was created in God's image; he may be restored to the same image again. God punishes us in pity "for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness." II. *RIGHT SHOULD ALWAYS GUIDE MIGHT.* 1. Because the right will be just to a man's physical needs and his moral powers. To trample upon those who are down is brutal conduct. That is to let might crush the right. Those who are down should excite our pity, not incite us to perpetrate cruelty. 2. Because the right will respect man's religious requirements. 3. Because the right will teach men to respect the claims of their fellow-men and the truth. III. *JUSTICE SHOULD ALWAYS BE THE AIM OF LAW.* 1. Because the Lord is an eye-witness of all we do. Our most secret thoughts before ever they become actions are known to Him. 2. Because the Lord is pleased or pained with all we do. If we really and devoutly considered this how differently would we act frequently. 3. Because God will punish all wrong-doers. (*D. Rhys Jenkins.*) *The right of a man before God*:—There is a general impression that God does as He pleases without any reference to sanctions or immunities of ours. This, however, is far wide of the truth. God is never arbitrary. I. One of our rights with respect to God is *LIFE*. This is a natural right. It is written that when God created man He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life so that he became a living soul. In this particular man was created in the Divine likeness. His life was like a spark thrown off from the infinite life of Deity. It is impossible, therefore, to think of annihilation or of "conditional immortality" in connection with him. Our life is the only created thing in the universe that has not in it the seed and certainty of death. An oak may resist the storms of a thousand years, but it falls at last. Our bodies are never free from disease; it is only a question of time when each shall return to the dust as it was. But the soul has in it no seeds of decay. Its eyes never grow dim, its blood does not stagnate, and whenever the query is propounded, "If a man die, shall he live again?" its answer is instant, "I shall live and not die!" II. The second of our rights before God is *FREEDOM*. This again is a natural right. It belongs to us by virtue of the fact that God created us in his own likeness. In this again man is unique among all created things. The sun goes forth out of its chambers in the morning to run its race, and has no alternative. God speaks and it obeys. The sea rolls to and fro as He directs. But to you and me He says, "Thou shalt," and if I please I may make answer, "I will not." If He would win me He must reason with me. If He would capture me He must draw me with the cords of a man. If, notwithstanding His goodness, we persist in sin, He can only suffer us to have our way. "Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life." III. We are entitled to *THE FULL BENEFIT OF THE MORAL LAW*. This also is a natural right. We are normal beings. As God Himself is the source and centre of law, so we, being made in His likeness, are made under law; and we may claim all the benefits and privileges of it. There is, however, little comfort in claiming these privileges of the moral law. For what is law? "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." And what is justice? Eternal separation from God and goodness. We are sinners, all alike under the penalty of death. To stand upon our rights just here is to court despair. IV. Fortunately for us we have another right, not natural like the foregoing, but conferred, to wit, the right of *APPEAL FROM LAW AND JUSTICE TO THE MERCY OF GOD*. No one among us can presume to stand upon his merits. On Sir Henry Lawrence's tomb at Lucknow is this inscription: "Here lies a man who tried to do his duty. May God have mercy on his soul!" If he tried to do his duty why did he not ask for justice? Because, no matter how earnestly he had striven to live well, he had made a measurable failure of it. Mercy, therefore, was Sir Henry's only hope. He is a wise man who in like manner, after doing his best and being mindful of his shortcomings, casts himself with an utter abandon on the mercy of his God. I. This right of appeal is a conferred right. It is purely of grace. But once conferred it is inalienable. "Him that cometh unto Me"—

no matter how scarlet his sins—"I will in no wise cast out." 2. This right is the purchase of the Saviour's blood. But for His atoning work it could not, consistently with justice, have been conferred upon us. 3. This right is conditioned upon the exercise of faith in Jesus Christ. A man may do as he pleases about exercising this faith, but in default of it he lives obviously under the law and must take the consequences. (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*) *Justice*:—The cultivation of wisdom, courage, and temperance is necessary to the doing of justice, and the cultivation of justice reacts favourably on the cultivation of these other virtues. But, on the whole, those three first are personal; this is public. In cultivating the first three virtues, a man is looking within; in cultivating this fourth one, he is looking without and around. For justice is to render to everyone his due. It is the virtue of a man, not as he stands alone, but as he stands in society; and as he cultivates this virtue, he has to keep his eye upon all his fellow-creatures, his superiors, inferiors, and equals, and on all the circles of society in which he stands, such as the family, the city, the nation, and the Church. As man has relations to other creatures beneath him and to other beings above him, as well as to his fellow-creatures, it has sometimes been proposed to include in justice the duties of man to animals, and the duties of man to God. I notice in some of the newer books on ethics, that the subject of cruelty to animals is discussed in connection with justice, and in many of the older books, in the writings of the schoolmen, and especially in the *Summa* of Thomas Aquinas, the duties of man to God are not only included in justice, but made the principal part of it: all parts of Divine worship, for instance, being discussed under this head. But it seems to me that it is better to limit justice to the duties of human beings to one another. This is a wide enough field. It comprehends the mutual duties of parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, friends and neighbours, clergy and laymen, employers' and employed, rulers and subjects, and others too numerous to mention. If anyone in all these relationships were a model man, then he would be a perfect man, and hence, justice has often been treated as if it were the whole of virtue; and even Aristotle, in an unusual outburst of enthusiasm, says: "It is more beautiful than the morning or the evening star." When justice is defined as rendering to every one his due, that might seem a very simple affair, but it is not so simple as it looks; and this you immediately begin to realise if you ask what is due to any other person, because the question always slips in, "And what is due to me?" That is what makes it so difficult to keep the balance straight—the bias in favour of self. Note I. The justice of the law of the land. II. The justice of public opinion. III. The justice of conscience. IV. The justice of Christ. That everyone should get his due is so essential to human welfare, that in every country in the slightest degree above the level of barbarism, the very best brains have been set to determine what justice is, and the united strength of the community to enforce it. In ancient Rome, for instance, the Twelve Tables were set up in the market-place, that everyone might read them, and there, in the plainest words, the citizen was told his duty, and was made acquainted with the penalties of transgression. In our own country and in other civilised countries, picked men are brought together in Parliament, who spend their time year by year, defining what justice is. Law courts are set up; judges and juries sit; lawyers plead, to bring special cases under the general laws which Parliament has enacted; and prison and punishment exist for the purpose of bringing home to the general mind the majesty of justice. These institutions in our midst form a school, to which we are all sent, that we may learn to give to everyone his due. The law of the land has been our schoolmaster, telling us what to do and what not to do, and telling us effectually; and the very unconsciousness of our minds as to our having anything to do with the police and the prison, is just the evidence of how well this schoolmaster has done his work. In all civilised countries the justice of the law of the land is an inheritance from many centuries, during which the best brains of the country have been set apart to determine what justice is. In our own law, extremes of wisdom mingle, derived on the one hand from the classical nations, and on the other hand from our Teutonic ancestors. And yet, in spite of all that has been done, and is being done, from year to year, the law of the land is a very imperfect embodiment of justice, and a man may all his life keep out of the clutches of the police, and yet be an extremely unjust man. If a man steals a pound-note from his neighbours, the law will set its whole machinery in operation to deal with him, but the very same person may, by the arts of temptation carried on for many years, make

the son of his neighbour a drunkard, and his daughter something still worse, and yet the law of the land may not say a single word. A man may all his life keep wide of the clutches of the law, which may never have one word to say to him; yet society may know him to be guilty of deeds which it intensely despises, and will not allow to be committed with impunity. It does not fine or imprison, but it turns its back on him. Thus, silently but sternly, society punishes the man who is known to be breaking the eighth commandment, and especially the woman who is known to be breaking the seventh commandment. It is often very cruel—at all events, it looks cruel—and yet on the whole it is beneficent, and the world is a far more habitable place because of the school of public opinion into which all have to come. Then there is the school of conscience. There are holes in the net woven by public opinion, just as there are in those woven by the law of the land, far worse than that even. There are many cases in which public opinion commands things it ought to forbid, and in which it forbids the things that it ought to command. But perhaps a custom established in public opinion is more difficult to deal with than a wrong statute. The appeal from it, however, is to the conscience of the individual, and this is the third school into which we all have to pass. If a man is doubtful about what is right and what is wrong, let him simply retire with the question into his own breast, and ask, What ought I to do? and if he is really willing to do what he knows to be right, he will very seldom be without the right answer. This often is a far sterner tribunal than either that of public opinion or the law of the land. The great interest of religion is to strengthen the conscience, so that a man may feel that in its presence he is standing before a more august judge than if he were in any court of law, or than if he were surrounded by a whole theatre of spectators. "Whatever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." That is the soul of justice. As I have just quoted the golden rule, it might be thought we had already got to the justice of Christ. Jesus was a moralist. He was the heir and successor of the prophets. He denounced wrong with a plainness never elsewhere exemplified in the world. He emitted many rules of justice, and the golden rule among them. Yet that was not the principal lift He gave to justice. It is well to understand that. There are things that make it easy to give to any one his due, or even perhaps a little more than his due. There is not a town in the world where the well-dressed do not receive more courteous treatment than the ragged. That is human nature. I dare say it is sometimes contemptible, but at all events it is a good thing to take advantage of it for those at the opposite extreme of society. What Jesus did to secure justice for the common man, was to raise the estimation of the common man. If the poor receive scanty consideration because there is nothing about them to attract attention, on the other hand, they will receive respect and attention if they are invested with dignity, and none can take in the teaching of Jesus Christ without recognising that the humblest belong to that humanity which He took into His heart, and for which He sacrificed His life. And if thus we look at our fellow-creatures through the eyes of Jesus Christ, if we see God in them, then we have a new and the finest of all reasons for treating them with justice. Let us take for an illustration that which we are all thinking so much about in the present day, the relations of employers and employed. What do these four kinds of justice say about what the employer owes to the employed and what the employed owe to the employer? Take the law of the land; what it says is very brief and to the point; it just says to the employer: "Pay that thou owest," and to the employed, "Thou shalt not steal." There are multitudes both of employers and employed to whom that is perfectly simple, but are there not others to whom these simple statements are the very thunder of God? Then public opinion goes a good deal further, although its voice in this case is divided. There is an opinion of employers which employers, perhaps, listen to too exclusively, and there is a public opinion of the employed to which they, perhaps, listen too exclusively. But there is a wider public opinion that is more impartial, and I think I should say that it frowns upon the employer of labour who is not endeavouring to bring the conditions of labour in his business up to the best that has been attained in the same business; and this wider public opinion frowns upon the employee if he does not do his best. Outside public opinion in such cases is apt to be only partially informed, and its decisions need correction by larger knowledge; but I should say that on the whole they are wholesome; and it is good for both sides that the voice of public opinion is to be heard. There is the appeal, though, for both employer and employed, to conscience. A man can go into his own breast

and ask, What is my duty? What would God like me to do? And then there still remains the justice of Christ. What would Christian principle say in this case? It would remind the employer that what are called his "hands" are in reality immortal beings, and therefore ought to be spared as much as possible things such as Sabbath labour and excessive hours, which secularise and brutalise; and bid servants hear the voice of Christ behind them as they labour, "Whosoever ye do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord and not unto men." I am not saying that even with the help of all these four kinds of light the problem of justice is always easy. I do not think it is. It seems to me to be specially difficult where, not individuals, but large bodies of men are concerned. But it is only by keeping these four lights streaming down upon life that the relations of men will become more just, and so more sweet, and that the individual will be prepared to appear before that tribunal where all the judgments of this earth will be reconsidered, and where a decision will be given from which there is no appeal. (*J. Stalker, D.D.*)

Ver. 37. Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?—God's Word supreme:—Here we are called upon to produce instances in which man's word has prevailed against the Word of God. Has any man commanded the sun to go backwards, and the sun has obeyed the instruction? Has any man commanded the seasons to change the order of their procession, and have they changed accordingly? Has any man been able to reverse moral duties, moral actions, and moral consequences, so that evil shall end in joy, and iniquity shall conduct to rest and heaven? The Lord asks for the production of evidence by which people may be able to judge as to moral duty and moral consequence. The interrogation assumes a gracious and initial fact, namely, that the Word of the Lord alone can stand fast, and ultimately and completely prevail in the direction and settlement of human affairs. Has this assumption the justification of history? If so, see what wondrous inferences may be drawn from that justification! Let us at once inquire for the Word of the Lord, and study it, and exclude from our ears all other voices, because in the word of the Lord alone is complete wisdom, and in the testimony of the Lord is an assured protection. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 38, 39. Out of the mouth of the Most High proceedeth not evil and good?—God and evil:—The eternal problem of the relation of God to evil is here treated with the keenest discrimination. That God is the supreme and irresistible Ruler, that no man can succeed with any design in opposition to His will, that whatever happens must be in some way an execution of His decree, and that He, therefore, is to be regarded as the author of evil as well as good—these doctrines are so taken for granted that they are neither proved nor directly affirmed, but thrown into the form of questions that can have but one answer, as though to imply that they are known to everybody, and cannot be doubted for a moment by anyone. But the inference drawn from them is strange and startling. It is that not a single living man has any valid excuse for complaining. That, too, is considered to be so undeniable that, live the previous ideas, it is expressed as a self-answering question. But we are not left in this paradoxical position. The evil experienced by the sufferer is treated as the punishment of his sin. What right has he to complain of that? Quite a number of considerations arise out of the curious juxtaposition of ideas in this passage. In the first place, it is very evident that by the word "evil" the writer here means trouble and suffering, not wickedness, because he clearly distinguishes it from the sin the mention of which follows. That sin is a man's own deed, for which he is justly punished. The poet, then, does not attribute the causation of sin to God; he does not speculate at all on the origin of moral evil. Meanwhile a very different problem, the problem of suffering, is answered by attributing this form of evil quite unreservedly and even emphatically to God. Now, is there not something reassuring in the thought that evil and good come to us from one and the same source? There must be a singleness of aim in the whole treatment of us by providence, since providence is one. Thus, if only as an escape from an inconceivably appalling alternative, this doctrine of the common source of good and evil is truly reassuring. We may pursue the thought further. Since good and evil spring from one and the same source, they cannot be so mutually contradictory as we have been accustomed to esteem them. They are two children of a common parent; then they must be brothers. But if

they are so closely related a certain family likeness may be traced between them. This does not destroy the actuality of evil. But it robs it of its worst features. If it is so closely related to good, we may not have far to go in order to discover that it is even working for good. Then if evil and good come from the same source it is not just to characterise that source by reference to one only of its effluents. We must not take a rose-coloured view of all things, and relapse into idle complacency, as we might do if we confined our observation to the pleasant facts of existence, for the unpleasant facts—loss, disappointment, pain, death—are equally real, and are equally derived from the very highest Authority. Neither are we justified in denying the existence of the good when overwhelmed with a sense of the evil in life. Is it only by accident that the poet says "evil and good," and not, as we usually put the phrase, "good and evil"? Good shall have the last word. Evil exists; but the finality and crown of existence is not evil, but good. The conception of the primary unity of causation which the Hebrew poet reaches through his religion is brought home to us to-day with a vast accumulation of proof by the discoveries of science. The uniformity of law, the co-relation of forces, the analyses of the most diverse and complex organisms into their common chemical elements, the evidence of the spectro-scope to the existence of precisely the same elements among the distant stars, as well as the more minute homologies of nature in the animal and vegetable kingdoms, are all irrefutable confirmations of this great truth. Moreover, science has demonstrated the intimate association of what we cannot but regard as good and evil in the physical universe. Thus, while carbon and oxygen are essential elements for the building up of all living things, the effect of perfectly healthy vital functions working upon them is to combine them into carbonic acid, which is a most deadly poison; but then this noxious gas becomes the food of plants, from which the animal life in turn derives its nourishment. Similarly microbes, which we commonly regard as the agents of corruption and disease, are found to be not only nature's scavengers, but also the indispensable ministers of life, when clustering round the roots of plants in vast crowds they convert the organic matter of the soil, such as manure, into those inorganic nitrates which contain nitrogen in the form suitable for absorption by vegetable organisms. The more clearly we understand the processes of nature the more evident is the fact of her unity, and therefore the more impossible is it for us to think of her objectionable characteristics as foreign to her being—alien immigrants from another sphere. Physical evil itself looks less dreadful when it is seen to take its place as an integral part of the complicated movement of the whole system of the universe. But the chief reason for regarding the prospect with more than satisfaction has yet to be stated. It is derived from the character of Him to whom both the evil and the good are attributed. We can go beyond the assertion that these contraries spring from one common origin to the great truth that this origin is to be found in God. All that we know of our Father in heaven comes to our aid in reflecting upon the character of the actions thus attributed to Him. The account of God's goodness that immediately precedes this ascription of the two extreme experiences of life to Him would be in the mind of the writer, and it should be in the mind of the reader also. The poet has just been dwelling very emphatically on the indubitable justice of God. When, therefore, he reminds us that both evil and good come from the Divine Being, it is as though he said that they both originated in justice. The last verse of the triplet startles the reader with an unexpected thought. The considerations already adduced are all meant to check any complaint against the course of providence. Now the poet appends a final argument, which is all the more forcible for not being stated as an argument. At the very end of the passage, when we are only expecting the language to sink into a quiet conclusion, a new idea springs out upon us, like a tiger from its lair. This trouble about which a man is so ready to complain, as though it were some unaccountable piece of injustice, is simply the punishment of his sin! The deserts of the city are only the deserts of her citizens. It will be for everybody to say for himself how far the solution of the mystery of his own troubles is to be looked for in this direction. A humble conscience will not be eager to repudiate the possibility that its owner has not been punished beyond his deserts, whatever may be thought of other people, innocent children in particular. There is one word that may bring out this aspect of the question with more distinctness—the word "living." The poet asks, "Wherefore doth a living man complain?" While the sufferer

has his life preserved to him he has no valid ground of complaint. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*) *Through repentance to faith*:—Nothing could be more dismal than the opening of this third lament over the ruin which had befallen the Holy City, and the dire calamities which had overtaken her people; but there is some radiant shining at the heart of it. One side of a mountain is often wrapped in clouds, while the other is bathed in noonday brightness. "I never have a chagrin," said Goethe, "but I make a poem of it." Some of the divinest poems we know have been the result of the saddest mortifications of life. The author sings from the heart of a fiery experience of his own, as well as that which he has shared with his nation. He comprehends the depths if not the heights of human experience, and yet he has "kept the faith." He can still declare that the Lord is his portion, and that his mercies are a "multitude," "new every morning." Ah! these are the men to speak to us about the compassion of God: men who have had to "climb the climbing way," and who declare the truth in tones that were born in the darkness and sorrow of the night. It is easy enough for most of us, whose lives have fallen in pleasant places, to talk to the broken-hearted about the love of God, and to persuade ourselves that He is the Father of us all and infinitely good. But if we have taken a light skimming view of life, if we have lived where it is "always afternoon," it becomes us to be silent, or to speak only in the name of those who have faced the sternest realities, and have yet believed. We can listen with patience to these ancient seers. They speak without mocking the world's trouble. They have stood where life wails its saddest notes and have not lost hope. True, this man had been tempted to believe, in one dark moment, that though God was leading him, He was against him; but when we follow him into the light when his night is past and "jocund day stands tip-toe on the mountains," we hear him speak of the compassions which "fail not." Oh, this is faith, is it not, when a man can stand face to face with all the contradictions of life, face to face with his own unbelief, and say, "I will not let Him go; I will have God in the whole of my life, in its tragedies as well as in its bliss, in its broken fortunes as well as in its sunny days"? "Out of the mouth of the Most High cometh there not evil and good?" "For though He cause grief yet will He have compassion, according to the multitude of His mercies." This is the faith that overcomes all repining. The Hebrew singer is one with the great prophets in this, that he is in no confusion about the source and meaning of Israel's trouble. He does not find the good hand of God in His deliverances alone. There is mercy even in the exile; in the sweeping disasters which have overtaken the nation. He who has been with His people in the calm is with them in the storm. Nay, He creates the storm, and causes the grief, and the "living" man has no ground of complaint though he be punished for his sins, for "the wages of sin is death" and it is "of the Lord's mercies" that he is "not consumed." And here is the key to the man's faith. These are not songs of sorrow alone; they are songs of confession and repentance, and therefore of hope. Here are the Jews in Babylon far away from the city they love. Their hearts are broken and their eyes are dimmed with tears; but they are tears of remorse leading to a searching of heart and a trying of their ways. The author would have them believe that exile is the outcome of their sin. It is not faithfulness that has compassed their downfall. The Lord has afflicted Zion not "willingly," but "for the multitude of her transgressions." He has suffered His people to go into exile that it may work its moral discipline and bring them back to confidence in Him, and to righteousness of life. "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord." There is some suffering, it does not need to be said, that is not for punishment. The sharpest pang of the singer as he thinks of the miseries of Israel comes from the cry of suffering children. But thinking not of children but of men and women, it is a commonplace to say that some of the noblest and saintliest lives have been shaped in affliction. "It is the accent of self-righteousness that finds in all your suffering the punishment of sin. A man whose heart has never been broken should have little to say to another man of his sins." And yet, surely, no man need ask why he suffers. If you have sinned, your own heart will tell you plainly what is the sin for which you suffer. If you have not sinned, you will have something still to do with your sorrow. There were some devout Jews who were not the cause of Israel's exile, and they too had lessons to learn which have enriched all posterity. But the lesson for all of us is this: that transgression leads to exile; that the broad way narrows; that to the man who persists in sin there must come a day when he will be confronted by fearful threatenings and apprehensions,

and when the judgments of the Most High will breathe within him their Divine protest against his sin. He whose compassions "fail not" can yet cause grief. The Most High sends forth evil as well as good. In the heart of the Father dwells a most exacting righteousness, that will "by no means clear the guilty" until they have acknowledged their offence. Oh listen; there is suffering which is for sin. This man is speaking of facts; addressing living men, conscious of grievous wrongdoing, bidding them take all the punishment honestly and humbly, and count it a mercy "new every morning" that a throbbing heart and beating pulse are God's assurance that He will have compassion, if they will return to the Lord. The one hope of our coming to this faith in His compassions is in confession and repentance. The Gospel of forgiveness and peace will never find the man who does not know the bitterness and guilt of sin. The experiences we have with conscience are to produce in us that "godly sorrow" which "worketh repentance unto salvation." This, indeed, is the Gospel for all of us. Whatever be our trouble repentance is our first need. You may not be able to trace your sorrow to any particular sin. It may not be due to any sin of yours at all; but I tell you, the one spirit to which God's reason for causing any grief is never revealed, is the spirit that has not known and will not know repentance. Who are we, the best of us, to say that this or that trial of life has nothing to do with our sin? Nay, it sometimes troubled these holy men of old, lest when they had confessed the sin of which they were conscious, there should be lurking within them latent evil, beyond their finding out, and only to be revealed to them by Him from whom nothing is concealed, who will have "truth in the hidden parts." "Search me, O God," they cried, "and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any way of wickedness in me." It is only to the penitent soul that the secret of the Lord's compassions can be revealed; you cannot believe that "deep love lieth under these pictures of time," if you are among "the wise and prudent"; but if you are among the "babes," of a humble and receptive spirit, the day will come when you can say, in the face of every perplexity, "even so Lord, for so it seemeth good unto Thee." These, I say, are the men to speak to us about the compassion of God. They know the love that passeth knowledge, for they know the sin that love bears. And Divine love cannot further go than that. It was for this He came, who was "a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief"; for this that He stood in dark Gethsemane and died the death of the Cross. And when you and I stand with Him there, and enter into the fellowship of His suffering, then all life is transformed for us. There is something for the heart to rest upon in the deepest distresses. We can go bravely to our encounter with whatever shall come to us, for He is with us who has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Has the Most High caused you any grief? Surely He has! There is some pathetic thing concealed in every heart. Then what will you do? Will you complain, will you resent it as a bitter and undeserved wrong? Will you go on to the end remembering nothing but "the wormwood and the gall"? Or will you say, "Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts, send whatsoever ordeal Thou wilt, so that at the last I may know thy salvation"? Then you are on the way to that attitude of soul which is faith. (*John Holden, M.A.*)

Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?—*Wherefore complain in affliction*:—This question suggests two considerations; each of which demonstrates the injustice of the complaint. Why should a living man complain?—a living man! Life is still left thee; and of whatsoever thou hast been stripped, there is such a counterpoise in the continuance of life that complaint must be groundless. "A man for the punishment of his sins!" There hath nothing befallen thee saving the just recompense of thy misdoing. How can a complaint against justice be itself just? Thus are these two arguments of the text demonstrative of the unfairness of human complaint when the dealings of the Most High pass under review. And these two arguments we will apply, first, to God's general dealings; and, secondly, to His individual.

I. How easy and how common is to it discourse in a QUERULOUS STRAIN ON THE FACT OF OUR BEING MADE TO SUFFER FOR A FOREFATHER'S TRANSGRESSIONS, AND ON THE FACT OF OUR DERIVING A POLLUTED NATURE FROM GUILT IN WHICH PERSONALLY WE TOOK NOT ANY SHARE. And we do not deny that the question of original sin is one of great difficulty; and that there requires a chastened and subjugated intellect ere the doctrine can be received in its full and scriptural extent. Nevertheless the transactions of paradise were not so dark and unintelligible that we can decipher nothing of the fitness and justice

of the present dispensation. Let it be remembered that not only was Adam the natural parent of the human race; he was also their federal representative; he stood forth as their head, so that by his obedience they were to stand, and by his disobedience to fall. And no appointment could be presented unto the human population with so great a likelihood of duty and blessing. Had the choice been in our power, we would gladly have given our fate into the keeping of Adam; stimulated as he must have been to obedience by so rich a deposit. For there was an infinitely greater probability that Adam, with the fall of millions committed to his keeping, would have watched diligently against the assaults of temptation, than that any lonely individual of his descendants, left to obey for himself, and disobey for himself, should have maintained his allegiance and preserved his fidelity. Therefore do we say, that in appointing mankind to stand or fall in Adam, God dealt with them by a measure of the widest benevolence. No other arrangement can be conceived which would have been equally likely to have advanced their well-being. But if so, complaint is at once removed by the second consideration which the text suggests. It is for the punishment of our sins that we are born the children of wrath and condemnation; and, if for just punishment of our sins, by what right do we complain? If it be in unison with the attributes of God that we should all be reckoned to have taken share in Adam's transgression, it follows that whatever there be of bitterness in our birthright, it has been imposed only as a punishment of sin; and all complaint at our condition is complaint against justice, and therefore itself must be unjust. And this one part of the question of Jeremiah applies itself to reproof of complaint at God's general dealings with man; namely, the part which represents suffering as the punishment of sin. Will not the other part do the same? "Wherefore doth a living man complain?" You learn that the threatening by which Adam was warned in tasting the tree of knowledge was most explicit and decisive, whereas the mode in which the threatening was executed seems hardly to accord with the denunciation, "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die," was the threatening; but Adam died not on the day that he ate, though, we believe, that he then became liable to death. And we may well suppose that the actual infliction of death was suspended through the interposition of the Mediator; and that when Adam sinned, and with him the whole race of which he might be the progenitor, it was only because Christ Jesus had undertaken from all eternity to achieve redemption that the guilty pair were not immediately destroyed. And, therefore, I can never feel within me the boundings of life, nor avail myself of the furniture of mental endowment, nor survey the varied loveliness of creation, nor mark the springing of flowers, nor hear the warbling of birds without being reminded that I am reaping the fruits of the Mediator's passion; for unless there had been His omnipotent interposition, the original curse might have received literal execution; and the throbbings of life have ceased to beat throughout this creation. If our very life have been given to us only in return for the marvellous humiliation to which Deity was subjected by tabernacling in the flesh, we have all been the subjects of a loving-kindness so vast, so transcendent, so overpowering, that it were base effrontery to describe ourselves as having cause of complaint against God. Living men—living only because Christ died—"wherefore should they complain?" Yes, you may argue, if you will, that to a great mass of the human race life is no blessing at all; but we meet you upon this point. We affirm, on the contrary, that life is so invaluable a blessing that all of us have cause to join heartily in the general thanksgiving of our Church, "We bless Thee for our creation." Is not life then a blessing? Does it cease to be a blessing just because I may debase, and prostitute, and desecrate it? Am I not rather warranted in declaring that life is so vast a blessing that it is a counterpoise to all those disadvantages which are consequent upon the fall; so that he who is disposed to arraign God's general dealings with his race, may justly at once be silenced by the interrogation of our text? Yes, it may in the first place most truly be said, that as the children of a disobedient race, whatever suffering we have to undergo, we endure it for the punishment of our sins. But this is not all: we are living creatures; and not merely living a frail and mortal life, but baptised into the faith of Him who is "the resurrection and the life"; so that we may live for ever in glory without measure; in happiness without bounds. Let, then, all murmuring be hushed. Who will dare to repine? II. But having thus applied the considerations suggested by the text to the complaints which are grounded on the

ruin and sinful condition of mankind, we proceed to make a LIKE APPLICATION TO THE COMPLAINTS CALLED FORTH BY INDIVIDUAL AFFLICTION. Whosoever thou art, on whom God hath laid heavily the rod of chastisement; and whatever the visitation beneath which thou art bowed, let all murmuring be hushed with the demand, "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" When God sends affliction, without doubt He designs that it should be felt as affliction. The cross is a burden which we must carry on our shoulders, and not throw it into the fire. But it is one thing to be sensible of affliction, and another to complain of it. And while we may feel acutely, and yet not transgress; we cannot murmur and be blameless. And it is against a repining and not against a suffering spirit that our text must be considered as directing its censure. And, therefore, it applies to none but those who would question the justice of God's dealings; and not to those who resign themselves meekly, although deeply wounded. But before we can bring the considerations suggested by our text to bear upon this complaint, we must examine in what sense it may be affirmed that affliction is allotted to us in punishment of our sins. There may often be an error here. Wherever and whatever I suffer, I suffer as a sinner; but there is no such nice proportion maintained between what I do as a sinner, and what I feel as a sufferer, that for every grief inflicted, I shall be able to produce an offence committed. Sometimes, indeed, it will happen that the judgment bears a distinct and palpable reference to the iniquity, so that the particular cause of God's wrath can hardly be overlooked; but we have no warrant for expecting that sin and sorrow should thus necessarily correspond; or that we should be able to calculate precisely the fault to which God hath apportioned present calamity. And it is in exact accordance with these remarks that our text represents affliction as a punishment, not of this sin, or of that sin, but generally, for the punishment of a man's sins. And this should suffice to show you the injustice of complaint. It is much, as we have already shown you, that every one of us transgressed in Adam; that in virtue of his standing as our federal representative, we have fallen from our first estate. It is much that as the result of the earliest rebellion we are all involved in one vast condemnation, so that when successive generations rise up and possess this earth, there is between each individual and his God such a separation that he has right to expect nothing but unmitigated wrath. But when you add to the contemplation of original sin, all the complicated catalogue of actual sin; when you remember that man is a transgressor, not only by imputation, but by every positive and personal working of evil, surely the marvel must be not that so much of wormwood should drug the cup of human life, but that so much of sweetness should still have been left, and that so much of brilliancy should still sparkle on the waters. Is it justice that man impeaches, or is it mercy, when he utters complaints against the dispensations of God? Justice! which of us is there unto whom, if he were dealt with by strict measure of justice, there would not be assigned so stripped and wasted an inheritance that no solitary flower should bloom on him, no smile of friendship gladden him, no voice of affection cheer him? And as to mercy—shall mercy be impeached by those who do daily a scornful despite to the attributes of God? Invert the calculation. Measure the mercy not by what is denied, but by what is bestowed; not by what is taken away, but by what is left—by what we have rather than by what we have not; and mercy stands forth wonderful in its extent; putting out even on behalf of a vast company, energies which are not to be expressed by all the imagery of the material universe. And this too—far worse than this!—for a being who has thrown himself, by his iniquities, out of the pale of loving-kindness, and who if he were left like a blasted tree on the mountain top, leafless and branchless—the sole survivor of a goodly forest, torn by the tempest, and scathed by the lightning, might, nevertheless, be pronounced a monument of mercy. And once more. We are living men. And whatever the woe and bitterness of our portion, wherefore should living men complain? Ye all know that this our mortal estate has been appointed by God as a probation for our immortal. Ye all know that we suffer for a while in these houses of clay; that when they shall have been demolished by the inroads of death, our souls must unite and form anew and hasten to a sphere of new and untried being. And life when regarded as the seed-time of eternity—life must appear to be so enormous in value that its sternest and most aggravated sorrows dwindle away into comparative nothingness. Living is never so terrible that man does not shrink from dying, and thus

he practically owns that he retains the greater blessing, though he may have been stripped of the lesser. May it not then be said of him, with all the emphasis of an indignant remonstrance, Wherefore, yes, wherefore, dost thou a living man complain? And this gift of life should repress the murmurings of the righteous as well as of the unrighteous, for a disposition to complain shows that patience has not yet done its perfect work, and the prolongation of life gives opportunity for this work to be completed. And, therefore, as the waters of the raging sea soothed themselves into calmness at the mandate of the Redeemer, let every rebellious and unholy passion be hushed before the Lord our Creator. "Be still, and know that I am God." (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *Address to complainers* :—

I. THE NATURE OF SINFUL COMPLAINTS. 1. Complaints as to our situation in life. Not satisfied with our lot. Not content with the bounties of providence. 2. Complaints as to providential visitations. Disappointments in business, blighted prospects, loss of friends, seasons of affliction, &c. 3. Complaints as to spiritual sorrows. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, &c. 4. Disappointed prayers and expectations. David, for his child; Paul, for the removal of the thorn. **II. THE EVIL OF SUCH COMPLAINTS.** 1. It is a sin against reason. Who so fit to manage for us as God? 2. It is a sin against goodness. Then how ungrateful to complain! 3. It is a sin against Divine faithfulness and truth. God's declarations run thus, that "He will withhold no good thing from them that walk uprightly." "My God shall supply all your need," &c. Now to complain is the essence of unbelief, the essence of distrust. 4. It is a sin especially against Divine condescension and abounding mercy. 5. It is a sin fraught with evil consequences to ourselves. It must incur God's righteous displeasure. See the fire of the Lord consuming the Israelites in the camp (Numb. xi. 1). And for what? They complained against the Lord. See, also, Jude 16. It deprives of all the enjoyment of Divine goodness. **III. THE REMEDY FOR SINFUL COMPLAINTS.** 1. Look within yourselves. See your utter unworthiness. 2. Look abroad. You are poor; others are destitute, naked, starving. You are afflicted, but how lightly! (*J. Burns, D.D.*) *Affliction considered as punishment* :—

I. IT COMES FROM GOD. The text points us to the moral Governor of the world, to Him who has made us, and made us men, and who orders things with reference to our condition and character as souls and as sinners. The Bible, of course, traces all suffering to God. It teaches us that He creates evil and good; that He causes light and darkness; that He appoints the rod; that if evil is in the city He hath done it; that is, it ascribes trouble to Him, as it ascribes everything else to Him, of whom, through whom, and to whom all things are, who made all things for Himself, even the wicked for the day of His wrath. Apart from questions of inspiration, such language is natural. The natural piety and scientific ignorance of men would delight, and be obliged, to use it; piety longing to make as much of God as possible, and ignorance not knowing what else to do. There is, no doubt, a sense in which God does all things. That is, since He has a plan, and accomplishes that plan—in other words, since He is all-wise and all-powerful, He must exercise a universal superintendence and control. God may be said to bring about results, even in the case of the voluntary acts of men, if He has so ordered the existing system that those results shall follow those acts. For our present purpose it is enough that in any true sense what happens to us is referable to His will; that it is His pleasure that it should happen; that He knows of it, and either causes it, or intentionally allows it. Our miseries, of every kind and source, are from Him; that is, from a Being having intelligence and will; not from what we call, with or without meaning, "chance," or "fate"; a personal God, a Father, a moral Ruler, means them. It is "punishment"—shall we "complain"? **II. WE HAVE OURSELVES ONLY TO BLAME FOR OUR TROUBLES.** It is quite true, generally, that we suffer because we sin. We should not know trouble if we were not guilty. We are not to vex ourselves, as good people often do, with inquiries as to the individual reasons and designs of our troubles; we are not to ask, in the sense of Job, "Show me wherefrom Thou contendest with me"; we are not to institute a particular search into the occasions of our trials, as if each had a special meaning, and indicated a special sin, after the manner of Adonibezek's punishment. It is enough for us that we are sinful, and therefore sorrowful; that we should not be where we are if we were not what we are; that God has placed us in a world of thorns and briars as well as flowers and fruits; in bodies whose organs pain as well as please; in a system of "wicked and unreasonable men"; and many

more very weak and thoughtless, intercourse with whom must often vex and distress us, because we were, in His foresight, creatures meriting chastisement, and able to profit by it. But we may go much farther than this in reference to many of our troubles. We cause them by our own acts. They are the direct results of our own conduct, of single deeds, or of courses of conduct. And we may know it, and ought to know it. "Sins" are of many kinds, but they are always violations of rule. "Sin is the transgression of the law." And law always has penalty, sooner or later, milder or more severe. Take the case of physical health. Many of our grievances are bodily. We have "trouble in the flesh." And as Gideon "took thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them taught the men of Succoth," so we learn from material experiences, and they are often painful ones. Indeed, many people can learn no otherwise. "The messenger of Satan," is only in return for some foolish message of our own; and "the thorn in the flesh" is there a pressure we ought to have avoided. The father of a family is struck down by paralysis; all the mystery of the case is in his persisting, in spite of friends and feelings, in putting two days' work and worry into one. A young woman has just died of consumption; the only marvel is that she let herself, and others let her, go out of a heated room into the cold air, or wear a dress that compressed the action of her vital organs. A young man comes home from school or university to die; there is nothing inscrutable about it, except in the unnatural strain of brain or body by work or play. Wherefore should a man "complain for the punishment of his sins"? And the same remarks apply to the lowness and gloom of spirits, and a hundred evils of mind and soul, that flow from a diseased or languid action of the bodily powers. Despondency, and even despair, may come from indigestion. Unstrung nerves may make any one "walk in darkness, and have no light." Many Christians go to the Divine for comfort, when they should go to the doctor for cure. They think God is "hiding His face," when He is really showing Himself, showing His love for them and for all men, in upholding the order of things, in which their welfare and that of all men is concerned. Wherefore should "a man complain for the punishment of his sins"? III. TROUBLE, AS AND BECAUSE PUNISHMENT, MIGHT HAVE BEEN WORSE, AND MAY BE BETTER. "Wherefore should a living man complain?" Stress is to be laid upon this. The trouble, whatever it is, might have been greater. It has exceptions and alleviations. The darkness does not cover the whole sphere of vision. The ingredients of the cup are not all bitter. We are not afflicted in all kinds, and in all degrees, like Job. We can imagine worse trouble. We can find worse. We deserve worse. We cannot have the worst while "living." There are sorer sorrows after death: the sorest here might be but "the beginning of sorrows," a foretaste and an earnest of the uttermost wrath of God. While living, we are not wholly lost. "To him that is joined unto all the living, there is hope"—hope of living even here, and hope of living in the fulness and infinitude of life hereafter. And this punishment of the living is to prevent their ever dying, in the full import of that awful word. This trouble, while it might have been worse, may be better—may be best of all. In the highest sense we may say, "This sickness is not unto death, but unto life. This loss is not unto ruin, but unto wealth. This sorrow is not unto hopeless misery, but exceeding and eternal joy." (*A. J. Morris.*) *The sin and unreasonableness of complaints against providence*:—We will on this subject meet at once the tenets of the boldest complainants. 1. It is asserted, then, by some, that, under all the circumstances of this life, they cannot consider creation as a blessing, and cannot offer up thanksgivings for it; that, born into the world without their own consent, they have a right to the good things of it; that, although a distant heaven may be promised, yet, as a distant hell is also threatened, the hopes of the one are more than counterbalanced by the fears of the other; and that it would be better not to have been born, than to live so circumstanced. These are high words against your Maker. They proceed, be assured, either from ignorance of the true state of things, or from a mind perverted by some love of sin. When you complain of being torn into the world without your own consent, it should seem that you consider yourself flung into it, by some blind necessity, or senseless chance. But is this the real state of things? You know it is not. From the moment of your birth, you became the care of an almighty, all-seeing, all-merciful God: in your progress through this world to that for which He graciously designs you, there is not a step in your path but you are surrounded by His

presence, and upholden by His power! 2. But it is not, perhaps, under a distrust of the general providence of God that you look upon life as no blessing; but under a view of your own individual situation, as born, according to the scriptural representation of you, subject to misery and death. Had that curse upon your first parents, which subjected you to these calamities, left you under them; had the future generations of mankind been, from that awful hour, devoted unto wrath, and forsaken, some excuse might be urged for pleading,—though even then with the deepest reverence of Omnipotence,—“Why hast Thou made me thus?” But search the Scriptures, and see whether such pleading will bear you out. Earth at one and the same time heard the denunciation of death, and the promise of redemption. Man was to be gradually fitted for that heaven, which, from the first, was designed him. The care of Omnipotence was thenceforth exerted in preparing the world for the coming of Him, in whom the nations of the earth were to be finally blessed. 3. Now, had Adam never fallen, or had it been ordained you to live with him in his early days of innocence and peace; had it been your lot, after a few years thus sojourning in peace in the garden of Eden, to have been removed from the shadows of this world to the realities of a better; will you say that creation would have been no blessing to you? that it would be nothing to have been brought from the dust of the earth into the everlasting fruition of spiritual bliss? I will not degrade your reason by thinking it capable of harbouring a thought so low and so unworthy. Well, then, if a spiritual immortality be deemed a blessing, what is there in the trials and sorrows of this life to check your aspirations after it? Shall the land of your inheritance be given up, because a boisterous Jordan rolls before you, and the sons of Anak must be struggled with? I would require you, with the book of revelation in your hand, to descend into your heart; to mark its pride, its sensuality, its worldly-mindedness, and vanity; and would urge you to say whether anything was ever more weak, more earthly, less fitted to mingle with the saints in light! You will plead that this pride and vanity proceed from a corruption inherent in your nature; and that their existence is no fault of yours. But it is your fault that they are not corrected. The Almighty has promised His everlasting Spirit to them that ask it. You have not asked it as you ought. Why, then, should a living man complain,—man for the punishment of his sins? 4. We may go yet farther, and even ranking you among those whose errors are the most venial, and omissions of duty the fewest, may ask you whether you ever felt real cause for lasting repining at the occasional mixture of evil with your good. Indeed, the nearer you approach to fulness of obedience, and to a perfect love of God, the more thankful you will be for those warnings, which tend to estrange you from the things of earth. Consider, therefore, this world in its true nature; consider it as a scene of preparation for another: that no state is so dangerous as undisturbed prosperity; that, during our continuance here, we must be purified to qualify us for perfect happiness in the presence of God: that such purification must be effected by trials and temptations; and that trials and temptations necessarily suppose troubles and afflictions. Let these considerations take place in the mind, and, at the brightness before them, clouds and darkness shall disperse, doubts and difficulties shall vanish away. (*G. Mathew, M.A.*) *Sinful man is a complaining creature*:—Observe here—1. The fault taxed, complaining. It denotes an action that passeth on a man's self, and intimates fretting, whereby one torments himself increasing his own grief and sorrow, for his affliction. 2. The unjustifiableness of this before the Lord. Losers think they may have leave to speak; but religion teaches rather to lay our hands on our mouths, and our mouths in the dust before the Lord, who does us no wrong. 3. On what accounts it is unjustifiable, what are these things that may silence all our complaints? We are men that should act more rationally. We are living men that might therefore be in a worse condition. We are sinful men, whose hardships are the just punishment of our sins. We are men that have another thing to do. Let each man complain for his sin. I. THERE IS A SINFUL COMPLAINING UNDER CROSSES AND AFFLICTIONS. 1. Let them complain of themselves, as the causes of their own woe. The sinful nature, heart and life, are father, mother, and nurse to all the miseries that come upon us. These are the carcass to which these eagles gather together. Remove that, and they would all quickly fly away. If the clouds return after the rain, let us blame our own misguidance. 2. Let them complain to God and welcome (*Psa. cii. 1-11*). (1) We must not complain

of God. (2) We must not complain of our lot, or murmur because better has not fallen to our share. (3) We must not arrest our complaining eye on the unjust instruments of our afflictions, like the dog snarling at the stone, but looking not to the hand that casts it. II. SINFUL COMPLAINING IS SELF-TORMENTING.

1. To God whose Spirit is grieved with it, and provoked to anger by it. 2. To others, as marring the harmony of society, and often when people give way to that black passion, God in His just judgment inhibits others, that they have no power to help the complainer. 3. To a person's self it is disagreeable and tormenting. It is a breach of the sixth commandment, a sin against one's own life, destructive to the body. The sinful complainer puts a load above his own burden. For if one's will were submitted to the will of God, how easy would it be to bear afflictions; but when the proud heart cannot stoop, the apprehension magnifies the cross, and of a molehill makes a mountain. III. MAN, SINFUL

MAN, IS A COMPLAINING CREATURE. 1. Men do not entertain due thoughts of the sovereignty of God, and His awful majesty (Matt. xx. 11-15). 2. Men often see not the designs of holy providence, and they are apt to suspect the worst, for guilt is a nurse and mother of fears. 3. Pride of heart is the cause of sinful complaining. Men are naturally like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. An unsubdued spirit under a cross makes a heavy burden. 4. Unmortified lust, when crossed with afflictions makes a fearful mutiny. If men were not too much addicted to the creature, too closely wedded to the things of time, they would not raise such complaints on the loss of them. Grasp hard a man's hand that hath a sore finger, he presently cries out; but if his hand was whole, he would take it kindly. 5. Want of a due sense of the evil of sin and of our unworthiness on that account. 6. Overlooking our mercies. 7. Dwelling and poring upon crosses and difficulties. This is just taking an unbelieving lift of our own burden, which will certainly increase it. 8. Unbelief is the great cause of all. It was the generation that believed not that murmured in the wilderness. Faith brings the soul to rest in God in all conditions. It satisfies the soul with a full Christ in the want of all things (Hab. iii. 17-19).

IV. BECAUSE WE ARE MEN WE OUGHT NOT TO COMPLAIN. 1. We are men and not brutes. We are endowed with rational faculties, by which we may take up such considerations, from the sovereignty of God and the demerit of our sins, that might silence our complaints. 2. We are men and not gods, creatures and not creators, subjects and not lords, and therefore ought to submit and not to complain. 3. We are men and not angels. We are not inhabitants of the upper regions, where no storms blow, where there is an eternal spring and uninterrupted peace. Can we think that the rocks must be removed for us, that God's unchangeable purpose in the management of the world must be changed for us? 4. We are men and not devils. We, at our worst, in this world, are not in that desperate, hopeless, and helpless state in which they are. But have something to comfort us which they have not.

V. BECAUSE WE ARE LIVING MEN WE OUGHT NOT TO COMPLAIN. 1. Our life is forfeited yet continued, therefore there is no reason to complain. 2. Living, we are not in hell, and therefore should we praise and not complain (Lam. iii. 22). 3. Living, we have the means of grace and hopes of glory. So we have access to better our estate in the other world, if it should never be better in this. 4. Living, it may be worse with us ere we go out of the world than it is, if we do complain. 5. Living, we may live to see our case better. While there is life there is hope. We have to do with a bountiful God. 6. We have no surer hold of our life than of the comforts of life. The latter are uncertain, so is the former. The stroke that takes away a comfort might have taken away our life. 7. When other comforts are lost, and our life is continued, that which is best is preserved to us. 8. The time of life is the time for all men's praising, because they sit all at the common table of mercy, and therefore not for complaining. VI. WE ARE SINFUL MEN JUSTLY PUNISHED FOR OUR SIN, AND THEREFORE OUGHT NOT TO COMPLAIN. 1. Our sins are the procuring causes of all afflictions. God hath joined together the evil of sin, and the evil of punishment, hence drawing the first link of this chain, we draw the other also on ourselves, why then do we complain?

2. When our afflictions are at the highest pitch in this world, yet they are not so great as our sins deserve. 3. We receive much undeserved good, while at the worst we get but our deserved evil. 4. Our afflictions are necessary for us. Our hearts are hard to wean from a frowning world, how would we do if it were smiling on every hand. Nay, there are many mercies in thy lot, there must be a mixture of crosses in it, something crooked, something wanting, to

be a corrective. Why then should we be so angry with our blessings? 5. We might get out from under them, if we would speedily answer the design of them (Lev. xxvi. 41, 42). 6. How often is the sin visibly written on the punishment, that men may clearly see the cause of God's contending, and lay their mouths in the dust. VII. UNDER OUR AFFLICTIONS WE SHOULD TURN OUR COMPLAINTS ON OUR SINS. 1. Instead of complaining of God, let us complain of ourselves to God, instead of taxing a holy God with severity, let us charge ourselves with folly before Him. 2. Instead of the heart's bleeding for trouble, let our hearts bleed for sin. 3. Instead of tossing our cross in our minds to fret ourselves, let us toss our sin there to humble ourselves. 4. Instead of labouring to get up our lot to our mind, let us labour to get our minds brought down to our lot. (T. Boston, D.D.) *Complaint under affliction*.—I. SOME COMPLAINTS ALLOWABLE. 1. It is lawful to express what we feel and suffer in those ways nature prompts us. 2. May complain to friends, relations, and acquaintances. 3. To God as well as to men. II. COMPLAINTS PROMPTED BY IMPATIENCE WITH GOD'S DEALINGS CONDEMNED. 1. It is long before God takes the rod in hand to correct. 2. He is soon prevailed with to lay it aside. 3. He lays no more on us than our sins deserve. 4. We enjoy many mercies in the meantime by which the bitterness of affliction is allayed. 5. God has a sovereignty of power and dominion to deal with us as He pleaseth. III. COMPLAINTS MAY BE SILENCED.—1. By keeping alive in your heart a sense of God's love in every dispensation. 2. By labouring to have a fresh remembrance of your sins. 3. By considering the extreme danger of quarrelling with and opposing God. (D. Conant.) *Living men ought not to complain*.—I. STATE THE MOST COMMON CAUSES OF COMPLAINT. 1. Our circumstances in the world. 2. The sufferings to which we are doomed. 3. Our condition as moral agents. II. SHOW THE IMPROPRIETY OF SUCH CONDUCT. 1. It is unreasonable. 2. Useless. 3. Impious and profane. 4. Endangers his immortal interests. III. POINT OUT ITS MOST EFFECTUAL REMEDY. 1. Seek the regeneration of our natures. 2. Consider what pain and punishment we deserve. 3. Think of the sufferings of others. 4. Remember the design of God in afflicting us. 5. Pray that our day of strength may be as our day. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*)

Vers. 40-42. *Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord.—The return*.—Before it is possible to return to God, before the desire to return is even awakened, a much less inviting action must be undertaken. The first and greatest hindrance to reconciliation with our Father is our failure to recognise that any such reconciliation is necessary. If the soul's quarrel with her Lord is ever to be ended it must be discovered. Therefore the first step will be in the direction of self-examination. We are led to look in this direction by the startling thought with which the previous triplet closes. If the calamities befallen are the chastisements of sin it is necessary for this sin to be sought out. The language of the elegist suggests that we are not aware of the nature of our own conduct, and that it is only by some serious effort that we can make ourselves acquainted with it, for this is what he implies when he represents the distressed people resolving to "search and try" their ways. The externalism in which most of our lives are spent makes the effort to look within a painful contradiction of habit. When it is attempted pride and prejudice face the inquirer, and too often quite hide the true self from view. Even when the effort to acquire self-knowledge is strenuous and persevering, and accompanied by an honest resolution to accept the results, however unwelcome they may be, it often fails for lack of a standard of judgment. We discover our actual characters most effectually when we compare our conduct with the conduct of Jesus Christ. As the light of the world, He leads the world to see itself. He is the great touchstone of character. We may be reminded, on the other hand, that too much introspection is not wholesome, that it begets morbid ways of thought, paralyses the energies, and degenerates into insipid sentimentality. No doubt it is best that the general tendency of the mind should be towards the active duties of life. But to admit this is not to deny that there may be occasions when the most ruthless self-examination becomes a duty of first importance. Then while a certain kind of self-study is always mischievous—the sickly habit of brooding over one's feelings, it is to be observed that the elegist does not recommend this. It is not emotion but action that he is concerned with. The searching is to be into our "ways," the course of our conduct. The word "ways" suggests habit and continuity. These are more characteristic than isolated deeds—short spasms of virtue or

sudden falls before temptation. The final judgment will be according to the life, not its exceptional episodes. A man lives his habits. He may be capable of better things, he may be liable to worse; but he is what he does habitually. Our main business in self-examination is to trace the course of the unromantic beaten track, the long road on which we travel from morning to evening through the whole day of life. The result of this search into the character of their ways on the part of the people is that it is found to be necessary to forsake them forthwith; for the next idea is in the form of a resolution to turn out of them, nay, to turn back, retracing the footsteps that have gone astray, in order to come to God again. These ways are discovered, then, to be bad—vicious in themselves, and wrong in their direction. This is a case of ending our old ways, not mending them. No engineering skill will ever transform the path that points straight to perdition into one that conducts us up to the heights of heaven. The only chance of coming to walk in the right way is to forsake the wrong way altogether, and make an entirely new start. Again—a very significant fact—the return is described in positive language. It is a coming back to God, not merely a departure from the old way of sin. The initial impulse towards a better life springs more readily from the attraction of a new hope than from the repulsion of a loathed evil. The hopeful repentance is exhilarating, while that which is only born of the disgust and horror of sin is dismally depressing. Following up his general exhortation to return to God, the elegist adds a particular one, in which the process of the new movement is described. It takes the form of a prayer from the heart. The resolution is to lift up the heart with the hands. Lastly, the poet furnishes the returning penitents with the very language of the heart's prayer, which is primarily confession. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*)

The saving effect of suffering:—Suffering only fulfils its mission when it constrains a man to look within himself and search and try his reins and ways that he may know how far he is sincere. Only suffering can get at our hearts with any profound and saving effect. Joy touches the surface, success hovers above us like a singing bird: it is when we are in the furnace of affliction that we discover what we really are, and what we really need. The sufferers in this case come to wise decisions. No longer will they murmur against the Lord, as if providence were fickle and arbitrary, as if providence found a wicked pleasure in the torture of human life: the sufferers say, The fault must be in ourselves; we carry the deadly poison within us; our hearts are lacking in the spirit of loyalty and obedience; they are lifted up in the ways of haughtiness, and they submit themselves to the rule of vanity; the time has now come for a different discipline and a different policy; we must lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens: we do not lift up the heart alone, as if we were intending to be religious in one part of our nature, and to reserve the liberty of self-service in another; nor do we lift up our hands alone, as if we were willing to indulge in bodily exercise, in ceremony, in ritual, or as if we were prepared to render in some degree the service of a hireling; but we lift up both our heart and our hands in sign of a complete consecration. Religious exercises cleanse and elevate the worshipper. The very act of lifting up heart and hand unto God in the heavens is an act of purification and ennoblement. All such exercises are valuable as parts of a larger discipline. Herein is the value of public worship: man helps man; voice increases voice; joy and sorrow mingle together, and produce a tender melancholy that is the surest pledge of perfect and enduring delight. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Self-examination a guard against sin:—I. The work of self-examination has this advantage, that it is a REAL, PERSONAL ACT; and in religion what a man does for himself is of much more avail than what others do or can do for him. Other religious actions may be "gone through," as it were, with little thought and attention; but self-examination, if performed at all, is performed with the mind; with a real application of the faculties to the matter in hand. II. Self-examination is a PRIVATE WORK. The public ordinances of religion have their place and value. But the religious improvement of the heart is entirely dependent on what passes in private; I mean, is measured by that. What a man is in private, that he is; and it is in the personal interviews with our Maker that the critical transactions of our religious history are performed. III. Self-examination is a REHEARSING OF THE JUDGMENT DAY, for it is a having the soul up before conscience, and conscience is God's voice in the heart. But in the judgment day, we are instructed to believe that there shall be a bringing forth to the light of each man's every action, in its detail and particular, and (which is

much to be observed) in its motive and inward cause. Now these are the things which cannot be discerned without much of careful consideration and thought. The case, in short, is this,—in order to repentance we must know what we have to repent of; for it were a mere trifling with our Maker to use the language of contrition when not really thinking of the things which we have done in disobedience to Him and disregard of His holy will. Keep short accounts with thy soul; the dealers of this world can teach thee thus much. A heathen found out thus much. “Let not sleep,” said Pythagoras, “fall upon thy soft eyelids, until thou hast first gone over thrice the actions, all and each of them, of the day; asking thus, Where have I transgressed? what good have I done? and what duty have I left undone?” IV. The practice of this careful and periodical self-examination will most assuredly SORTEN AND HUMANISE THE CHARACTER IN REGARD OF THE SOCIAL INTERCOURSES OF LIFE; making him who is diligent in such practice, gentle and merciful and forgiving toward his fellow-creatures. The slight, the disrespect, the unthankfulness, and forgetfulness of promises,—just the things which are taken so unkindly between man and man, which constitute the sting of injury, and alienate between heart and heart,—are the very same which we find that we have to ask our Heavenly Father, having experienced at our hands, not to resent, but to forgive; for mercy’s and for Christ’s sake, to forgive. Therefore the self-examiner is a merciful man. V. And lastly, he is—what each one of us would desire to be, but what the neglecter of self-examination will hardly be—A PROFITABLE ATTENDANT ON THE SERVICES OF THE CHURCH. And he is so for this reason; that having considered his ways, he knows what he has to confess when he comes into his Maker’s presence. The visits to God’s house are stages in his life, are steps from earth to heaven, to him whose thoughts have been rightly employed during the interval between his visits there; whose one confession speaks to his former confession, and (may be) rebukes it, but with a sweet rebuke, for it is administered at the footstool of a merciful and forgiving God. (*C. P. Eden, M.A.*) *Self-searching*:—Prayer, praise, the public ordinances, consistent walking, are obligations, laid though not with equal depth, yet laid on the consciences of all who are taught of God. But the point of deep and thorough consideration of our ways, is I fear, but little reflected upon, as its deep importance demands. I. THE EXHORTATION. How awfully affecting the description in ii. 5-17. Yet with all this, the great mass of the people remained hard and impenitent. Ah, how little is it in the power of any judgment to turn the heart. It is under this conviction that the prophet calls them to deep searchings of heart. 1. The prophet includeth himself, “Let us.” So Daniel ix. 4, 5. Have we not invariably found the most spiritual are the most ready to take the low place? 2. Remark the expression, “Our ways.” It is one of the deepest incentives to self-condemnation, humiliation before God, and holiness of heart, to mark diligently, prayerfully, watchfully, all the way by which we have been brought. Let us note down our mercies, pray to have them continually on our hearts, on our lips; this is no small part of the precept. But it refers principally to “search and try the ways” in which we are walking. Am I in the way? What a question! How important the answer. Walking in Jesus, the way of pardon, the only way of salvation, of holiness, of happiness, the only way to God, and heaven, the abode of God. And how am I walking in this way? By faith? in daily repentance? in real, sincere, and honest obedience? happily? If not, why am I not? 3. The expression implies difficulty in the act of obedience to the precept, “Let us search and try our ways.” Much is required to its accomplishment. (1) Sincerity is needed (*Jer. xvii. 9*). Ah, what heavenly sincerity, honesty, integrity, are required to investigate motives, try principles, decide practice. (2) Quiet is needed. A piece of gold cannot be discerned in the unquiet waters of a turbid stream, so the graces of the Spirit cannot be clearly discerned in the defilements of an unquiet spirit. (3) Time is required. The viper sin that coils, and coils, and coils beneath the verdure of the grass, cannot be seen in a moment’s glance. (4) Faith, too, is needed, laying the hand on the head of Jesus, or there is no fair review. (5) Filial repentance is required. Legal repentance only extenuates the sin. (6) Above all, there must be much real, fervent, persevering prayer (*Psa. cxxxix. 23, 24*). II. THE BLESSED CONSEQUENCES OF SEARCHING OUR WAYS AND TURNING TO THE LORD. A man may, without this, be admired, courted, applauded, followed; as a minister he may draw crowds, as a man, be flattered to the skies; but never can he be a spiritually-minded man, a close walker with God, a happy, holy,

and consistent Christian. This inestimable good is bound up in it. It is the certain, the necessary consequence. It is the mode of the Divine operation, the order of the Divine Spirit (James iv. 8). It is so in the first approach of the sinner to God (Isa. lv. 7). It is so in every after approach (Jor. iii. 1). The sinner is called to consider his ways (Hag. i. 5). Real consideration leads to repentance (Ezek. xviii. 28). It is the breath of spiritual life, it is the germ of the new creation, the spark of heavenly fire. (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*) *The importance of self-examination*.—I. THE ADVANTAGES THAT MAY ARISE FROM IT. There is no possibility, either of viewing a bad action, in a full light, without abhorrence, or of weighing its consequences without terror. Wickedness, therefore, always banishes thought, and piety and virtue encourage it. A good man, far from being driven to hide his inward condition from himself, though he find many things that want still to be amended, yet finds at the same time, so many, which, through the aid of God's Holy Spirit, are already grown, and daily growing better, that he feels no joy equal to that of his heart telling him what he is. Therefore the Psalmist speaks of self-amendment as the immediate fruit of self-inspection (Psa. cxix. 59, 60). Nor doth it only excite in us good resolutions, but furnishes directions how to put them in practice. Reflection will show us, and nothing else can, by what defect within, or what opportunity without, each of our faults got ground in our breasts: and which is the way to root it out again. Another use of searching frequently into our past ways, is to preserve ourselves from the secret approach of future dangers. All these are general advantages flowing from the practice of self-inspection. But in many cases it hath yet a more especial good influence. A distinct knowledge of ourselves will greatly secure us from the ill effects of flattery, which would persuade us that we are what we feel we are not; and enable us to bear unjust reproach, thinking it a very small thing that we should be judged of man's judgment, when we can reflect with comfort that He who judgeth us is the Lord. Experience of our infirmities will teach us humility, and move us to compassion and forgiveness (Gal. vi. 1). Experience where our strength, as well as our weakness lies, will show us how we are best able to serve God and our fellow-creatures; what we may attempt, what will be too much for us. And strict observation of our own hearts will qualify us, beyond all things, to give useful cautions to others, and direct their steps in the right way. II. SOME RULES TO BE OBSERVED FOR CONDUCTING IT PROPERLY. Of these the fundamental one is, that we consider it as a religious duty; perform it as in the presence of God; and earnestly beg Him to show us in a true light to ourselves (Psa. xix. 12). Let us therefore neither be too tender, nor too proud, to bear inspecting our hearts and lives: and, that we may bear it well, let us learn to moderate, if we have need, the uneasiness which it may give us. For every passion that we have may be raised so high as to defeat its own end. And though we can dislike nothing so justly as our faults; and very few dislike them near enough; yet if we dislike ourselves for them too much to have patience to think of them, and mend them; that runs into a new fault: and we should check ourselves for it, mildly indeed, but very carefully; considering well both our natural frailty, and our Maker's goodness: but especially the promises of forgiveness and grace, which He hath recorded for our use in His Holy Word; not in order to reconcile us at all to sin, but in a reasonable degree to ourselves. And how mortifying soever a needful examination may still prove, it is surely worth while to support the most painful reflections for the present, when it will secure us a succession of pleasing and happy ones ever after. Nor must we examine only into the weak and suspicious parts of our characters and conduct: but those which procure us the most applause from others and ourselves: for want of which, even vices, a little disguised, may pass upon us for great virtues; and we may be doing, with entire satisfaction, what we should abhor, if we understood it right. Nor are these general grounds of caution the only ones; but every person will find, on inquiry, particular reasons for being watchful and distrustful of himself, in some point or other; arising, perhaps, from unhappy experience of failures, at least from conviction of the dangers, incident to his natural disposition, age, employment, company; and, which is a matter of no small consideration, rank in the world. For they, above all, should be careful in searching their own breasts, whose higher condition subjects them most to flattery, and removes them farthest from hearing censure. (*Archbishop Secker.*) *The duty of self-reflection*.—I. ITS USEFULNESS. 1. Teaches us to know ourselves. 2. We discover our sins. 3. Provides good company and comfortable

employment. II. ITS NEGLECT MISCHIEVOUS. 1. Hardens the heart. 2. A daily increase of sin. 3. Renders a man the more unwilling to reckon with himself. III. DEMANDS DILIGENCE. 1. There is a natural reluctance to attend to the duty. 2. Many sins not easily discovered, unless diligent search is made. 3. A convenient time should be set apart for the work. 4. Affliction a time for heart-searching. 5. Let not the difficulty of the work discourage you. 6. A work that must be often repeated. IV. LEADS TO REPENTANCE. "Turn again to the Lord." Sin is an aversion and turning away from God; repentance is a returning to Him. 1. Repentance must be speedy. 2. Thorough. 3. Resolute and steadfast. (*D. Conant.*) *Strict self-examination*:—Set thyself in good earnest to the work; beset thy heart and life around, as men would do a wood where murderers are lodged; hunt back to the several stages of thy life, youth, and riper years, all the capacities and relations thou hast stood in; thy general calling and particular, every place where thou hast lived, and thy behaviour in them. Bid memory bring in its old records, and read over what passages are written there; call conscience in to depose what it knows concerning thee, and encourage it to speak freely without mincing the matter. And take heed thou dost not snib this witness, as some corrupt judges, when they would favour a bad cause or give it secret instructions, as David did Joab, to deal gently with thee. Be willing to have thy conditions opened fully, and all thy coverings turned up. (*W. Gurnall.*) *Self-examination much neglected*:—Many either search not at all (they cannot endure these domestic audits: it is death to them to reflect and recognise what they have done), or as though they desired not to find. They search as men do for their bad money; they know they have it, but they would gladly have it to pass for current among the rest. Heathens will rise up in judgment against such, for they prescribed and practised self-examination. Pythagoras, once a day; Phocylides, thrice a day, if Stobæus may be believed. (*J. Trapp.*) *Turn again to the Lord.—On repentance*:—I. THE NATURE OF REPENTANCE—that repentance which is "unto salvation, and which needeth not to be repented of." 1. Repentance presupposes a knowledge of our previous condition. Before we can sincerely turn to the Lord, we must be sensible of our alienation from Him. They who have never felt the weariness and wretchedness of their natural state; who have never, in any measure, experienced the misery and guiltiness of their sins, are still destitute of that very knowledge which must precede the exercise of scriptural repentance. Nay more, this sense of sin and sinfulness must be no mere general and theoretic opinion—no mere notion; but a heartfelt conviction of entire and aggravated sinfulness, humbling the sinner in the dust, and depriving him of all fancied righteousness in the judgment of his own conscience. Combined with this, there must be also some measure of acquaintance with the character and perfections of that God with whom the sinner has to do. 2. Godly sorrow has its seat in the affections. It is heartfelt grief, a real and poignant sentiment of anguish on account of sin; and whilst the soul of the repentant sinner does mourn over the bitter consequences of sin, yet his mourning is not confined to the evils resulting from his iniquity. There will be in the heart that truly seeks the Lord a commencement, at all events, of hatred to sin, a sense of its hideousness and deformity. 3. Where the soul hath really sought the Lord as He is to be found, there will be manifested the Spirit's presence in efforts at a holy, a spiritual and heartfelt conformity with the whole will of God. 4. Whilst the child of God experiences all this in turning from sin, he is called further to beware of regarding his repentance as in itself worthy of God's acceptance; our very righteousnesses are even as filthy rags in the presence of Him who sitteth on the throne, and our repentance not only flows from the imparted grace of God, but at best can be acceptable in God's sight only through the mediation of the Beloved. 5. The believer is further called on to feel that repentance is not proper, simply to the first stage of his spiritual existence; that it holds not only an elementary place in practical Christianity, but belongs to the whole currency of his life on earth. Alas! when is the believer free from sin? II. THE ENCOURAGEMENTS TO REPENTANCE HELD OUT TO US BY GOD. This is a wide field; the Lord has not been sparing in the manifestation of such encouragement. Does not the very existence of the Bible proclaim that God waiteth to be gracious? Instead of selecting a series of striking invitations from the fertile pages of the Divine record, I would rather seek to place before you a few of the great truths which are embodied in the numerous and very varied appeals to man's conscience contained in Scripture. 1. The

foremost of these truths is the fact of God's mercy. Not only do all the gifts of His hand bespeak a wondrous forbearance, a marvellous compassion, but we owe our very existence, amid our sins, to the compassion of the Eternal: we are all of us living monuments of His mercy; "because His compassions fail not," therefore are we not consumed. God has not, however, limited the manifestation of His mercy to the mere preservation of our guilty race, and the bestowal of multiplied temporal blessings. "God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son," &c. 2. The justice of God furnishes under the Gospel dispensation the strongest of all encouragements to the exercise of this grace. Nor is there any paradox in the assertion. In Christ, mercy and truth meet together, God's righteousness and the sinner's peace are made to embrace each other. 3. The disquieted and dispirited sinner may be apt to exclaim, of what service are all the encouragements to repentance, when repentance itself involves in its very exercise feelings which I do not possess, and which I know not how to obtain? There have issued from the mercy seat the promises, the full, clear, and reiterated promises of all needful grace. It is in God Himself that our succour lies.

III. THE PRACTICAL BEARINGS OF THESE CONSIDERATIONS ON THE CONDITION AND CONSCIENCES OF MEN. 1. I would address myself, first, to the followers of Christ, those who have known what it is "to turn unto the Lord"; who have been quickened by His Spirit in the inner man, and "having the Son," "have life," life indeed, life eternal. I would call upon them to recognise not merely the duty, but the precious privilege of repentance. Let him that standeth or that "thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." We are never more in need of grace than just when we think best of ourselves. Self-complacency is the sure token of backsliding from the Lord. 2. With regard to those who have never yet experienced true repentance, who may perhaps regret their sins at times when the evils flowing from sin are felt by them, but whose regrets have been vain and fruitless—the mere sorrow of the world that worketh death—I would beseech them, with all earnestness, to "turn unto the Lord." In resisting the call to repentance, the sinner is not simply putting away from him the only way of peace and happiness, he is resisting, madly resisting, the expressed mind of God—God's holy commands; and whether he be a profligate or a man of decent life; whether an avowed atheist or a professed Christian; whether he defy God or turn away to the things of this world in besotted infatuation, his course, in either case, is in direct opposition to the will of God. (*L. H. Irving.*) *Return to God made easy*:—A minister narrates the following: "While walking along one of the London streets a Paris pastor came forward and accosted me thus, 'Excuse me, but were you not in Paris some time ago?' I said, 'Yes, I was'; and then he inquired, 'Did you not, in one of your addresses there, say that the latch was on our side of the door?' 'Yes, I believe I did say so,' I replied. 'Well,' he answered, 'I always thought it was on the Lord's side, and I kept knocking, and knocking, and knocking, until I heard your words, and what a joy came over me! I lifted the latch. Since then all has been changed, my church, my congregation, my work, and everything about me!'" Remember that the latch is on your side of the door. *The penitent's first effort*:—In every building the first stone must be laid and the first blow must be struck. The ark was 120 years in building; yet there was a day when Noah laid his axe at the first tree he cut down to form it. The temple of Solomon was a glorious building; but there was a day when the first huge stone was laid at the foot of Mount Moriah. When does the building of the Spirit really begin to appear in a man's heart? It begins, so far as we can judge, when he first pours out his heart to God in prayer. (*J. C. Ryle.*)

Ver. 41. *Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens.*—*The sublimity of devotion*:—The finest and most sublime sensations of which the soul is susceptible are connected with the principle of devotion. I. THE SUBLIMEST BOOKS EXISTING ARE THOSE FROM WHICH WE LEARN OUR FAITH. The writings of the inspired penmen abound with passages for which no parallel can be found in the productions of mere genius. Rousseau once exclaimed, "The majesty of the Scriptures fills me with astonishment; the holiness of the Gospel speaks to my very heart. Behold the books of the philosophers, with all their pomp, how little are they in comparison! Is it possible that a book at once so wise and so sublime should have been the production of mere men?" II. SOME OF THE SITUATIONS OF REAL LIFE PROVE THE INTIMATE CONNECTION BETWEEN DEVOTION

AND THE SOURCES OF SUBLIME FEELING. 1. In studying the character of God and the works of nature. 2. In the changing circumstances of life, in adversity or prosperity, the proper operation of religious thought is to call up sublime and fervent feelings. III. CONSIDER THE SUBJECT OF ADORATION—GOD, WHETHER WORSHIPPED IN PRIVATE OR IN PUBLIC. If it be objected that in such an account of the effects of devout feeling, we place religion too much under the dominion of the imagination, it may be answered that though the abuse of a thing is dangerous, we are not therefore to relinquish its use. It is the soul that truly feels; imagination is the effort of the soul to rise above mortality. Imagination as well as reason is frequently appealed to in Scripture. (*R. Nares.*) *The appeal of the saints to their God*:—We owe an appeal to God on whatever concerns us, to—I. THE THRONE OF GOD. Those things which you look upon as trivial, have been subjects of eternal thought, and of eternal purpose. Some men lay stress entirely upon the decrees of God with respect to their conversion and their salvation. But the right view of the Divine decrees is, to connect them with everything—not merely with your conversion, and with your salvation, but with the time of your birth, and the day of your death; with the hours of your sickness, and the seasons of health; with the gain of your property, and with the loss of your property; with the lives of those that are dear to you, and with the deaths of those whom you love: even with the falling of sparrows. II. THE PERSONAL PROVIDENCE OF GOD, AND THE ACTUAL GOVERNMENT OF GOD. For the superintendence of our affairs is not committed by God to some deputy. This must be the case with all human rulers, with all creature governors; but while God employs instruments, He personally superintends, not only the instruments, but those for whom those instruments work. He Himself provides, and He Himself rules. III. THE CHARACTER OF GOD. Think of His complete knowledge. Think of His consummate wisdom. He never fails in anything, He never can fail, He sees the end from the beginning, He counts all the steps between the beginning and the end, and He can adjust every movement, every instrument, every influence. He can make angels and devils, good men and bad men, things material, and things spiritual, earth, hell, and heaven—He can make all work together for some ultimate good. IV. THE PATERNITY OF GOD. I say paternity; and would include in this idea, not only fatherhood but motherhood: for God is as really mother as He is father. And the Scriptures do not fail to represent this fact to us. While God has all the masculine strength of the father, He has also the tenderness of the mother. V. GOD'S PROVISION FOR OUR FULL RECONCILIATION TO HIMSELF. For God is by Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. He has provided for us a propitiatory, where we may meet, and where He ever stands waiting to be gracious; and His invitation is, "Come nigh." He is not satisfied with our standing afar off; His invitation ceaselessly is, "Come nigh." In the degree of your discipleship will grow your consciousness of sonship: and just as you say in your heart, "I am a disciple of Christ," so will you say in your heart, "I am a son of God." VI. THE DIVINE PRECEPTS, INVITATIONS, AND PROMISES. "Call upon Me," said God, "in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me." "Thou hast not called upon Me, O Jacob," said God. "Thou hast been weary of Me, O Israel." Might not God bring this charge against some of you? Might He not say to some of you, "Thou hast been weary of Me. Thou hast not called upon Me"? VII. OURSELVES. This alone will keep the heart and mind in peace; this is the chief means of deliverance from evil; this renders other means effective; this carries out our principles; and this will keep us from the use of sinful means. VIII. EACH OTHER. In common affairs, for example, how can we really help each other, unless we pray for each other? (*S. Martin.*) *The reasonableness of prayer*:—Can God listen to and answer prayer? Will God listen to and answer prayer? Ought God to listen to and answer prayer? Three points, you notice, are involved—ability, disposition, right. 1. Do our petitions, as a matter of fact, reach the throne, or is it more likely that they die away upon the air, never get beyond wall or roof; or, if spoken out of doors, go no further heavenward than the carrying power of the speaker's voice avails to press them? Doubts of this sort might perplex us, fairly enough, were we tied to the child's notion of a God only to be really found by going up and up and up in space. But this is not the true Christian conception of the mode of the Divine presence. The King of heaven is indeed what one of the prophets has called Him—a God that hideth Himself—but His hiding-place is close at hand, not far away. Even the heathen, for all their dimness of spiritual vision, seem to have had some

perception of this truth. Smoke was their chosen symbol of prayer. Sometimes it went up from the burning sacrifice upon the altar, sometimes from the swinging censer; but whether the savour that it carried was that of the flesh of beasts or of sweet incense, they had the satisfaction of watching it melt away into nothingness. It has gone out of the world visible, they said, this offering of ours, it has gone out of the world visible into the world invisible, and has reached the waiting God for whom we meant it. Modern discovery, instead of dulling our belief that prayer may find a hearing, ought singularly to warm and quicken it. Only consider the wonderful enlargement that has taken place of late in our notions of what is possible in the way of transmitting intelligence from one mind to another mind! It is within the memory of living men that instruments have been invented to do for speech what long ago the telescope and the microscope did for sight, namely, to extend its range. There is little reason to doubt that a time will come, and that before very long, when our present means of communicating sound—marvellous, nay, almost miraculous as they seem—will be superseded by adjustments and contrivances even more wonderful in their effects. And shall we say of Him who has thus empowered us indefinitely to extend the reach of the faculty of hearing, supplementing His original gift of the sense itself with so generous an endowment, shall we say of Him that of necessity eternal deafness is His portion? He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? Consider what speech is. A word is an embodied thought. When this word has been articulated and made audible, we call it spoken. So then speech is thought going forth upon its travels. But midway between the thought just born and the audible utterance of the lips, comes the as yet unspoken word. It has left the mind, we will suppose. It has not yet reached the lips. Now who can tell upon what other undulations besides those of the material atmosphere that thought just now clothed upon with a word may not be going forth? For man's benefit and that it may accomplish its earthly errand, it is committed to the waves of the air; but how know we that there is no more subtle medium still on which simultaneously it is borne to the auditorium of Almighty God? Human hearing is dependent, at least under the conditions of this life present is dependent, on the bodily organ of hearing, the ear; but Divine hearing may be just as real as ours without any such dependence. There is good and sober reason to believe that some of the brute creatures hear sounds that are wholly inaudible to us, the instrument of hearing having in their case been differently adjusted. But is there no intelligence, think you, anywhere in the universe to which all sound is audible? I cannot easily believe it; but, were I forced to do so, I should still hold fast my faith that to the spoken word of man Divine audience would be lent, and should still keep on praying my prayers to Him unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid. He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? 2. But supposing it conceded that God is able to listen to our prayers, can we think of Him as having also the ability to answer them? As a matter of fact, we see and know that hundreds, thousands, millions of requests that are made to God by the children of men, and made fervently, go ungranted. A mother prays, with all the earnestness of which a mother's heart is capable, for the recovery of a sick child,—the child dies. But the pathetic thing, the convincing thing, is that in spite of it all, great numbers of men, and they by no means the least intelligent of their kind, keep on praying, keep on making known their requests unto God. What inspires this unquenchable determination to continue hoping against hope, this dogged resolve to believe in God's ability not merely to hear, but also, if He will, to accede to the petitions His children bring? It is, I think, the conviction lying deep down in the mind, and fast rooted there, that God is a person, not a mere force, like magnetism or heat or attraction, but a being possessed of what we know among ourselves as reason, and will, and loving-kindness, one capable of forming a purpose and working out a plan. We are often told that it argues a downright puerility to suppose that God either can or will answer our requests, because nature is clearly and beyond all question an intricately contrived machine, no more able to alter its motions and change its bearings in compliance with a spoken word of request, than a steam-engine or a clock or a loom. This would be an unanswerable argument in favour of fatalism, and against the potency of prayer, were nature a machine of which we could see the whole, but it is not. There is a background of mystery, a region none of our senses can penetrate, and there, wholly out of sight, lie the beginnings of power. It may be that behind the veil which sunders the seen from the unseen, the hand which keeps the wheel-work

all in motion, is turned this way rather than that, or that way rather than this, because two or three believing souls have agreed on earth touching some blessing they desire to have, some work they would see done. 3. There remains the question, Ought He always and invariably to answer it, in the sense of never refusing to any petitioner any earnest request? To this a sober-minded faith will assuredly answer, No. Fatherhood involves governance, and governance involves the exercise of judgment, discrimination. The life of a well-ordered family is full of what we may call earthly prayer. The children ask the parents questions of many sorts, and bring to them requests of widely variant character; is it any argument against the efficacy of this which I have called earthly prayer, that some of the questions go unanswered, and not a few of the requests ungranted? No, the father remembers what his responsibility with respect to the whole family is, and certain of the favours the children ask he grants not, because he ought not. And yet, who will deny that in the life of that household the right of petition is a real thing, or that the exercise of it produces real results? So with our Father in heaven and His family on earth. Possibly in the clearer light of the heavenly life, should it be granted us to enter there, we shall find ourselves thanking Him with greater fervency for withholding our heart's desire, than we could possibly have thanked Him for conceding it. Moreover, God forbid that we should confine our definition of prayer to the men begging for favours. Prayer is more than petition, it is communion, intercourse, exchange of confidences. The confiding to God the whole story of our troubles, of our disappointments, of our failures, of our well-meant endeavours, and last, not least, of our sins,—is there nothing of value in all this that we should leave it wholly out of view in estimating the efficacy of prayer? Or again, think of how much a grateful heart has to tell. Is it nothing that the soul should have the opportunity given her to pour out before her Maker a glad offering of thanks? Intercourse with a character richer and better than our own is commonly held to be a great privilege. We can all of us recall friends to whom we have, as we say, owed a great deal on the score of helpful influence. But is it supposable that God has permitted personal intercourse between man and man to be such a potent instrument in the building up of character, and yet has made all intercourse with Himself impossible? If the spirit of man can, through the power of influence and sympathy, bless and uplift the spirit of his fellow-man, much more, a thousand-fold more, shall God, who, be it remembered, is a Spirit also, aid by intercourse and influence the creature spirit whom He permits to call himself His child. Wherefore, let us pray. (*W. R. Huntington, D.D.*) *The uplifted hands of the penitent*:—Instead of wrangling with God (ver. 39) let us wrestle with Him in prayer; this is the only way to get off with comfort. Nazianzen saith, that the best work we can put our hands unto is, to lift them up to God in prayer. (*J. Trapp.*) *Prayer*:—1. True repentance worketh in us most earnest and hearty prayer. (1) Because we see our misery in ourselves, and what need we have to seek to God for help. (2) It assureth us of God's love to us, and readiness to hear us. (3) It encourageth us to call upon the Lord, who in our conversion hath given us experience of His unspeakable mercies. 2. Prayer to God consisteth not in words, but in the fervent and faithful lifting up of the heart. (1) God is a Spirit, and regardeth not the outward action in His worship. (2) Divers have prayed aright, that have uttered no words (Gen. xxiv. 63; Exod. xiv. 15). 3. We may use all outward means, that have warrant in the Word, to stir up our affections to be more fervent in prayer. (1) Because we are naturally dull in it. (2) Our hearts are often moved with the things that our outward senses do apprehend. 4. All our prayers are to be made unto God alone (Psa. l. 15; Rom. x. 14). 5. The prayer of the faithful must never rest upon anything in this world, but look unto the mighty God, the author of all things. (*J. Udall.*)

Ver. 42. We have transgressed and have rebelled.—*Prayer and confession of sin*:—1. The time of affliction requireth a special kind of showing our repentance both more fervent and with longer continuance than ordinary. (1) Because God therefore afflicteth us, that we may be brought to a more thorough repentance. (2) God's anger against us for our sins is manifested unto us by afflictions; which must be turned away by our unfeigned repentance, or we shall be consumed. (3) God hath usually brought His people to such special declaration of repentance, and blessed them therein (1 Sam. vii. 5, 6; Neh. i. 2; Esth. iv. 16). 2. It is necessary for God's people to begin their prayers to God with a free confession

of their sins (Psa. xxxii. 5; Dan. ix. 5; Neh. i. 6). (1) Else we obtain no forgiveness. (2) Else we have no assurance that we have repented. (3) Otherwise, we cannot rightly and thoroughly condemn ourselves, and clear the Lord for punishing us. (4) By the confession of our sins we are the more humbled, and prepared the better to prayer. 3. It furthereth to thorough repentance that God's people do in their prayers adjoin to their confession of sins a recital of the judgments that are upon them for the same. 4. Every child of God is justly punished that faileth in any duty whatsoever it be, that God hath commanded him in His Word. 5. It is rebellion against the Lord to despise any of His laws, though all human laws should approve us therein. 6. No excuse or privilege can shield any man from God's plagues for sin. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 43-54. **Thou hast covered Thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through.**—*God's silence*:—The demand for response is a thing instinctive in us, native to our feelings. We are so made that when any emotion is stirred in the heart, and breaks out into expression, there must be answer or we suffer. The very mechanism of Nature seems to have been planned with reference to this spiritual fact, and, as it were, in illustration of it. Motion has its rebound, light its reflection, sound its echo. Nature may be, and, as we have too good reason to know, is, upon the highest topics, dumb to man, but to herself she is vocal. Action and reaction, play and counterplay, are the very groundwork of her being. When now we pass over the invisible line that marks off the confines of external Nature from those of human nature, and open our eyes upon the field of our own inner experience, what do we see? We see everywhere the same need of, the same demand for the response; but we do not everywhere see the need satisfied, or the demand met. On the contrary, appeal upon appeal, cry after cry, go out upon the air, and there comes nothing back. And yet the call for response is as real a thing as anything in us. What can the orator do with the unresponsive audience? He may be able to struggle through the sentences he has prepared himself to utter, but if it is plain to him as he goes along that what he says is nowhere calling forth assent on the part of the listeners, he is half-paralysed. Liturgical worship, as an institution, may be said to rest upon this same principle. A recognition of the mutual interest that lies between minister and people in the act of worship is what makes *The Book of Common Prayer* the thing it is. "Lift up your hearts," that is well, but how much better to have the reply come back, full and strong, "We lift them up unto the Lord." These are but detached illustrations of the general principle that there is rooted in human nature a craving for response. "As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man." The question arises, Has man a right to demand, or to expect, from his Maker the responsiveness which he instinctively looks for from his brother man? First, then, is it a reasonable expectation on our part that God should take notice of our sorrows and our griefs, and in some way speak to us about them? The Bible warrants me in answering, Yes. It is the teaching of the Christian religion that whatever there is in man that is good is also in God, and more besides. This is a general inference from the declaration that man was made in the image of God. The original has many characteristics which the image has not. But still the image has resemblance, even though it have not identity. If it had not resemblance, it would not be the image. Hence when we find in the works of Nature certain laws of number and proportion accurately followed; when we discover by chemical process that the same substances always combine according to the same fixed weights; when botany has shown us that the stalks and leaves of a plant are arranged in a carefully adjusted numerical order, we infer that a mind not unlike our own minds, in its general characteristics, must have planned and calculated such results. Apply this reasoning to the facts of the spiritual universe, and what have we as a result? Take the sentiment of pity, that compassionate feeling which strength may entertain towards weakness. It may not be possible to define it satisfactorily in words, but we all know what it is, and we know also that it is found most fully developed as a characteristic in the noblest natures. But why stop at this point? Why make the noblest man you can imagine the supreme illustration of this grace? God is above man, for God made man, and must of necessity, therefore, be man's superior. And shall we suppose that compassion ceases to be possible after we have soared up above the level of man's being? Nay, ought we not to expect to find in man's Maker a larger, deeper, broader compassion than we found in our very noblest man? There is an immense wealth of argument hidden in that question of the Psalmist: "He that formed the

eye, shall He not see ? ” With equal emphasis we have a right to ask, He that formed man’s heart so that it could be pitiful, shall not He pity ? We do not hold our peace at the tears of others, when we honestly and sorely grieve for them. Why then should He hold His peace at our tears, if pity us He really does ? Is there then any way of satisfactorily accounting for the apparent dumbness of God’s pity ? Does He really, as it might seem that He does, hold His peace at our tears ? Instead of directly answering these questions, I purpose to meet them indirectly by suggesting a few thoughts to be pondered by all whom this inquiry in any degree interests. Here is one such suggestion. A voice, in order to be real, need not necessarily be an articulate voice, need not necessarily employ audible sounds. Of our various teachers there are few indeed that speak to us more effectively than the artists and the composers. They do it through the instrumentality of forms of speech peculiar to themselves. So, then, let us not look to God for a sort of utterance He has never vouchsafed, unless by miracle, and let us be reconciled to the thought that if He is to speak to us, it will be in what must seem to all except ourselves the deepest silence. Unquestionably there does sometimes come to persons in affliction, when they take their sorrows patiently, a certain quietness of soul, a calm tranquillity of which all about them take notice. Why is it not a reasonable inference, at least for a religious mind disposed to think the best rather than the worst things of God, why is it not a reasonable inference that this very stilling of the waves is the direct result of God’s having spoken ? We charge Him impatiently sometimes with holding His peace, when really the fact is that He has been bestowing His peace, and in doing so has spoken in the very truest and most satisfactory sense of all. Under the shadow of some weighty sorrow a group of friends sit silent in one another’s presence. Shall we say of them that because their grief is speechless, therefore they are of no help to one another ? Most assuredly, No. Do you tell me that the parallel fails, because in the case of the friends their silent sitting in one another’s presence is comforting and helpful wholly because at other times, and in other places, they have spoken often and much ? And so, I answer, has God in the past spoken often and much, spoken more than once, and more than twice. Through the lips of holy prophets, since the world began, He has from time to time communicated to the human family messages of reassurance. They tell of a new heavens and a new earth ; they foretell the day when God shall wipe away all tears from off all faces ; they predict a triumph over the grave, and the swallowing up of death in victory. No one can rob us of our heritage in words like these ; they have been spoken ; they have never been taken back ; they are the common property of all of us ; and while they stand we have no valid reason for complaining that God holds His peace at our tears. But I have kept the richest and most helpful suggestion till the last. CHRIST is really God’s word of answer to those who turn to Him in trouble, all eagerness for His response. Baffled, disheartened, afflicted, distressed, we look at Him, and faith is born afresh. With what tenderness and graciousness, and at the same time with what a masterful touch does He sketch for us the true likeness of the Divine Majesty. Look at Him as the Good Shepherd leading His flock in green pastures, and beside still waters ! Look at Him as the Man of Sorrows, a homeless pilgrim, a seeker of mountain solitudes, misunderstood, plotted against, spitefully entreated, cursed, mocked, and scourged ! See how full of pity He is for all who sorrow and all who suffer ! These three are the great ills of life : sin, disease, and sorrow. We note His attitude towards each of them, and it is plainly that of pardoner, physician, consoler. If any word can be imagined more full of meaning than this Word made flesh, speak it out, and let us know what it is. Failing to do that, no longer think of God as one who will not answer, who holds His peace at tears, but trust Him, trust Him as your everlasting Friend. (W. R. Huntington, D.D.)

Vers. 49, 50. **Mine eye trickleth down, and ceaseth not, without any intermission, till the Lord look down and behold from heaven.**—*Mourning the absence of Christ* :—I. SHOW WHAT THIS IMPORTS. 1. That a child of God may be under the hidings of God’s face, God will have a difference betwixt the upper and lower houses. When the saints are above, all the shadows flee away, but now clouds may intercept the light of His countenance. When the Lord turns His back, conscience turns its face to the soul, and tells that the Lord is displeased. And Oh ! how bitter must God’s anger be to that soul that knows Him. 2. That the hidings of the Lord’s face may continue long with a child of God. God will have His people’s faith and patience tried, and therefore makes their clouds return after the rain. 3. A holy

dissatisfaction with all things, while Christ hides His face. 4. A wearisome longing after the Lord (Job vii. 2, 3; xxiii. 3, 4). Duties are hard work, when Christ withdraws. Labour in vain much more causeth weariness. Hope deferred makes the heart sick. It refresheth the labourer to think that when the sun goes down, he will go to his rest; but the people of God, in this case, see not their signs, nor know the time how long. 5. Some hope that the Lord will yet look down, and behold from heaven (Psa. xliii. 5). Should they lose all hope, they lose all. 6. A resolute persisting in duty till the Lord return: The soul resolves never to give over, and so holds on, till the Lord look down and behold from heaven. II. Some REASONS WHY THEY ARE THUS DISPOSED. 1. Felt need of Christ. The gracious soul cannot live without Him. They say with Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Now, necessity hath no law, and hunger will dig through stone walls. And if it cannot dig through them it will leap over them. The soul still cries, Lord help me. 2. Superlative love to Him (Song viii. 6, 7). Use—1. Hence we may see why so many professors fall short of Christ. They are utter strangers to this disposition of the godly. (1) They have not the living spirit of Christ in them, and so they cannot follow the Lord fully (Num. xiv. 24; John iv. 14). (2) There are difficulties in the way of heaven which their hearts cannot digest. (3) The world and their lusts were never made sapless to them, but still have the chief room in their hearts. Hence, when Christ will not answer, they have another door to go to. 2. You are in earnest for Christ, yet under the hidings of His face, and all things else insipid to you without Him, you see here how you are to behave; you must hold on seeking till the Lord look down from heaven. (*T. Boston, D.D.*) *Compassion for sinners*:—This is the great need of all the members of our churches. If this consuming desire were in the hearts of pastor and people there would be less time and thought for the profitless discussion of technicalities in faith and practice. Dr. Mason said that the secret of Dr. Chalmers' power was his "blood earnestness." The seraphic Summerfield, just before his death, speaking of his recovery, said: "Oh, if I might be raised again, how I would preach! I have taken a look into eternity." Think of Allein, of whom it is said that "he was insatiably greedy for the conversion of souls"; of Matthew Henry, who said, "I would think it a greater happiness to gain one soul to Christ than mountains of silver and gold to myself"; of Doddridge, who said, "I long for the conversion of souls more than anything besides. I could not only labour for it, but die for it with pleasure"; of John Knox, who broke the stillness of the night with his thrice-repeated cry, "O Lord, give me Scotland or I die." God gave him Scotland. No wonder that Queen Mary "feared the prayers of John Knox more than an army of ten thousand men." A passion for souls gives a man irresistible power. The Chinese convert was right when he said, "We want men with hot hearts to tell us of the love of Christ." All about us are souls in sin and death; we may hear their death-knell sounding. Men and women there are without God and without hope—men and women soon to stand at the judgment-seat of Christ. May God help us to cry unto Him day and might for their rescue!

Ver. 51. *Mine eye affecteth mine heart.*—*The proper use of observation*:—We are not to look upon life with the eye of the statistician or the political economist or the collector of facts so called; our heart is to be in our eye, and our observation is to be conducted in the light of our tenderest sympathy. When the prophet says "affecteth" he means harms, or causes grief, to my heart: it is as if he said, What I see hurts me; does not merely hurt me outwardly, but hurts me within, strikes me at the very heart, gives me pain of soul, distresses the very springs of life. Note then how keenly sensitive was the prophetic heart. Why is it that our hearts are so little affected by the destruction that is wrought in the city? Simply because we are content to look at surfaces, to look with the eye of science or art or social mechanism. Prophets looked with the eye of the heart, and they could not hear the sad and tragic visions of the streets. Were our hearts right with Christ, were we one with the living God in all the tenderness of His love, a walk down the city thoroughfares would crush us, disable us, and drive us into the uttermost despair; only then by some other vision—that is to say, by the very vision of the Cross itself—could we be recovered from our dejection, and constrained to renew our efforts at amelioration. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Sight aids sympathy*:—1. The eye, in seeing the outward miseries that God layeth upon us, is a special mean to make us the more sorrowful in heart for it. (1) The sight is the quickest of the senses. (2) Things seen are most surely and amply known

and understood, seeing a report may deceive us, but not the sight. 2. Natural affection of the most passionate woman can bring no such grief of heart as the ministry of the Church of God doth often work in the godly. (1) Those mourn for things temporal, these for spiritual. (2) Those have nothing but natural affection to set them on work; these have God's Spirit also that helpeth them herein, and worketh a greater affection to God's truth than any affection of nature can work in a mother to the child of her womb. (*J. Udal.*) **Mine enemies chased me sore.**—*Adversaries of the good*:—1. The true Church and faithful people of God do never want enemies whilst they live here, who do most eagerly pursue them, by all means seeking to overthrow them. (1) Many walk in the broad way, who being of contrary quality to the godly do therefore hate them (2 Cor. vi. 14, 15; Psa. cxxiv. 6, 7; cxxix. 1, 3; lvi. 1). (2) God's providence hath disposed that it should be so, for the use of just condemnation of the wicked, and the greater good of His servants. 2. The godly of themselves are so simple and weak, that they can neither prevent nor withstand the strength of their adversaries. 3. The wicked are moved by the malice of their own hearts to persecute the godly, not having any cause given to move them thereto. (1) The godly are fewer, weaker, simpler, and withdraw themselves from them. (2) Nothing can be just cause to make one bitter against another but sin, which the wicked hate not. (3) God in His providence hath appointed it to be so, to show His righteousness in delivering His, and overthrowing the other. (*Ibid.*) **They have cut off my life in the dungeon.**—*Malice of the wicked*:—1. The wicked are often so enflamed with malice against the godly, that nothing will satisfy them but their blood. 2. The wicked do not content themselves with ordinary means to seek the life of the godly, but also practise often more than naturally seemeth needful (Matt. xxvii. 66). (1) They bear a deadly hate to the truth, and possessors thereof. (2) The sting of their evil conscience maketh them always fear they shall not prevail (Dan. vi. 16, 17). (*Ibid.*) **Waters flowed over mine head.**—*Sorrows of the godly*:—1. Many grievous and inevitable are the troubles and miseries which God's faithful people suffer in this life. 2. The godly oppressed with miseries are often brought both to doubt and despair for the time. (1) They judge according to their present feelings. (2) Man's infirmity is naturally prone to infidelity. (3) God in His wisdom withdraweth the feeling of His grace for a time, to let them see themselves, and to make them seek to Him the more earnestly. (4) To make them more thankful for His grace when they feel it, and more careful to continue in it. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 55, 56. **I called . . . out of the low dungeon.**—*Prayer in peril*:—1. The godly do pray unto the Lord for His grace and favour, even when they are in such great extremity that all hope, in reason, is past. Moses at Red Sea, Jonah in whale's belly, &c. (1) Reasons. (a) Their faith can never be quailed, seeing it is that which overcometh the world (1 John v. 4). (b) They rest upon God's truth that faileth not, and power that ruleth all things. (2) Use: to teach us (a) to strive against that temptation which persuadeth to surcease praying when our case seemeth desperate; (b) that their profession was but temporary when troubles do quail; (c) to call still upon God in the day of our troubles, yea, to increase in fervency, according to the increase of danger and continuance therein. 2. There is no condition so miserable in this life, but the godly may and do fall into it. (1) Examples. Abraham, for uncertain dwelling; David for many enemies; Job for inward and outward miseries of all sorts. (2) Reasons. (a) God will show His anger against sin in this life, even upon His own servants. (b) That by afflictions they may be weaned from the delight in this world, and made in love with heaven. (3) Use: to teach us (a) to reprove them that judge according to the outward estate of any, what favour they are in with the Lord; (b) not to promise ourselves any worldly success, but to look always for the contrary. (*J. Udal.*) **The efficacy of prayer**:—I. TO WHAT A STATE GOD'S MOST FAVOURED SAINTS MAY BE REDUCED. In the prophet's experience, however, we see—II. WHAT REMEDY IS OPEN TO THEM. The answer he received will lead us to contemplate—III. THE EFFICACY OF THAT REMEDY WHENEVER APPLIED. (*C. Simeon, M.A.*) **Thou hast heard my voice; hide not Thine ear.**—*Prayer of the godly*:—1. The experience of God's former favour is a notable provocation to cause us still to trust in Him again in our necessities (Psa. iv. 1). (1) It argueth that we are engrafted unto Christ, and therefore shall be loved unto the end, seeing God changeth not. (2) God is always ready to show mercy and to forgive; and therefore He will do it

one time as well as another. 2. The prayer of the godly ought to come from the heart, and to be with greatest fervency that may be. (1) God will not be dallied with, but looketh to the inward affection. (2) We must groan under the burden of that we would be rid of, and long for that we desire, before God will hear us. (*J. Udal.*)

Ver. 57. *Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon Thee: Thou saidst, Fear not.* — *A wonder explained by greater wonders*; — How different are our experiences from our fears! This man of God had said, "When I cry and shout He shutteth out my prayer." He had said again, "Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through." He had added even to that, "Surely against me is He turned." But now he corrects his misapprehensions. Neither was prayer shut out, nor had God turned against him; for he joyfully confesses, "Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon Thee: Thou saidst, Fear not." Brethren, if our experiences have so far exceeded our expectations and belied our doubts, let us take care that we record them. Do not let us suffer our lamentations to be written in a book, and our thanksgivings to be spoken to the wind. Write not your complaints in marble and your praises upon the sand. Whatever wonder there was in the heart of Jeremiah that God should draw near to him, you and I must have felt even greater wonder whenever God has drawn near to us. It is to us a standing miracle that the great and glorious and thrice holy God should ever come and reveal Himself in a way of love to us, insignificant, dishonoured, guilty sons of men. 1. Let us set forth some sort of AN EXPLANATION OF THIS WONDER. 1. The first thought I would suggest to you is that men have ever been in the thoughts of God. Of the eternal wisdom we read, "My delights were with the sons of men." Long before man was created it was in the eternal purpose that such a singular and specially favoured being should be formed; and all things concerning covenant purposes and designs were written in that book into which angels may not look. At this moment the whole conformation of humanity on the face of the globe bears a direct relation to the ultimate Church of God. Thrones and crowns must all be subordinate to the main purpose of God concerning his elect; it has been, and it shall be so, even to the end. 2. God hath drawn nearer to us than we have as yet hinted at, in becoming tenderly near in nature. If I were in trouble in a foreign land, it would be pleasant to hear the voice of an Englishman; it would be even more encouraging to spy out a neighbour, a fellow-citizen of the same town; but most of all would it be cheering to perceive that a dear friend, a brother, a husband was to the front on our behalf. Such a near and dear friend is Jesus to each one of those the Father hath given Him. His nature is love itself. He will, He must, come to you that are in sorrow, and sorrow with you, and thus cheer your hearts; for not in vain does He wear your nature, not in vain in that nature has He suffered and died for you. 3. Nor is this all. The Lord Jesus was specially near to His people in the days of His life on earth. Jesus was the most manlike of all men. He draws us to Himself, and the nearer we come the more fully we appreciate Him. If Jesus came thus near to men in His life on earth, do you wonder that He draws near to them now? 4. Carefully notice that this was a nearness to sinful men. You and I are sinners too, and our Redeemer's nearness to the sinners of Judæa meant nearness to us. 5. Jesus Christ came still nearer to us in His death. "For the transgression of my people was He stricken." "He bare the sin of many"; He was made "sin for us, who know no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." This is coming wonderfully near to us. 6. He is now in heaven; turn your thoughts up to Him there. In heaven He is still perpetually near us. He has carried our nature into heaven. He is member of heaven's high Parliament for the sons of men, and He holds His seat as such. He is head over all things to His church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. What is He doing in heaven? He is not only representing us, but He is preparing a place for us; making a niche in heaven for you, a place in heaven for me; and all the while He is continually offering intercession for His people. 7. Jesus may well come near to His people, for there is a mystical union which ensures it. A Divine doctrine this, of which Paul saith, "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church," and this in relation to the marriage union. He went down to the depths with us, that He might bring us up into the heights with Himself, that there His enthroned bride should be for ever with Him, a queen more glorious than eternity had ever seen. II. THE WONDER ITSELF. 1. By

no means is this wonder at all contrary to expectation, when expectation is founded upon an enlightened understanding. It is natural, it is necessary, that Christ should come near to a people whom He loves so well. 2. But, if you have ever enjoyed this communion, let me help you to describe it, that you may wonder at it. What is the manner in which God draws near to His people in their time of trouble? At times He draws near to us by a secret strengthening of us to bear up when we are under pressure. We may have no marked joys, nor special transports; but quiet, calm, subdued joy rules the spirit. Furthermore, the good Lord often vouchsafes to His people in their time of great pain and weakness and weariness a doubly vivid sense of His love. At such times the Lord grants us a sensible assurance of His sympathy with us. We feel that every stroke of the rod comes distinctly from a Father's hand, who doth not afflict willingly. The Lord draws near to His people's souls sometimes by a very speedy and remarkable deliverance out of the trouble under which they groan. Did He not bring up Joseph out of the prison-house and set him on the throne of Pharaoh? He can do the like with you if He wills, ere your sun has gone down. 3. There seems to be some surprise concerning the memorable graciousness of God. "Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon Thee." Then, I suppose, there were other days in which he had not called upon God, or at least had not done so so memorably; but in the first day when I called upon Thee thou drewest near to me. Does not that give us a hint, as if he said, "I had neglected my God, I had failed to apply to Him; my faith had been asleep, but as soon as ever I awoke the Lord drew near to me." 4. There seems to me also to be a *Nota bene* here, a kind of hand in the margin to point out the promptness of God. "Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon Thee,"—the very day he called God came; no sooner the prayer than the answer. Oh, the blessed quickness of God. 5. Observe the extreme tenderness of all this. You remember that text, "He giveth liberally, and upbraideth not." Here is an illustration of it. He comes to His poor, suffering, downcast people, and what He says to them is not—"You should not have done so-and-so; this is very wrong of you; I must terribly correct you." No; but He says, "Fear not, I have forgiven thee; and I will deliver thee." (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Communion with God.—I. THE CONDESCENDING VISITATION OF GOD'S PRESENCE AND GRACE.

1. It supposes all obstacles to His approach removed. 2. It asserts an actual intercourse with God. 3. It asserts that the tokens of His love were enjoyed; and nearness and familiarity of friendly communication. It implies also the influences and consolations of the Holy Spirit: for it is by His Spirit that God is pleased to maintain converse with His people. II. THE SEASON WHEN THIS APPROACH TO THE MIND WAS ENJOYED. "In the day that I called upon Thee." Observe that this was a day of trouble. 1. This dungeon may be considered as a representation of temporal adversity, or spiritual distress; to both of which the children of God are subject. 2. A day of trouble ought to be a day of prayer. "Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray." 3. God never treats with indifference the prayers of His children. 4. When God, in answer to the prayers of His people, is pleased to draw near to them, it must have a most reviving influence on the mind. III. THE ANIMATING EFFECTS OF SUCH VISITATIONS FROM GOD ON THE MIND. 1. The best and most eminent believers may be the subjects of fear. In the animal world, the lion is distinguished by his courage, the hare by its timidity. And thus in human minds there is a vast diversity: some are bold and unacquainted with the passion of fear; others are the contrary, and tremble like an aspen leaf, and are liable to fear even where no fear is. 2. But there is everything in a consciousness of God's presence with us to disarm these terrors. "Thou saidst, Fear not." God says this by His word and spirit, and by His providence, and by the exhortations of Christian friends. And if He be with you, what have you to fear? In concluding this subject, first, admire the condescension and grace of the Divine Being, that He is pleased thus to notice the circumstances in which we are placed, and to afford relief under every painful dispensation. 3. We should be led to inquire whether we know anything of the approach of God to the mind. 4. I infer the misery of those who are far from God, and strangers to spiritual intercourse. "Behold all that are far from Him perish." (G. Clayton.)

Prayer encouraged.—1. When the godly do rightly pray unto the Lord, they have most notable experience of His favour towards them. (1) Reasons. (a) God performeth His promise unto them (Psa. l. 15; Matt. xi. 28). (b) Their affections are carried into heaven, where is the fulness of joy, from earthly things that are full of vexations. (2) Uses. (a) To teach us that we, therefore, are not heard when we pray, because

we call not aright. (b) To teach us to labour with ourselves, that we may increase in fervent and frequent prayer. (c) To reprove them that either account fervent prayer needless, or are negligent in it. 2. The Lord doth give most notable encouragements and comforts unto those that rightly worship Him. (1) Reasons. (a) He doth thereby manifest His love unto His servants. (b) He will daunt the enemies by their wonderful patience, constancy, comfort, and courage. (c) Others may be allured by their example to trust in Him. (2) Uses. (a) To reprove them that account the patience of the godly, sottishness; their courage, desperation: their constancy, obstinacy. (b) To teach us that in walking uprightly, and calling upon God for His assistance, we shall be assured that He will be with us, howsoever He seem for a time to neglect us. (J. Udall.)

Ver. 58. **O Lord, Thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; Thou hast redeemed my life.—God pleading for saints, and saints pleading for God:—**1. The prophet speaks experimentally as of a matter which he had proved for himself in his own case. There is no true understanding of the truths of God except by a personal experience of them. 2. Observe how positively he speaks. "Thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul." Let us, by the aid of the gracious Comforter, shake off those doubts and fears which so much mar our peace and comfort. 3. Observe how gratefully the prophet speaks, ascribing all the glory to God alone. Earth should be a temple filled with the songs of grateful saints, and every day should be a censer smoking with the sweet incense of thanksgiving. 4. How joyful Jeremiah seems to be while he records the Lord's mercy! How triumphantly he lifts up the strain! **I. DIVINE PLEADING.** 1. The Lord pleads our cause in the Court of Providence. The Christian may expect that in the course of providence, when he meets with trouble, God will raise up for him at different times, and in unexpected quarters, persons who will take an interest in him, and be the means of working out his deliverance. (1) Sometimes God pleads the cause of His people by silencing their enemies. When your foot has slipped—when you have spoken unadvisedly with your lips, if you have deeply repented of the sin, you may leave the matter before God, for He will either silence every dog's tongue, or turn their barkings to His glory. (2) At other times our God has pleaded the cause of His people, by raising up friends for them. He does not violate the wills of their enemies, but He wisely turns those wills into the channel of friendship. (3) You see thus, that either by silencing enemies, or else by raising up friends, God can, in providence, plead the cause of your soul; or if men should seem to have even less than this to do with it, He knows how, by special providences, to bring you out of the depth of your difficulties. No Christian man, methinks, can look back through many years of his life without observing some strange and singular workings of the Divine hand, by which, in an unexpected manner, God has wrought His deliverance. 2. Our text may be read with great comfort if we think upon the Court of Divine Law. My soul, triumph thou in thy God! This day rejoice thou with all thy might, for Christ hath prevalently pleaded thy cause, and thou art acquitted—nay, thou art brought in as meritorious, and accepted in the sight of God, through the plea of the Beloved. 3. In the third place, Jesus pleads the cause of my soul in the court of conscience, which is a minor imitation of the great Court of Heaven. Foul and vile I am, and yet I am perfect in Christ Jesus: lost, ruined, and undone in the first Adam, but saved and redeemed—made to sit in heavenly places, in the second Adam. Ah! doubts and fears! Where are ye now, when Jesus pleads in my soul? 4. Jesus pleads our cause in the Court of Heaven. A poor man once wished to have a favour of a great one. This great lord had a son—a very kind and condescending one, who spoke to the poor man, and said, "If you will write a petition to my father, he is very gracious, and he will be sure to grant it; but that you may have no doubts about the success of your petition, give it to me, and I will take it in my own hand up to my father's house for you, and make your case my own. I will say to him, 'My father, hear this poor man's petition, not for his own sake, but consider it as mine; do me the personal favour and kindness of hearing this man's prayer, as though it were my prayer; for, indeed, I make it mine.'" The poor man wrote out his petition, but when he had finished it, "Alas!" he said to himself, "this will never do to present before the great one; it is so full of errors; I have blotted it with my tears, and where I have tried to scratch out a word which I have spelt wrongly, I have made it worse, and have so badly worded the whole petition, that I am afraid the great one will throw it in the fire, or never notice it." "But," said

his friend, "I will write it out in a fair clear hand for you, so that there shall be no blots and no blunders; and when I have done so, I will do as I have said—I will take it in my own hand, put my own name at the bottom of it, with your name, and will offer it as our joint petition; and I will put it upon this footing, 'My father, do it for me; not for him, but for me.' " When the poor man saw his petition thus written out, and knew it was in such hands, he went his way, and made sure that the answer must come; and come it did. This is how Jesus Christ has done for you. He takes our poor unworthy prayers and amends them. 5. Jesus will plead the cause of His people, and our heavenly Father will do so too in the last great day of judgment. If you are a true Christian, and you are called to occupy a prominent post in the service of God, expect to lose your character; expect not to have the good opinion of any but your God, and those faithful ones, who, like you, are willing to bear contempt. But what joy it is for all these holy men to know that at the last God will plead the cause of their souls! II. IF THE LORD HATH PLEADED THE CAUSES OF OUR SOUL, WE SHOULD PLEAD HIS CAUSE WHILE WE HAVE ANY BREATH TO PRAY, OR A TONGUE WITH WHICH TO BEAR WITNESS FOR HIM. Beloved, there is a way of bearing witness for Christ which you must adopt—that of witnessing by your consistency of conduct. Holiness is, after all, the mightiest weapon which a Christian can wield. Be ye holy as Christ is holy. Lastly, we can all plead for God in a private way. Oh! there is a great power in pleading for God with individuals. A man went to preach for seven summers on the village green, and good was done. Joseph sometimes listened to the preacher, but only to ridicule him. There were many souls converted, but he remained as hard as ever. A certain John who had felt the power of truth, worked with him in the barn, and one day, between the strokes of the flail, John spoke a word for truth and for God, but Joseph laughed at him, and hinted at hypocrisy and many other things. Now John was very sensitive, and his whole soul was filled with grief at Joseph's banter; so after he had spoken, feeling a flush of emotion, he turned to the corner of the barn and hid his face, while a flood of tears came streaming from his eyes. He wiped them away with the corner of his smock-frock, and came back to his flail; but Joseph had noticed the tears though the other tried to hide them; and what argument could not do, and what preaching could not do, those tears through God the Holy Spirit did effectually, for Joseph thought to himself, "What! does John care for my soul, and weep for my soul? then it is time I should care and weep for it too." Beloved, witness thus for Christ! (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The causes of the soul:*—Roughly classified, the causes that are tried in ordinary courts of law are of two sorts, those in which the person accused is guilty and those in which he is innocent. The effort of judicature, the end and aim of courts, judges and juries, is to distinguish aright between these two classes of cases, to determine whether, in any given instance, the man on trial is to be held blameworthy or without blame. Under which of these two heads are we to count the "causes of the soul"? It may surprise you to have me reply, Under both of them. I. TAKE, TO BEGIN WITH, THOSE CAUSES OF THE SOUL IN WHICH SHE ACKNOWLEDGES HERSELF GUILTY. There are a great many ways of trying to explain away the sense of guiltiness in the human heart. There is a rooted reluctance in every soul to take upon the lips frankly, and in the spirit of genuine contrition, the words, "Father, I have sinned." And yet deeper down even than this reluctance lies the conviction that such confession ought to be made. This is the acknowledgment of the men and women of fullest, strongest, ripest nature. You say, Oh, no! I am acquainted with scores of people who have no such consciousness, make no such acknowledgment. They think too well of God to believe that He will ever punish, if indeed it must be conceded that He exists, which they doubt. Yes, it must be admitted that there are a great many such people, and they are often very agreeable people, accomplished, versatile, cultivated it may be; at any rate, people who are, as we say, exceedingly pleasant to meet. The question is, Do such people adequately represent human nature in its heights and depths? Testimony is of weight in proportion to the familiarity of the witness with the facts about which he testifies. To put the case strongly, picture to yourself an aged man, who has seen much of the trials and troubles of this mortal life, whose face is seamed with marks that tell of mental struggle, of conflict with doubt, with difficulty, with pain, whose eye has lost the flash that once belonged to it, but keeps still the glow and penetrative power that tell of active life within, call him à-Kempis, if you will, or St. Augustiue, or Keble, or Muhlenberg. Now set opposite him some fresh-checked, light-hearted,

cheery-voiced young fellow, who knows not very much of life, to be sure, but is quick-witted and intelligent, thoroughly well read, informed as to the very latest phase of contemporary thought, literary, social, political, able to instruct you on a thousand points of scholarship in almost any department you may choose. To which of the two, let me ask, should you the more naturally, or with the more confidence turn, were the question to be discussed, not one about rocks or shells, or pictures, or pottery, or artist's proofs, or first editions, but a question of the powers and possibilities of the human heart? Which of them would be the best authority, say you, on such a point as this one before us now, namely, the soul's attitude toward God its Maker as respects innocence and guilt? But now the question comes up, and it is certainly worth looking at, Why should one whose cause is a guilty cause care to have it pleaded? Why not confess judgment, and take the consequences? "O Lord, Thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul." Is this a thing to be desired, that the Lord should take up or help forward the cause of the offender? High-minded advocates sometimes refuse to defend a criminal when it is perfectly evident that the offence charged was really committed. Let the law take its course, they say. And ought it not to be so in men's relations to their Maker? If they have really broken His law, ought they not to be willing to meet the penalty, instead of expecting or desiring any one to plead their cause? To all which I merely answer that if it be indeed so, then is the word Gospel emptied of meaning, and the title "our Saviour" robbed of all its power to charm. For what element of good tidings is there in the message, Do wrong, and you shall be punished? And what need have we of a Saviour, if there be nothing evil from which it is possible for us to be saved? That ancient sufferer whose words make the substance of our text was reaching after, and had partly grasped, a truth which Jesus Christ came into the world to make so clear that every one might grasp it, namely this, that with God there is forgiveness, not, indeed, the weak-minded, easy-tempered condoning of sin which it is an insult to forgiveness to call by that name, but a costly forgiveness involving intensest suffering. "O Lord, Thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul." If sympathy and that intimate identifying of one's self with another, which advocates know something of, when seeking with all their might to save the life of a defendant in a capital case—if these can, as they sometimes do, involve keen suffering, can we wonder at men's putting a similar interpretation on the agony and bloody sweat, the Cross and Passion? The truth is, there is a feeling deep down in the human heart that if we are to be helped at all, the help must come from some source higher than our own level. It is all very well to say complacently that men ought to be willing, and not only willing but glad, to bear the punishment of their sins, and so to expiate them. But is it quite certain that when we allow ourselves to use language of this sort we at all appreciate what the punishment our sins deserve would be, or what it would mean to bear it? That Christ came down into human life, dwelt with us, shared our sorrows, toiled, suffered, and all in order that He might be the more closely identified with us, and so the better be our advocate, the better plead the causes of the human soul,—this is the Gospel, this is the glad news, and how different it all sounds from the bare, Be good and thou shalt be rewarded, be bad and thou shalt be punished.

II. TAKE NOW THE CAUSE WHERE THE MAN ACCUSED HAS BEEN THE VICTIM OF SUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES AND REALLY IS NOT THE GUILTY PERSON HE SEEMS TO BE. No men escape wholly misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Perhaps it would not be putting the matter too strongly to say that there is probably no time when a man is not in a false position as regards some of those about him; no time when, on all sides, and by every observer, he is seen precisely as he really is. The atmosphere through which men look at the actions and the lives of the other men about them is never so absolutely clear that there is no distortion, no undue foreshortening or misplacement in the picture received into the eye. Ordinarily this is tolerable enough; we expect a certain measure of misunderstanding, are prepared for it, and do not mind encountering it. But there are times in the lives of some men when misapprehension and unjust judgment seem to hem them in on every side. Innocent at heart, and sure that they are innocent, they yet bend and waver under the crushing load of suspicion which adverse circumstance has laid upon their shoulders. Then it is that the soul, helpless to free itself from its calamitous entanglement, calls out to God for aid. And how is it that the Lord does plead the cause of such a soul as this environed one we have in mind? He does it by His providence, by His ordering of events. Our help cometh from the Lord. It is not

by cultivating an introspective, self-analysing habit of mind that we are likely to find the way to peace. We are living out these lives of ours too much apart from God. We toil on dismally, as if the making or the marring of our destinies rested wholly with ourselves. It is not so. We are not the lonely, orphaned creatures we let ourselves suppose ourselves to be. The earth, rolling on its way through space, does not go unattended. The Maker and Controller of it is with it, and around it, and upon it. We cannot escape Him. Why should we desire to do so? He knows us infinitely more thoroughly than we know ourselves. He loves us better than we have ever dared to believe could be possible. Conscience-stricken, guilty, perplexed, spoken against, misjudged, there is no one we can turn to with such confidence as to Him; no advocate so trustworthy. He pleads the causes of the soul. (*W. R. Huntington, D.D.*) *Thou hast pleaded*:—1. Observe how positively the prophet speaks. He doth not say, "I hope, I trust, I sometimes think that God hath pleaded the causes of my soul"; but he speaks of it as a matter of fact not to be disputed. "*Thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul.*" Let us, by the aid of the gracious Comforter, shake off those doubts and fears which so much mar our peace and comfort. Be this our prayer, that we may have done with the harsh croaking voice of surmise and suspicion, and may be able to speak with the clear melodious voice of full assurance. 2. Notice how gratefully the prophet speaks, ascribing all the glory to God alone! You perceive there is not a word concerning himself or his own pleadings. He doth not ascribe his deliverance in any measure to any man, much less to his own merits; but it is "Thou." "O Lord, Thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; Thou hast redeemed my life." A grateful spirit should ever be cultivated by the Christian; and especially after deliverances we should prepare a song for our God. Earth should be a temple filled with the songs of grateful saints, and every day should be a censer smoking with the sweet incense of thanksgiving. 3. How joyful Jeremiah seems to be while he records the Lord's mercy. How triumphantly he lifts up the strain! He has been in the low dungeon, and is even now no other than the weeping prophet; and yet in the very book which is called "*Lamentations*," clear as the song of Miriam when she dashed her fingers against the tabor, shrill as the note of Deborah when she met Barak with shouts of victory, we hear the voice of Jeremiah going up to heaven, "*Thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; Thou hast redeemed my life.*" (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 63. I am their music. *Facing the music*:—I. THE TRIAL OF RIDICULE. There is hardly a trial that men feel more severely than they do the test of ridicule. Livingstone tells us that "the Africans cannot stand a sneer." They bear with wonderful fortitude the most appalling torments, but they cannot endure ridicule. Poor Africans! How much they resemble civilised men. A French writer speaks thus of his countrymen: "Says Ridicule: 'You are gay,' and the fear of appearing light-minded makes him heavy. 'You are sharp,' and the ambition to be strong makes him uncouth. 'You are delicate,' and he becomes a realist. 'You are honest,' and he becomes a wily politician. 'You are a believer,' and he plays the sceptic and remains credulous—thinks it beneath his reason to believe in God, whom he does not see, and makes and unmakes gods of men whom he does see. . . . And outsiders and foreigners judge us on these noisy demonstrations of the few: for, after all, they are the few." But if a scoff drives the Frenchman to hide his good qualities, and to boast of his vices, it is not less true of the Englishman. We are most sensitive to ridicule; we cannot bear a laugh. And we are sensitive to scorn and humour when they are directed against our religious beliefs and hopes. The prophet felt this when he gave utterance to the text. Jeremiah lived in days of national disaster, and endured the pangs of exile, but amid all the tribulations of the period he seems to have felt nothing more bitterly than the mockings of the heathen. They turned his religious ideas and hopes into merriment. And the hardest thing that thousands have to bear to-day in consequence of their Christian character and habits is the derision of the ungody. Sometimes this is encountered in the school. Youth is peculiarly sensitive to ridicule, and many a lad finds the flouts and jeers of his schoolfellows a veritable martyrdom. It is sometimes to be borne in the family. And in the great outside world those who live a truly devout life often excite sarcasm and railery. The soldier in the barracks, the sailor in the fore-castle, the collier in the pit, the labourer on the farm, the assistant in the shop, the clerk in the counting-house are liable to banter.

II. SEVERAL GROUNDS ON WHICH CHRISTIAN MEN ARE SUBJECTED TO RIDICULE,

AND HOW FALSE THESE GROUNDS ARE. 1. They are derided on the ground that religion is unmanly. We laugh at men who are wanting in manliness, and, perhaps, that is a legitimate use of laughter, but is it a fact that the Christian man is lacking in manliness? Is he wanting in sense, or courage, or force? "Oh!" it is said, "religion is childish." It is child-like, but not childish. "Oh!" it is said again, "religion is womanish." When are we to get rid of the puppyism that prates about religion being "fit only for women," and that taunts us with the assertion that "only women are left in the Church"? Women have sufficiently vindicated their intellectual eminence. It is folly to reproach the godly with unmanliness—no man is more manly. Who in the Old Testament is held forth as the ideal man? "The man of God." He is the manly man. Who is the ideal man of the New Testament? "The Son of Man." He is the manliest of men. The faith of Jesus Christ does not make craven, foolish, effeminate, impotent characters; it inspires wisdom, valour, chivalry, strong purpose, and noble adventure. 2. Christian men are sometimes derided on the ground that religion is irrational. They are supposed to be ignorant, credulous, superstitious, and are laughed at accordingly. The cultured men of the early ages of Christianity regarded it "not as a problem to be investigated, but an extravagance to be laughed at." We are told that no one abreast of the culture of the day will give it credence. Sometimes they scorn the doctrine of inspiration, or miracles, or atonement; they scoff at the morality of revelation, at its great names, at its glorious hope. Every sceptical scoffer is supposed to be a thinker of independent understanding; the believer is treated amusingly as a fossil of the geological age. But you have no need to be ashamed of revelation. The greatest and best men of all generations have been its champions, and the grandest deeds of successive ages have been wrought by its power. 3. Christian people are assailed on the ground that religion is hypocrisy. Many critics of our faith are cynics at heart; they disbelieve in goodness, and so they treat the profession of religion as so much canting hypocrisy. How they love to discover and proclaim a stumbling saint! Hypocrites prove nothing against religion. If you wished to give an enlightened opinion upon Minton's or Doulton's ware you would not stir up their refuse heaps and bring out the rejected shards that had been mis-shapen on the wheel, or been cracked in the oven, and parade these as specimens of the potter's unskilfulness and untrustworthiness. It is by the splendid vases, rich in material, exquisite in grace, brilliant in colour, which adorn palaces and galleries, and not by the wrecks of dust heaps, that you judge the artist. III. A FEW WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT TO THOSE WHO ARE BEING TRIED BY THE FIERY TRIAL. 1. If you are called upon to bear ridicule, you bear it with the noblest of the race. 2. If you are assailed by ridicule for your Master's sake, remember that in these days we are not called upon to suffer much for His sake. How immense were the penalties in which the Christian name involved the primitive saints! 3. If the Philistine does make music of you, have you no music? Do not your faith and love and hope bring you discourse of sweet sounds? When the moments of reflection come is there no music? When the day is over, and you muse on your bed, is there no music? When the morning dawns, is there no music? When you vanquish temptation, is there no music? The conscience is an austere organ, without painted or gilded pipes, but it yields delectable strains, and are not these yours? The heart is a living lute, a many-stringed lyre, a golden cymbal, and is not its magic melody yours? 4. He laughs best who laughs last, and your mouth shall be filled with laughter and song at the last. The future is yours. Your faith and righteousness flower in immortal blessedness. (W. L. Watkinson.)

CHAPTER IV.

VER. 1-12. *How is the gold become dim!—The spoiling of humanity:—* What is the most precious thing in the world? "Why, gold, of course," says the multitude; not, indeed, with its lips, but with its heart. For this, men will leave father and mother, and wife, and houses, and lands; for this, what will men not forsake or give? What is the real cause of half the lawsuits and the prosecutions that arise; is it not gold? And what will not men do for gold? They will cheat,

rob, embezzle, lie, forge, perjure themselves,—nay, they will do murder itself, for gold. Must we rest content, then, with this answer to our question, “What is the most precious thing in the world?” Impossible! for, notwithstanding the force and unanimity with which the world cries out, “Gold!” there are voices, not a few, which instantly and disdainfully reject the insulting reply. “Perish gold, where honour is at stake!” cry a hundred men at once; and they are right. Though honour be but an abstraction, that cannot be exchanged for bread, or pearls, it is more precious than gold. “Part with my political, my religious principle for a bribe, to keep a house over my head, or my farm in my hands?” say scores of men, “no! not for the world!” And they are right; though principles can neither be taken to market nor put out at interest, they are more precious than gold. “What! must I empty my heart of love to fill it with gold; marry a money bag instead of a soul; let the home fires die out of my heart in my eager pursuit of the gold? No, no! perish the dross, and let me keep my love, and a whole and sound heart,” say scores more. And they are right, for love is more precious than gold. Ay, and the philosopher would tell us that all the worth of the gold lies in the man. Now, if this be so, again, what answer must we have to our question, “What is the most precious thing in the world?” What answer but this, that MAN is the true gold, the priceless gem of the world, in comparison with whom all other things are vile? That, then, is the gold of which I am going to speak. Man, humanity, manhood—that is gold; the most fine gold, the precious stones of the sanctuary, over whose dimming, and changing, and desecration, I am going to ask you to lament with me. And I must first ask you to consider with me a little further the preciousness of manhood. For the mere secular and mundane purposes, there is no denying the power and the worth of gold. “Money can do anything,” say its devotees; and they are right, of course, within limits, but the limits are very wide ones. Gold can buy up the world, and the world’s laws resolve themselves into questions of money. And what is true thus of the literal gold, is true also, and in greater degree, of that more precious thing, of which we make that the figure just now. Oh! what splendour and glory of capacity is there not bound up within that little sphere, the body of a man! Six feet of earth can hold him comfortably, and yet the world cannot hold him—he holds the world. He is lord of all he sees; tenant for life of God’s grandest freehold, the universe; at the annual rent of the love of his whole soul. And, oh! what capacity of service for the world lies wrapped within that little germ. You have watched your garden in the blooming time, when every spur upon the branch holds promise of a cluster of the fruit; did you ever watch the blooming time of manhood? Did you note the quick impetuosity, the keen susceptibility, the noble emotions, the tender sympathy, the fine candour, the metallic ring of conscience, the play of high principle? Oh! what power was there to bless the world, if all this blossom had set in fruit, and all that manifold being had developed, in harmonious proportion, to its true stature; what a rich power, to hundreds and to thousands, had that one man been; what light he would have shot into the dark places of the universe; what a lever of help would his strong sympathy have become; what a power against wrong; what a haven of healthy sentiment and opinion; what a moral power; how his goodness would have radiated round him, as far as his world stretched. And, best of all, had that promise been fulfilled, had all those buds of hope and aspiration been set in fruit, he might have been how true, and good, and grand a saint; devout, and yet withal as cheery as a tenant of this sunny world should be; tender and gentle as a little unspoiled child, and yet as manly as the strongest hero in the world. A worshipper in all his life, with God in all his thoughts; God in his heart; his life a happy, conscious, willing service of his God; and yet the freest child of man and user of the world; a presence, and a power of righteousness, wherever he was. “What then!” do you ask me? “Is it within the power of every man that is born into the world to be saint, hero, statesman, poet, painter, genius, philosopher, philanthropist, every highest style of man—and all to perfection?” Of course I can’t mean any such thing! God’s gifts are all departed. “One star differeth from another star in glory.” Few men are great in more than one thing. So that I do not expect that it will be possible, in any millennium, ever, for every man to be in everything a man. And yet, though this be true, it is also true that every bit of humanity is fine gold! What I mean to assert is this, that by far the greater part of humanity is spoiled; that a large proportion of the men and women you meet every day might have been a great deal nobler, and better, and greater, and more capable every way than they are, and would have been so had

they not been spoiled. "The gold has become dim, the most fine gold has become changed; the stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the streets." In respect of this world merely, and of the things men have to do in this world—the handling of its material, the reading its books, the fulfilling of its relations—the masses of men are spoiled; dwarfed in their capacity, crippled in their mental and moral power, stunted in their development, warped from their uprightness, shorn of their beauty. There is a blight in the natural world that kills off the buds of every spring; there are untimely frosts; there are devouring insects, little, but potent; there are worms at the root, and maggots at the core; there are wind and tempest; over-sun, and over-rain; and so, not half the world's blossom comes to perfection. And as it is with the physical, so it is with the moral world. There is a human blight, deadly and fatal, that comes invisibly in a night, and makes our petals fall; there are chilly frosts, in the circumstances of our youth, that nip our buds; there are moral insects, of passion and temper, that come and gnaw at our heart; and there are germs of evil in the world around us that lay their eggs in our life. "How is the fine gold become dim!" Let me convert the exclamation of the text into an inquiry. How? First, there is weakness, inherent and innate—the legacy of one's ancestry, more lasting than their gold; weakness, working through generations, and culminating in us, through ignorance or wilful neglect of great physical laws; the natural robustness of humanity diluted out of us by evil treatment, and want of knowledge and care; and so, when the wings of the full-fledged soul begin to try their unused plumes, we find ourselves incapable of sustaining our lofty flight, and come to grovel on the earth again. Secondly, there are the defective or positively evil influences that surround our youth, and play on the formation of our character. How can one expect anything good to come from such germs, and out of such homes as thousands of these human germs are born and bred in? With sordid fathers, and silly mothers, ungoverned and untaught; mindless of their children, save to prevent them being a burden or a trouble—what wonder, that the fine gold becomes dim! With sweets and finery as the rewards of life, and "God" never used, but as a whip or bugbear, how can any good come? With no painstaking culture of morals and of tempers in such a world as this, how can it be but that the fine gold should be spoiled? (*G. W. Conder.*) *The lustre of humanity dimmed*.—I. THE PROPHETS REPRESENTATION OF MAN. "Gold." "Fine Gold." 1. A thing becomes valuable in proportion as it is so regarded. Gold in itself is useless; it is but as the dust which clings to our feet. But men have come to attach an importance to it, and hence it has become valuable. So man will be valuable or otherwise, just in proportion to our idea of him. God regards man as possessed of an interminable life; as worthy of minute providential inspection; as worth the great redemptive scheme; as fit for a home in heaven. 2. A thing is valuable in proportion to what it can accomplish. Gold can do much. It can make railways all over the world; tunnel the mightiest mountain; fix telegraphy to the most distant countries. What has man done? Measured the mightiest mountain; analysed the floating atmosphere; sounded the deep sea. What has man done? Let Bacon answer as he reveals the laws and operations of the human mind; Luther as he dispels mediæval ignorance; Clarkson as he pleads for the slave. What has man done? Let Elijah speak as he mounts up to God; Paul as he hears things which human speech cannot reveal; John as he sees celestial visions on Patmos; the humanity of Christ as it pleads in heaven. How great is man! He can partake of God's nature; assist in God's work; share God's glory. II. THE STATE WHICH THE PROPHET LAMENTS. The gold has become dim. Humanity has lost its lustre. This manifested in—1. A cruel neglect of parental duty (vers. 3, 4). Physical neglect is treated as a crime. Our moral sense loathes the man who withholds from his child its proper education. But spiritual neglect is far more criminal than either physical or intellectual. Parents, won't you spread your wings of faith and prayer, and bear your children up to God? 2. A sad prevalence of spiritual poverty. Those who once fed on dainties are desolate and perishing. But why this spiritual want? Is there no bread? Jesus gives the answer, "I am the bread of life." Listen! "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." 3. A fearful prostitution of powers and privileges. Minds which might have rivalled angels sunk below the brute. Hearts which might have throbbled with love to God cherishing hatred. III. THE CAUSES LEADING TO THIS DIMNESS. 1. Inward listlessness. We are easily moved along by the crowd of evil tendencies within. 2. Influence of example. The liar helps somebody to tell lies; the drunkard helps others on to ruin; the dishonest man leads some one else to

cheat. 3. The force of habit. He who once yields to temptation finds it more difficult to withstand the next attack. (*W. Tucker.*) *Spiritual declension* :—

I. THE OUTWARD SIGNS OF SPIRITUAL DECLENSION. 1. Love to Christ growing cold. We are all, more or less, amenable to the sympathy of numbers, the force of association; and where the majority are carnal, it is more difficult for the few to continue spiritual. The same danger reaches the Church by another route, namely, when there is an extensive profession of godliness, whether in its forms or phrases. 2. A growing inattention to ordinances. The sentiment of a heavenly-minded man is, "Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth." There is a love of places, as well as of persons and performances, because of their Divine associations. 3. Niggard and abridged seasons of personal devotion. 4. An easy satisfaction with present attainments. Increase is the condition of success; there is no stagnation in the waters that Christ shall give us; they are either "springing up," or else "the light that is in us is becoming darkness." 5. Religious gossiping. By this is meant a proneness to converse about the accidents, rather than the essence of Christianity. Not that other subjects than religion are excluded from their turn of necessary attention, but when every subject but that wakes an echo of interest, and challenges a general interchange of sentiment and experience, can they be loyal Christians who have nothing to say for Christ? 6. Decreasing sensitiveness of conscience. When men allow themselves in habits of conformity to the world from which they once shrunk, it is not that the world is better, but they worse. 7. Diminished zeal for the glory of God.

II. SOME INWARD SIGNS OF WHICH THE INDIVIDUAL ALONE IS CONSCIOUS. 1. The cessation of secret prayer. The habit has perhaps not wholly ceased, but it is carelessly, cursorily dealt with. There is a shrinking from personal details in communion with God. 2. The neglect of the Bible as a devotional book. If our Bibles cease to be necessary, nay, delightful to us, there is an internal evidence of decaying grace, which must be looked to, or the devotional neglect of the Book will proceed to the neglect of its Author. Other religious influences will begin to fail, the gold will become too dim to reflect a solitary star of heaven on the shipwreck of our faith, and the fine gold so changed as to be no longer recognised for a precious metal. 3. The spirit in which ordinances are entered upon. If the sanctuary be entered without previous prayer, and we should leave it as we entered, we asked nothing, and at least we have what we asked for. If we visit God's house without a settled purpose to honour Him, and only to patronise His minister, as some imagine, we cannot expect to meet Him; for that blessing is limited to them who meet together in His name, not in their own, or some other name. 4. What St. Paul calls "the root of bitterness springing up, whereby many are defiled." The root is concealed under the soil, and its existence is betrayed only by the sucker and the sprout starting from beneath, and indicative of a bad energy at work. Such a sucker robs the sap from the tree, bears no fruit itself, and detracts from the fruitfulness of the other branches. But the image is stronger than this: its metaphor indicates a man bad in doctrine and morals infecting by his evil influence the community of which he is a member. 5. Self-interest—a tendency to look at what is supposed to become our station, rather than what "becometh saints," as the elect of God. (*J. B. Owen, M.A.*)

Dimming of the gold :—We might so far alter the obvious meaning of the text as to lay great stress upon the meaning of the word "How"—as if it involved a mystery rather than declared the fact. How is it possible? It is gold, but it is dim; it is fine gold, but it is changed—how has it been done? Marvellous is the history of deterioration. 1. Archbishop Trench in his book upon "Words" has shown this in a very vivid manner in the matter of certain expressions and phrases which have gradually but completely changed their meaning in English speech and intercourse. He quotes the word "innocent." A word of gold, yea, of fine gold, indicating beauty of character, simplicity of spirit, incapability of double-mindedness or ambiguity of thought and intent; all so plain, so pure, so straightforward. How is the word now employed in many cases? To indicate people who have lost mental strength, or people who never had mental strength; weak-minded people; even those who are little short of imbeciles are described as "innocent"—those having no longer any responsibility; having outlived the usual obligations of life or never having come under them; persons from whom nothing may be expected. "How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!" A change of that kind does not take place on the surface; changes of that sort have history underneath them as their cause and explanation; the soul has got wrong in order to allow a word like that to be perverted from its original

beauteousness. This is not a trick in merely vocal transition ; underneath this is a sad moral history. Even words may indicate the moral course which a nation has taken. 2. What is true of words is true also of merely social manners. How different you are now in some of your social relations from what you used to be ! Every man will supply his own illustration. How civil we used to be ; how courteous ; how prompt in attention ; how critical in our behaviour ; how studious not to wound ! "How is the gold become dim ! how is the most fine gold changed !" How rough we are, and brusque ! How blunt—and we call our bluntness frankness ! How positive, stubborn, self-willed, resolute, careless of the interests of others ! What off-handed speeches we make ! What curt answers we return ! "How is the gold become dim ! how is the most fine gold changed !" What if that dimness should so deepen and extend as to lead some persons to question the reality of the gold ? In these matters we must as Christian men be careful, thoughtful, watchful, critical. There is nothing little that concerns the integrity and the fulness of Christian character. 3. What is true of words and of manner is also true of the high ideals with which we began life. Let us be thankful for ideals. We cannot always live up to the ideal, but we can still look at it and cherish it ; and from our uplifted ideal we may sometimes draw healing when we have been bitten by some flying fiery serpent whose bite has flung us in agony upon the ground for a while, like worsted and mortally wounded things. We cannot have ideals too lofty, too pure, too heavenly. We cannot strike the star, but the arrow goes the higher for the point it was aimed at. What ideals we used to have ! Who dares bring back to memory all the ideals with which he started life ? Where are they ? "How is the gold become dim ! how is the most fine gold changed !" Let me add to the criticism the Gospel which says, We may every one begin again. What say you to that Gospel opportunity and Gospel challenge ? Let each say, "I will arise and go to my Father" ; let each one say, "I will arise and go to my Ideal, and say, I have wounded Thee, dishonoured Thee, fallen infinitely short of Thee in every particular. I am no more worthy that Thou shouldst be associated with my poor name." (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Gold become dim*.—In describing and deploring the sad condition of the favoured and once holy and famous city of Jerusalem, the prophet employs a familiar symbol. We all know what gold is, and only by precision of statement does the dictionary help us with its information that "Gold is a precious metal, remarkable on account of its unique and beautiful yellow colour, lustre, high specific gravity, and freedom from liability to rust or tarnish when exposed to the air."—Century Dictionary. Men have been talking and thinking about gold as they never have before in the history of our country, possibly as never before in the history of the world. And men are coming to understand and appreciate as perhaps never before the importance of this most valuable of the precious metals to the commercial interest of the world, the distribution of commodities, the remuneration of labour, the stability of institutions, the progress of civilisation, and the weal of humanity ; aye, and to recognise and admire the Divine wisdom and goodness in providing this important agent, giving it just the qualities it has, supplying it in just such quantity, and making it just so acquirable, and just so difficult of acquisition, that there has ever been enough and never too much for the world's use, and its value has been more sure and stable than that of any other material thing that man uses. Gold is valuable for many uses. It is exceedingly serviceable in the arts, particularly the arts of adornment, not only from its beautiful, brilliant, and permanent colour, but also from its extreme malleability, ductility, elasticity, and tenacity. It is easily shaped by hammer, graving tool, mould, or die. It will receive the most delicate impression, and embody the effects of the most exquisite skill. It is the appropriate setting for the most costly gems, and the suitable material for crowns and sceptres and signets, and all the insignia of eminent and sacred office. It seems designed to express the splendour and glory of goodliest things. But its most important use is as a universal and unvarying medium of commercial exchange and standard of material values, representing and converting all the varied and countless products of human labour. All this is in a measure true of the other precious metal, silver, but in a less degree. Indeed, the old notion that gold was related to the sun, and silver to the moon corresponds well with their actual importance. It has not been left for us at this late day to discover the value and use of gold. These have been understood from the earliest ages. "I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich" ; but allusions to gold are frequent in the earliest as well as the latest books. Gold has a prominent place

in Biblical symbolism and metaphor. The ark of the covenant was overlaid with pure gold. The furnishings of the ark, the cherubim upon its cover, the altar of incense before it, the sacred candlestick, the high priest's breastplate in which the twelve jewels were set, and the plate in his tiara bearing the inscription, "Holiness unto the Lord," were all of gold. Everywhere it is the symbol of what is sacred, and of highest special excellence and value. As the prophet here uses the symbol he may have had in mind gold as money; or, if his thought were more general, that will serve to help us realise the imagery. 1. A gold coin fresh from the mint is an object of beauty as well as of value. It has, in the first place, an actual and intrinsic value, the same, or about the same, as its nominal value as money. Real, as distinguished from representative money, must have this quality, that its actual and intrinsic value is equal to its nominal or representative value, so that it can pass freely from hand to hand throughout the community in final discharge of debts and in full payment for commodities, and be accepted without a reference to the character or credit of the person who offers it. It is this that makes gold so pre-eminently adapted for use as money, that in it this element of value obtains without too great bulk, and with the stability which is necessary in the commercial interchanges of civilised peoples. That which is of comparatively low value, so that great bulk and weight are involved, or that is of fluctuating value, so that it cannot meet the requirement of stability, does not, and cannot, so well serve this important use. Besides its intrinsic value, gold coin has impressed upon it some design and legend, authoritatively attesting its value; this minting being now, among civilised nations, an exclusively governmental function. But, along with these characteristics, it has also great beauty. The metal, with its rich colour, is capable of beautiful effects; and the process of minting develops the capability, bringing out the rich and brilliant hue, and the image and superscription which it receives being impressed with artistic skill and the most perfect mechanical aids. Such the prophet's figure of Jerusalem in its better days. It was an embodiment of eminent civic excellence. It owned the sway, and bore the image and superscription of the King of kings. There the Temple stood in its stately splendour. There the worship of God was celebrated with devout and elaborate pomp. There the Law of God was recognised and honoured, and the ideal of the holy city, the city of God, the earthly dwelling-place of the Most High, was sustained by a befitting government and order, and had effect in a peaceful and happy prosperity. Hence the admiring and rejoicing eulogies of Hebrew poets: "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth is Mount Zion: the city of the great King." But we are in a world where even fine gold becomes dim. This is true literally. Notwithstanding its freedom from liability to rust or tarnish, and its resistance to the agents which produce these effects, even gold will lose its pristine lustre. An old gold coin does not have the sheen and splendour of a newly minted one. It becomes dulled and dimmed by circulation. Also, there is an abrasion as it passes to and fro in the uses of the world. Its edges become worn; the design and legend upon it grow indistinct; and its very quantity is reduced, so that in the course of about twenty years, on an average, gold coin needs to be reminted. And there are even yet more serious processes of deterioration conducted with fraudulent design in the various forms of counterfeiting and coin debasement. This is even yet more true of those embodiments of moral excellence of which gold is the symbol. It would seem that this ought not to be, but that moral goodness, excellence, and worth should be the most stable and persistent qualities in the world; that they would be stronger than the opposite qualities and the forces arrayed against them, and that they would resist and subdue them; and also that their good effects would be so apparent and approved that the world would be friendly and favourable to them, and that individuals and communities would cherish and foster them; and so that every virtuous attainment would be a happy and lasting gain. Thus we should expect that truthfulness would become ever more truthful, and more manifestly excellent and beautiful with the wear of use; and that the friction of the world would not dim its lustre, wear down its fine precision, and render its Divine impress less distinct, but give its sheen and splendour and intrinsic worth more superb and glorious effect. We should expect a corresponding history of honesty, fidelity, courage, honour, purity, patriotism, philanthropy, and generosity. This is what ought to be, as every moral intuition affirms. It is what might be, as every revelation and provision, precept and promise, guiding law and gracious succour, assures us. But it is not what actually and uniformly

is. Virtue is militant, and maintains itself only by victorious warfare. There is the possibility of deterioration in every nature that is capable of virtue, and innumerable occasions, influences, and agents press to develop the possibility into actual fact. Of nothing perhaps did men ever feel more sure than Jewish patriots did of the stability of Jerusalem, both in its sacred and civil glory. Yet Jerusalem declined into an indescribable corruption and depravity, and the devastation and desolation resulting from Nebuchadnezzar's siege were but the sequel of its moral decadence. How many other institutions and societies have had a similar history! How to nations, churches, and other social federations and organisations there have been what are fitly named "Golden Ages!" And how these have been followed by ages of decline. And by what recastings and renovations the progress of humanity has been realised! This further is to be noted, and it is the great lesson of history, that material decadence has been the sequel of moral deterioration. History teems with illustrations of this truth. But we are more interested in applications and illustrations lying nearer to common life. One of the most beautiful and precious things our human life can know is friendship—I mean real friendship—the alliance for good, and fellowship in good, of congenial souls, and not mere modish or faddish attachments. What help and solace these companioned souls afford each other! What interest and worth they find in each other! In success the joy is insipid until the other shares it. In misfortune the pang is softened by the other's sympathy. And each life is unfolded and enriched by its interest in the other. How sad to see such gold become dim, such fine gold change! And yet how common the instance! So with other relations growing out of our social aptitudes and needs. And yet how poor, and base, even, in actual fact they become! 2. But the most impressive correspondence to this imagery is in the sphere of character and the processes of individual life. With what interest, admiration, and hope we contemplate the splendid possibilities and goodly promise of a fair opening life! Childhood has passed under favourable conditions and good influences, youth has unfolded under judicious nurture and with only the faults incident to youth, and manhood has been attained with no dark stain upon the character and no vitiating habit in the life. Grand equipment for life's work has been won by the processes of general and special education. "Here," we say, "is fine gold. This one will make his mark. This life will count for something, and be among the grander facts and forces in the life of the world." The hope, thank God, is often realised. Notwithstanding debasing influences grand lives are being lived. But it is not always so. In some instances the following years do not fulfil the promises of life's splendid opening. The character, subjected to the hard wear of the world, loses the lustre of its glorious prime. The high ideals, the noble and generous aims, the principled integrity, the delicacy of conscience, and the fine sense of honour, fade under the rough impact of coarser lives. Thus the gold that shone with such noble brilliancy becomes dim. So it is sometimes with a life that has come under the influence of religion, and connected itself with, and set itself to, the highest and best. Sometimes even such a life shows deterioration. The faith, the love, the zeal, the devotion which marked its opening, and made it bright with Divine lustre, decline. By some truancy to duty, some neglect of spiritual culture, or some looseness of living, the heaven-born soul loses the fine quality of its life, the Divine image and superscription upon it are defaced. When gold coin has ceased to be what it ought, by loss of weight, or defacement of its impression, it must be reminted. By that process what is deficient is made up, and what is defaced is restored. This is what deteriorated characters, deteriorated souls, deteriorated lives, need; and this is precisely what Christianity provides for. This is the distinctive feature of Christianity, that it is a converting, transforming, renewing religion. It restores in man the faded image and superscription of God, and it makes the debased nature worthy of the impress. (*J. W. Earnshaw.*)

Vers. 2-12. **The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers!**—*The heavenly and the earthly estimates of good men*:—I. **THE HEAVENLY ESTIMATE OF GOOD MEN.** Good men have a golden value in the estimation of heaven. 1. Their principles are intrinsically valuable. They are men of truth, justice, benevolence, worship. 2. Their influence is socially valuable. They are the salt of the earth, the light of the world. 3. Their privileges are infinitely valuable. All things are theirs. Angels are their servants; Christ is their Redeemer; the Lord is their portion. II. **THE WORLDLY ESTIMATE**

OF GOOD MEN. "How are they esteemed as earthen pitchers?" 1. This estimate has ever been lamentably common. 2. This estimate indicates great moral degeneracy. The human soul is constituted to value the true, to admire the excellent, to worship Divine virtues wherever they exist. 3. This estimate entails fearful spiritual evils. The virtues of the good are the world's uplifting powers. Where they are ignored their salutary influence is not felt. (*Homilist.*) *The character, excellence, and estimate of the pious:—I. THE CHARACTERS DESCRIBED.* "The precious sons of Zion." 1. Zion is their spiritual birthplace. Being "begotten again," they have received the spirit of sons (Gal. iv. 6), and now aspire after the "better country" to which the sons of Zion are entitled (Isa. xxxv. 10; Heb. xi. 16). 2. They acknowledge their great and growing obligations to Zion. 3. They are devoted to the interests of Zion. Gratitude, piety, benevolence, prompt them to promote the prosperity of the Church, by persuasion, &c.; and by their example and their prayers (Psa. cxxii. 6-9; Isa. lxii. 1; Matt. v. 14-16; Rom. xii. 1). 4. They are entitled to all the privileges and immunities of Zion. They are "free" (Gal. iv. 31); "are fellow-citizens with the saints," &c. (Eph. ii. 19). And the unfailing word of Zion's King secures to her protection (Isa. xxvi. 1); provision (Psa. cxxxii. 15); support (Isa. xxxv. 3, 4); comfort (Psa. cxxxii. 16); and eternal glory (Isa. lx. 14-20). II. *THE EXCELLENCE OF THE SONS OF ZION.* 1. In respect of its purity. "Comparable to fine gold"; which is gold that has undergone a certain process of purification, to clear it from dross, and thus make it more fine, solid, strong, and useful. So the saints have all experienced "the renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Tit. iii. 5); and their hearts are purified by faith (Acts xv. 9). 2. In respect of its value. Gold is of "the precious metals" the most precious, *i.e.*, of highest price. The text speaks of fine gold, of the best quality; and therefore most valuable. In this sense Zion's sons are precious; possessing intrinsic excellence. They are partakers of precious grace (2 Pet. i. 1); which they exercise on precious promises (2 Pet. i. 4); which promises have respect to a precious Saviour (1 Pet. ii. 5-7); by whose precious blood they are redeemed (1 Pet. i. 19). 3. In respect of its utility. The true sons of Zion are greatly useful, on account of their excellent principles of philanthropy and social order, uniting the different classes and members of society, and promoting the welfare of the whole (1 Tim. ii. 1-4). Whence results the excellence of their practice; as rulers (2 Sam. xxiii. 1-3); parents (Eph. vi. 4); masters (Col. iv. 1); subjects (Rom. xiii. 7; 1 Pet. ii. 17); children (Eph. vi. 1-3); servants (Eph. vi. 5-7); doing evil to none (Rom. xii. 17); but good to all. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him," &c. And they are valuable also, on account of their piety and their prayers. 4. In respect of its honour. Gold has been employed in presents to the most honourable persons (1 Kings x. 2, 10; Matt. ii. 11); and in the most honourable services; whether civil (Psa. xlv. 9, 13); or sacred (Exod. xxv. 11-22; 2 Chron. iii. 3-11). The pious are highly honourable in the estimation of those who are proper judges of what constitutes an honourable character. III. *THE ESTIMATION IN WHICH THE SONS OF ZION ARE TOO OFTEN HELD.* "How are they esteemed as earthen pitchers," &c.; as mean, worthless, despicable things! This false estimate of the pious happens, because Satan employs all his craft and all his agency to obscure the excellence of truth and piety; and to gild with a false and beguiling lustre what is wrong and wicked. 1. Their principles are misnamed. Their humility is meanness; their forbearance and meekness, pusillanimity, weakness, &c. On the other hand, their zeal is rashness; their firmness, obstinacy; their piety, enthusiasm, &c. 2. Their motives are suspected. Of the Redeemer Himself it was said, "He is a bad man, and deceiveth the people." 3. Their conduct is misrepresented. "Prejudice has neither eyes nor ears" to discover merit; but it whets the tongue of slander, to mangle, disfigure, and distort innocent actions; and then to inflict censure and condemnation. (1) In our estimate of character let us not judge from common report; but from our own observation. (2) Nor by the maxims of the world; but by those of God's Word. Many, "of whom the world was not worthy," have "wandered in sheep-skins," &c. (3) Nor be solicitous of the honour that cometh from men; but "the honour that cometh from God only" (John v. 41-44). (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *Excellence of the Christian character:—I.* The sons of Zion are comparable to fine gold. In its refined state gold is so freed from alloy or dross, that among the metals it is esteemed the purest; and if there be one feature in the Christian more prominent and distinguishing than another, it is his purity at once of heart and life. Between Christians and iniquity there is an ever-widening distance,

an ever-increasing opposition; and although, like the finest gold, which still contains some portion of alloy, they are never in this life absolutely free from impurity, they are yet, with an unwavering steadiness of purpose, putting it progressively away from them, and becoming clothed with that righteousness which in eternity shall shine in unspotted whiteness. Sin, in every shape and under every guise, is the object of their deep and confirmed abhorrence; and because of the love, and faith, and hope which they sedulously cultivate, they are so gradually approximating in resemblance to Him of whose spirit they are the living temples, that they exhibit so many reflections of that moral beauty by which the Godhead is adorned, and are the types of that holiness which, undimmed and infinite, reigns triumphantly in heaven. II. But gold is distinguished also for its *VALUE*. This arises from its rarity, from its intrinsic worth, and from its utility; and, in these several respects, the comparison between it and "the sons of Zion" may be illustrated. 1. First, then, the Christian is comparable to gold in respect of scarcity. Not profusely enriching every land, nor to be found imbedded in every soil, the golden ore is discoverable but in few countries; and, in like manner, of the earth's inhabitants, the sons of God's spiritual Zion form a small and insignificant proportion. 2. Christians are comparable to pure gold, next, as respects their intrinsic value. Estimated, indeed, on the principles which guide the world's judgment, they, in general, have less to recommend them than many of their unregenerated and ungodly neighbours; but looked at as delineated by the Spirit of revelation, and judged according to the standard by which the destinies of creation are to be decided, they are a "chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people." 3. The Christian is comparable to fine gold also in respect of utility. By this, indeed, the value of an object is usually estimated; and as gold, when freely and plentifully circulated, promotes the general comfort and happiness, so "the sons of Zion," by the sanctity and blamelessness of their lives, exert a most beneficial influence upon society. With the influence of consistent and persevering example, every individual is acquainted. It challenges to imitation; it is a living commentary upon the excellence and power of principle; and where it is not successful in exciting to kindred action, it usually has majesty enough to awe and to rebuke the gainsayer into silence. And if we would properly comprehend the influence which, in this respect, Christians exercise upon the community at large, we have only to look at them moving within the circle of a family or a neighbourhood. Suppose a multitude of such men, the same in character, the same in consistency, pervading society throughout the land, mingling in the market-place, frequenting the marts of trade, labouring in the manufactory and in the workshop; and when you think of the innate depravity of the human heart, and the inherent tendency of sin to propagate itself, is it not clear that they are the salt which preserves the whole mass from rottenness,—the preservatives of the community from moral putrefaction and decay? (*J. Jeffrey.*) *Men lightly esteemed*.—1. The greatest reputation that man can attain unto in this life, is an uncertain estate, and easily taken away (*Psa. xlix. 12*). (1) Reasons. (a) There is no certainty in anything under the sun (*Eccles. i. 2*). (b) God setteth up, and putteth down, at His pleasure (*Dan. iv. 29*). (c) He that useth his prosperous estate best, deserveth continually to have it taken from him. (2) Use: to teach us not to admire the glorious estate of man that is in honour, seeing it is most fickle; not to set our hearts upon anything we enjoy in this world, but to use the things thereof as if we used them not. 2. Those whom God hath advanced in authority above others, are to be revered and honoured above others. (1) They represent the person of God Himself. (2) They have that power and authority which should work a reverent fear and awe of them in the hearts of others. 3. It is a worthy thing in great men to be adorned with good qualities, so far exceeding others as their calling is above them. (1) They shall be the more able to carry themselves aright in their place. (2) They shall procure the greater reverence unto their place thereby. 4. It is marvellous in the judgment of flesh and blood to see a man of highest estimation come to be of the basest account. (*J. Udal.*) *They that did feed delicately are desolate*.—*The delicate are desolate*.—1. It is often the lot of God's people to spend the former part of their life in much worldly pleasure, and the latter in great misery. (1) Because many have their share in the world till they be called to the knowledge of Christ, which is often at the ninth or last hour. (2) God seeth it meet to let many of His children have experience of good and evil. (3) It is the nature of our corruptions to lead us to abuse prosperity, which God will

punish in His children in this life. 2. Many are most delicately brought up, that afterward come to great want and extremity. (1) Their parents make fondlings of them, and do not put them to any lawful work in their youth, and so they prove unfit for any in their age. (2) God will punish both the folly of the parents, and the vanity of the children, for the example of others. (3) Disordered education increaseth the number and height of sin, which must needs pull in the punishments for sin after it. 3. In a general calamity, they are most subject to ruin that in time of prosperity are freest from it by their abundance of worldly things. (1) They are most likely to have committed the greatest sins in the abuse of God's blessings. (2) They have least exercised themselves in the ways to escape danger; persuading themselves to escape if any do. (3) The riches of the wealthiest are the things that spoilers set their eyes most upon: for which they will be most extreme with the owners thereof. (*J. Udal.*) **For the punishment of the iniquity . . . is greater.—Grievous punishment:—**1. The godly do usually sustain more grievous punishments in this life than any others. 2. Man never sustaineth any punishment in this life, but such as he justly deserveth by his own sins. 3. That is the greatest punishment which man can suffer in this life, which is of longest continuance, though it be not the severest in itself. (1) A short punishment, though heavier, doth not kill the heart so much. (2) Satan can work many things in time, which of a sudden he cannot. (3) The consideration of the length of time giveth matter of strong temptations to despair or revolt from the truth. (*Ibid.*) **The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed.—The incredible things of life:—**The "impossible" is not impossible, the incredible may come to be true, that which revolts the sense and shocks the feeling may become a commonplace of life. Let us illustrate this. 1. All the neighbourhood, all the friends and acquaintances, would not have believed that the great rich man to whom scores were mean and hundreds trifles could have come to beg his bread. But it is possible. Riches take to themselves wings and flee away. Take heed! It is right to be rich, very rich, but it is wrong for the riches to be master of the man; hold them, so that coming or going they never interfere with prayer, with faith, with charity, with noble, generous love; they are servants, helpers, great assistants in the philanthropic cause: hold them so, and you never can be poor. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Pause and consider, and put things wisely and solidly together, and say, These things are but for a moment; for a moment's use they are invaluable, but as securities, towers, defences, rather let me entangle myself in some elaborate cobweb, and trust to that against God's lightning and thunder. 2. Who would believe that the great strong man, whose every bone is, as it were, wrought-iron, should one day be glad of the help of a little child? How humbling! how instructive! You may accost him, and ask him if he remembers the time when he could have lifted a man in each hand and felt he was not doing anything in particular as an exercise of strength; and with a hollow laugh he will say, Ay, I remember! How now?—the sinews melted, the bones no longer iron, the great frame bent down, the sunken eyes peering for a grave. What did this? Ill-conduct? No. Wastefulness of strength and energy? No. What did it? Silent, insidious, mighty Time. 3. Who could believe that a man of great capacity and great judgment in all earthly things should come to be unable to give a rational opinion upon the affairs of the day? Impossible, say you. How godlike in reason! How all but infinite in faculty! He will be to the last bright as a star. What if he stumble at noonday? What if he forget his own name? What if he cannot tell where his own house is? and what if they who trusted him aforetime so implicitly should say, Poor soul! he is gone; it is no use looking in that quarter for wisdom or direction: his genius is dead; alas! but so it is? If that be so, why should we not learn from that fact, and work while it is called day, for the night cometh wherein no man can work? Redeem the time, buy up the opportunity, knowing that our brightest genius shall be eclipsed, our strongest sagacity shall lose its penetration, and our judgment shall halt for the judgment of others. 4. Who of us cannot name men who, if they were to fail in moral completeness, in probity, in honour, in truthfulness, would shake Society to its base? What! every word a hollow word, every action a selfish calculation, every attitude part of a fraud and conspiracy, every generous deed a new bid for self-promotion,—signatures forsworn, bonds broken, by such men? Never! It is impossible, incredible; the suggestion is born of the pit. We are right in so saying. Have no faith in men who cannot be fired into godly anger when they hear great reputations assailed, and when they see

great characters slurred and defamed. At the same time let us learn from history. Great men have fallen from high moral excellence. He—the unnamed—“the starry leader of the seven”—fell from heaven. Some angels “kept not their first estate.” With these wrecks before us, what is our course of wisdom? Let us trust under the wings of the Almighty, let us live within the shadow of His presence, let us be hidden in His pavilion; then, come weal, come woe, our end will be heaven:—say ye to the righteous, It shall be well with him, however black the immediate cloud, however storm-laden the immediate outlook. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Vers. 13-16. For the sins of her prophets.—*Sins of the prophets*:—1. When the teachers of the people are wicked, it is a sign that the general number of the whole people is grown far from the right way. (1) Very shame keepeth teachers from many sins, until they be grown into custom among the people. (2) Such teachers are usually sent of God among a people, as a special punishment for their grievous sins against the Lord. 2. The promise of God's presence was never tied to any Church or order of ministry, further than as they walked in His obedience. 3. Foul spots and gross sins may be in the face and principal members of a true visible Church. 4. When the corruptions of a Church do grow so far that the maintainers thereof proceed to shed the blood of them that withstand the same, there can nothing be looked for but desolation and ruin. (*J. Udall.*) **They have wandered as blind men in the streets.**—*Religious blindness*:—1. Those that are not rightly instructed in the true knowledge of God, are as blind in matters of religion as the blind man in seeing what is before him in the way (1 Cor. ii. 14; Matt. xxiv. 29). 2. An unconscionable ministry begetteth ignorance and all ungodliness in the people. (1) Such are usually sent in God's judgment to lead them to believe lies (2 Thess. ii. 10). (2) The people are naturally inclined easily to follow that teacher who leads unto evil. 3. The ignorance of the true knowledge of God is the ready way to all iniquity. (1) We cannot know what is sin but by the knowledge of the law of God (Rom. vii. 7). (2) Where there is no knowledge, there is no consciousness of sin. 4. They that are ignorant of God's Word, and live among an ungodly people, cannot but be defiled with their sins. (*Ibid.*) **Depart ye; it is unclean.**—*The sins of professors exclaimed against*:—1. The professors of the truth, when God giveth them over unto themselves, become so odiously sinful, that their enemies shall cry out at them for it. (1) They have no power to restrain from evil, but only from the Lord. (2) God giveth the wicked to see and exclaim against the sins of professors, though they be blind in their own. 2. When we regard not to walk in the truth, God will give us over to do we know not what, and wander we cannot tell whither. (1) It is a branch of His judgment threatened (Rom. i. 28). (2) He will let men see in their own experience, what a miserable way they walk in that have not Him for their guide. 3. We are easily brought to flatter ourselves, and to promise ourselves much felicity. (1) We do not rightly weigh the weight of God's anger, and the desert of our sins. (2) Our affections labour to be persuaded of that they desire to enjoy. 4. It is a great fault for him that professeth to make conscience of his word, to report that which he hath no ground for. (1) It is a mark of a busybody to employ himself where there is no need. (2) It argueth the heart to be most light and vain that setteth the tongue on work with such uncertain things. (3) It is the cause that many untruths be reported, and consequently of many sins. (*Ibid.*) **Lepers**:—We do not know whether the poet is here describing actual events, or whether this is an imaginary picture designed to express his own feelings with regard to the persons concerned. The situation is perfectly natural, and what is narrated may very well have happened just as it is described. But if it is not history it is still a revelation of character, a representation of what the writer knows to be the conduct of the moral lepers, and their deserts; and as such it is most suggestive. In the first place there is much significance in the fact that the overthrow of Jerusalem is unhesitatingly charged to the account of the sins of her prophets and priests. The accusation is of the very gravest character. These religious leaders are charged with murder. The crimes were aggravated by the fact that the victims selected were the “righteous,” perhaps men of the Jeremiah party, who had been persecuted by the officials of the State religion. The sin of these religious leaders of Israel consists essentially in betraying a sacred trust. The priest is in charge of the Torah—traditional or written; he must have been unfaithful to his law or he could not have led his people astray. If a man who has been set in a place of trust prostitutes his privileges simply to

win admiration for his oratory, or at most in order to avoid the discomfort of unpopularity or the disappointment of neglect, his sin is unpardonable. The one form of unfaithfulness on the part of these religious leaders of Israel of which we are specially informed is their refusal to warn their reckless fellow-citizens of the approach of danger, or to bring home to their hearers' consciences the guilt of the sin for which the impending doom was the just punishment. Our age is far from being optimistic; and yet the same temptation threatens to smother religion to-day. In an aristocratic age the sycophant flatters the great; in a democratic age he flatters the people—who are then in fact the great. The peculiar danger of our own day is that the preacher should simply echo popular cries, and voice the demands of the majority irrespective of the question of their justice. In the hour of their exposure these wretched prophets and priests lose all sense of dignity, even lose their self-possession, and stumble about like blind men, helpless and bewildered. The discovery of the true character of these men was the signal for a yell of execration on the part of the people by flattering whom they had obtained their livelihood, or at least all that they most valued in life. This, too, must have been another shock of surprise to them. Had they believed in the essential fickleness of popular favour, they would never have built their hopes upon so precarious a foundation, for they might as well have set up their dwelling on the strand that would be flooded at the next turn of the tide. The Jews show their disgust and horror for their former leaders by pelting them with the leper call. According to the law the leper must go with rent clothes and flowing hair, and his face partly covered, crying, "Unclean, unclean." It is evident that the poet has this familiar mournful cry in his mind when he describes the treatment of the prophets and priests. But if the religious leader is slow to confess or even perceive his guilt, the world is keen to detect it and swift to cast it in his teeth. There is nothing that excites so much loathing; and justly so, for there is nothing that does so much harm. Such conduct is the chief provocative of practical scepticism. Religion suffers more from the hypocrisy of some of her avowed champions than from the attacks of all the hosts of her pronounced foes. Accordingly a righteous indignation assails those who work such deadly mischief. Their action appears to show that they had some idea that even at the eleventh hour the city might be spared if it were rid of this plague of the blood-stained prophets and priests. And yet however various and questionable the motives of the assailants may have been, there is no escape from the conclusion that the wickedness they denounced so eagerly richly deserved the most severe condemnation. Wherever we meet with it, this is the leprosy of society. Disguised for a time, a secret canker in the breast of unsuspected men, it is certain to break out at length; and when it is discovered it merits a measure of indignation proportionate to the previous deception. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*)

Ver. 20. The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, was taken in their pits.—The failure of human trust:—I. **THE NATION'S RELATIONS WITH THEIR KING.** They trusted their fate, their safety, their hopes, into the hands of their king. 1. Observe how they regarded him. They called him "The breath of their nostrils"—that is, they considered him as dear and as necessary as the air they breathed. We are prone to make too much of human agents and earthly creatures, especially of the rich, noble, and great. 2. Observe how he disappointed them. They gave him honour, trust. They expected security and happiness. But when the city was besieged, he and all the men of war escaped through the king's garden. His cowardice, however, availed him nothing, for the Chaldeans overtook him and carried him to Babylon. Thus were the people's hopes and expectations painfully deceived, and the popular idol, instead of defending them, proved a cowardly and a miserable traitor, who suffered for his wretched conduct by being blinded, bound in chains, and kept in prison till the day of his death. II. **THE IMPORTANT INSTRUCTION DERIVED.** 1. The folly of making popular idols. Whether regally, politically, or socially, they only bring disappointment, and for their own purposes will deceive and betray those who have reposed their trust in them. 2. The folly of seeking human help. God will take away or destroy that which He sees is likely to take our thoughts away from Him. Whatever we make the means of our forsaking or forgetting Him, He will make the instrument of chastising us. (*Homilist.*) *Confidence in vain help:—*1. The office of the king, and so of every magistrate, is to protect and preserve the people in safety and peace, even as the breath that we draw in at our nostrils giveth life and health

unto the body. (1) God hath given them power for the good, and not the harm, of the subjects. (2) They are God's lieutenants, who is the preservation and safety of all His creatures. (3) Else are the people subject to fall into all evils (Jud. xvii. 6; Prov. xix. 12). 2. Kings and princes, when they sin against the Lord, are subject to His punishing hand as well as meaner people. (1) God is no acceptor of persons. (2) They have no more privilege promised them than others (1 Sam. xii. 25). 3. It is the nature of man to promise himself all assurance, when the outward means seem strong for him. (1) Carnal reason doth regard nothing but the outward means. (2) Satan laboureth to make us secure thereupon, and not to look any further. 4. When God's people set their hearts too much on outward things He useth utterly to take them away from them. (1) Else they will forget to rely upon Him as they should. (2) He loveth them, and will force them from all alliance except Himself. (*J. Udall.*) *Taken in the pits:*—The people tell the sad tale of the pursuit of their foes. Swifter than the eagles, they chased them on the mountains, and laid wait for them in the wilderness. Then they narrate how their king fell into the hands of them who sought his life. He was dear to them as the breath of their nostrils; his person was sacred as the anointed of the Lord; they had thought that even though they were carried into captivity they would find some alleviation to their hardships in dwelling under his protection; they said, "Under his shadow we shall live among the nations." But even he was taken in their pits. What a likeness and a contrast to our blessed Lord! I. There is LIKENESS. He is as the breath of our life. As we inhale the air around us, so we expand our souls to drink in of His most blessed nature. We open our mouths, and inhale Him as our vital element; His Spirit for our spirit; His blood for our souls; His resurrection strength for our bodies. He is the anointed of the Father, who anoints us. Because He is the Christ (anointed), we are Christians (anointed ones). His shadow is a most grateful and widespread one, beneath which we may dwell in safety. II. But how great the CONTRAST! Though He was once taken in the pit of Satanic malice and the shadow of death, yet now He liveth to be the shield and protector of His people wherever they are scattered among the nations. He that sitteth on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them. They shall hunger and thirst no more, neither shall the sun strike them. However far our bodies are from one another, we all dwell beneath the shadow of the Lord, which is as a great rock in a weary land. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

Vers. 21, 22. **Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom.**—*Edom's rejoicing:*—

1. The godly must take it patiently that the wicked do triumph and rejoice over them, when God doth humble them by afflictions. (1) Because they know it to be the Lord's doing. (2) They know that the wicked do but according to their nature. (3) They are assured that God will look upon it in its due time, to deliver them, and punish their enemies. 2. Of all the adversaries that God's people have, those are the cruellest that in outward respects are the nearest to them. (1) Because they know best their corruptions for which they are afflicted, and the ways to do them most harm. (2) That God may make the rod the heavier, to make them the more earnestly seek unto Him. 3. Whatsoever afflictions the Lord layeth on His people in this life, the wicked shall be punished therewith in their time. (1) God's justice cannot let them escape unpunished. (2) Judgment doth begin at the house of God. 4. Though the Lord spare His enemies, till He hath corrected His servants, yet will He overthrow them with a large measure of His judgments in His due time. 5. The wicked, when God layeth His punishing hand upon them, do most notoriously manifest the heinousness of their sins. (1) They have no grace to take it patiently, but do rage at it. (2) God's hand is never upon them for their comfort, but to crush and confound them. (*J. Udall.*) **The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion.**—*The debt of guilt extinguished:*—I. Our FIRST MESSAGE IS ONE OF COMFORT. "The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion; He will no more carry thee away into captivity." 1. A joyous fact. Sin deserved God's wrath; that wrath has spent itself on Christ. O daughter of Zion, let thy conscience be at rest. Justice is satisfied; the law is not despised: it is honoured; it is established. Thou art accepted in the Beloved; thy guilt was laid on Him of old, and thou art now safe. Come thou boldly unto God, and rejoice thou in Him. Lest, however, while God is reconciled and conscience is quieted, our fears should even for an instant arise, let us repair to Gethsemane and Calvary, and see there this great sight, how the punishment of our iniquity is accomplished. 2. See

to whom this message is sent. (1) In the first chapter and at the sixth verse you find it said, "From the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed." We should have thought that Christ would have died for those who had some form and comeliness, but no. "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." (2) Wonder of wonders! the eighth and ninth verses tell us "Jerusalem hath grievously sinned," and the ninth verse tells us yet more, that "her filthiness is in her skirts." Thus those for whom Christ died are made to feel their sin. (3) Look on, again, to the seventeenth verse, and there you find that this filthiness has brought her into utter distress—"Zion spreadeth forth her hands, and there is none to comfort her." So those to whom this message is sent are brought, through a sense of sin, into a comfortless state. (4) To make the case worse, this poor daughter of Zion is obliged to confess that she deserved all her sufferings. In the eighteenth verse she says, "The Lord is righteous: for I have rebelled against His commandments." The soul feels now that God is just. Come with the ropes about your necks, ready for execution, and you will find a God ready to forgive. (5) Further still: her prayer was not yet heard (Lam. ii. 1). If thou hast been for months, ay, even for years, crying for mercy, and still hast not found it, let not this cast thee down, for to thee is this message sent this morning. (6) Further: every place of refuge was broken down (Lam. ii. 8). Our Lord, who is determined to bring us to the obedience of faith, continually beats down the sinner's confidences, till at last there is not one stone left upon another that is not thrown down; then the sinner yields himself a captive, and free grace leads him in triumph to the Cross. (7) Further still: this daughter of Jerusalem was now brought into a state of deep humiliation (Lam. ii. 10). (8) Furthermore: it seems from the thirteenth verse that all her foes were let loose against her, and her grief exceeded all bounds and prevented all comparison. (9) In the eighteenth and nineteenth verses of the same chapter you will see that at last this afflicted daughter of Zion was brought to constant prayer. 3. A precious promise. "I will no more carry thee away into captivity." Thou art in captivity now, but it is the last thou shalt ever have. Thou art sorrowing on account of sin, and troubled even to despair; but thou art now forgiven—not thou shalt be, but thou art; all the wrath was laid on Christ; there is none remaining upon thee; thou art forgiven, and thy captivity is turned as the streams in the south. Let thy mouth be filled with laughter, and thy tongue with singing, for the Lord hath done great things for thee. II. A BURDEN OF WOE. Daughter of Edom! Thus saith the Lord unto thee, "I will visit thine iniquity." Unbeliever, thou who hast never felt thy need of Christ, and never fled to Him, to thee He says, "I will visit thine iniquity." His justice tarries, but it is sure; His axe seems rusty, but it is sharp. The sins of the past are not buried; or if they be, they shall have a resurrection. But who is this daughter of Edom? 1. It seems, according to the twenty-first verse, that the daughter of Edom was a mirthful one. Weep, all ye that make mirth in the presence of the avenging Judge, for the day cometh when He shall turn your laughter into mourning, and all your joys shall be ended! 2. Edom, moreover, dwelt very carelessly, she dwelt in the land of Uz, far from danger. Her dwelling was among the rocks. Petra, the stony city, was cut out of the live rock. The daughter of Edom said in her heart, "Who shall come hither to disturb the eagle's nest?" Thus saith the Lord, "O daughter of Edom, I will visit thine iniquity." 3. It appears that this daughter of Edom rejoiced because of the sorrow of Zion, and made mirth and merriment over the sorrows of others. Do you not hear even the wise men say, "Ah! These drivelling hypocrites, whining about sin! Why, it is only a peccadillo, a mere trifle!" 4. It seems, too, from Mal. i. 4, that Edom always retained a hope, a vain, a self-sufficient confidence. 5. Besides, it seems that this daughter of Edom was very proud (Jer. xlix. 16). But this tremendous pride was brought low at the last; and so also all those who think themselves righteous shall find themselves foul at last. They rest and trust in the rotten and broken reed of their own doings, and woe shall be unto them, for God will visit them for their sins. III. WHAT IS THE REASON WHY THERE ARE THESE DIFFERENT MESSAGES? 1. The reason why I had to publish a message of mercy to the daughter of Zion just now was sovereign grace. Everlasting love preserved deliverance for the beloved city. Our God had kindled in her heart thoughts of repentance, and in His sovereignty, because He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, He sent her the gracious message of full remission by an accomplished punishment. 2. But why was the second message

sent to the daughter of Edom? Here it is not the line of sovereignty, but the line of justice; He sent it because the daughter of Edom deserved it. IV. WHAT CLAIMS HAVE THESE MESSAGES TO OUR FAITH? We believe this Bible to be the Word of God. 1. Well, then, you to whom the first message is sent, believe it. You said, as I read the description just now, "That is my case." Very well then, the punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished. Do not say, "I will try and believe it," but believe it. 2. As for the second message, again I say this Book is God's Word, and it is true. Believe it. "Oh," says one, "but if I believed it, I should be full of awful anguish." Would to God you were; for do you not see that then you would come under the description of the daughter of Zion, and then the promise would be yours, for what is the law sent for? To flog men to hell? No, but to be our pedagogue to bring us to Christ. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

O daughter of Edom; He will discover thy sins.—*God's discovery of man's sins*:—I. It is a VAST discovery. 1. The significance of each separate sin; each one implies the thought, the wish, the volition of an immortal soul standing up in hostility to its Maker. Each is a seed of poison capable of indefinite multiplication; every act of a moral agent, whether good or bad, has a germinating and multiplying principle in it. 2. The number of each man's sins. Count the sins of one day, and multiply them by all the days of his life, and he will feel they are as numberless as the stars of heaven. God discovers the whole; He discovers their origin, relations, bearings, issues. II. It is a TERRIBLE discovery. God has so constituted our moral nature that nothing is so hideous and revolting to the eye of conscience as sin. When even one sin starts up in all its enormity to the eyes of conscience, how horror-striking is the vision. But for all the sins to start up in the sunlight of eternal justice, how overwhelming the terror. III. It is an INEVITABLE discovery. 1. The discovery is sometimes made here. Cain, Belteshazzar, Judas, Felix. When made here a blessed relief may be obtained by faith in the mediation of Christ. It was so with Peter, with the Philippian jailor. 2. The discovery is certain to be made hereafter. (*Homilist*.)

CHAPTER V.

VERS. 1-10. Remember, O Lord, what is come upon us.—*An appeal for God's compassion*:—The prayer opens with a striking phrase—"Remember, O Lord," &c. It cannot be supposed that the elegist conceived of his God as Elijah mockingly described their silent, unresponsive divinity to the frantic priests of Baal, or that he imagined that Jehovah was really indifferent, after the manner of the denizens of the Epicurean Olympus. Nevertheless, neither philosophy nor even theology wholly determines the form of an earnest man's prayers. In practice it is impossible not to speak according to appearances. Though not to the reason, still to the feelings, it is as though God had indeed forgotten His children in their deep distress. Under such circumstances the first requisite is the assurance that God should remember the sufferers whom He appears to be neglecting. The poet is thinking of external actions. Evidently the aim of his prayer is to secure the attention of God as a sure preliminary to a Divine interposition. But even with this end in view the fact that God remembers is enough. In appealing for God's attention the elegist first makes mention of the reproach that has come upon Israel. This reference to humiliation rather than to suffering as the primary ground of complaint may be accounted for by the fact that the glory of God is frequently taken as a reason for the blessing of His people. That is done for His "name's sake." Then the ruin of the Jews is derogatory to the honour of their Divine Protector. The peculiar relation of Israel to God also underlies the complaint of the second verse, in which the land is described as "our inheritance," with an evident allusion to the idea that it was received as a donation from God, not acquired in any ordinary human fashion. A great wrong has been done, apparently in contravention of the ordinance of Heaven. The Divine inheritance has been turned over to strangers. From their property the poet passes on to the condition of the persons of the sufferers. The Jews are orphans; they have lost their fathers, and their mothers are widows. The series of illustrations of the degrada-

tion of Israel seems to be arranged somewhat in the order of time and in accordance with the movements of the people. Thus, after describing the state of the Jews in their own land, the poet next follows the fortunes of his people in exile. There is no mercy for them in their flight. The words in which the miseries of this time are referred to are somewhat obscure. The phrase in the Authorised Version, "Our necks are under persecution" (ver. 5), is rendered by the Revisers, "Our pursuers are upon our necks." It would seem to mean that the hunt is so close that fugitives are on the point of being captured; or perhaps that they are made to bow their heads in defeat as their captors seize them. But a proposed emendation substitutes the word "yoke" for "pursuers." The next line favours this idea, since it dwells on the utter weariness of the miserable fugitives. There is no rest for them. The yoke of shame and servitude is more crushing than any amount of physical labour. Finally, in their exile the Jews are not free from molestation. In order to obtain bread they must abase themselves before the people of the land. The fugitives in the south must do homage to the Egyptians: the captives in the east to the Assyrians. Here, then, at the very last stage of the series of miseries, shame and humiliation are the principal grievances deplored. At every point there is a reproach, and to this feature of the whole situation God's attention is especially directed. Now the elegist turns aside to a reflection on the cause of all this evil. It is attributed to the sins of previous generations. The present sufferers are bearing the iniquities of their fathers. Here several points call for a brief notice. In the first place, the very form of the language is significant. What is meant by the phrase to "bear iniquity"? It is clear that the poet had no mystical ideas in mind. When he said that the children bore the sins of their fathers he simply meant that they reaped the consequences of those sins. But if the language is perfectly unambiguous the doctrine it implies is far from being easy to accept. On the face of it, it seems to be glaringly unjust. We are frequently confronted with evidences of the fact that the vices of parents inflict poverty, dishonour, and disease on their families. This is just what the elegist means when he writes of children bearing the iniquities of their fathers. The fact cannot be disputed. Often as the problem that here starts up afresh has been discussed, no really satisfactory solution of it has ever been forthcoming. We must admit that we are face to face with one of the most profound mysteries of providence. But we may detect some glints of light in the darkness. The law of heredity and the various influences that go to make up the evil results in the case before us work powerfully for good under other circumstances; and that the balance is certainly on the side of good, is proved by the fact that the world is moving forward, not backward, as would be the case if the balance of hereditary influence was on the side of evil. The great unit Man is far more than the sum of the little units men. We must endure the disadvantages of a system which is so essential to the good of man. But another consideration may shed a ray of light on the problem. The bearing of the sins of others is for the highest advantage of the sufferers. It is difficult to think of any more truly elevating sorrows. They resemble our Lord's passion; and of Him it was said that He was made perfect through suffering. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*) *Zion's sufferings*:—I. HER ENTREATIES. 1. Remember. 2. Consider. 3. Behold. II. HER MISERIES. 1. What is befallen her, captivity; it is not coming, it is already come upon her. 2. Her bright Sun gives not out its rays. Ignominy, like a black cloud, now covers its face. Lessons: 1. God hath thoughts of His people, when they cannot apprehend His purposes. He thinks upon their souls. 2. God's thoughts are affectionate, and hold out help unto His saints. Men many times think of their friends in the day of their distress, yet endeavour not to make their help their comfort, the product of their thoughts, but whom God remembers He relieves (Lev. xxvi. 44, 45). 3. God's forgetting is an aggravation of the soul's affliction. Questionless, it is the great, yea one of the greatest aggravations of trouble to an afflicted soul, to apprehend itself not to be in the thoughts of God (Psa. xlii. 9—xliv. 24). (1) They are things of value that we commit to memory (Isa. xlii. 4, 26). (2) Special affection is demonstrated by God's remembering (Mal. iii. 16, 17). Lessons: 1. God's remembrance ever speaks a Christian's advantage. Whosoever forgets you, let your prayers demonstrate your desires to be in the heart, in the thoughts of God. This was Nehemiah's request, and he made it the very upshot of his prayers (Neh. xiii. 31). Do you likewise. For men may fail us though they think of us, but God will help us if He but have us in His mind (Jer. ii. 2, 3). 2. They that put us in mind of our friends in misery, are many times instrumental for the

alleviating of their sorrow; their excitements may stir up earnest resolves for their freedom, they may become messengers to proclaim their peace, to publish tidings of their salvation. O let us be God's remembrancers, let us expostulate the Church's case with His sacred self, this is our duty (Isa. xlii. 26). Let us beseech the Lord—(1) Not to remember her iniquities (Psa. lxxix. 8). (2) Not to continue her distress (Psa. lxxiv. 2). Israel's freedom from thralldom hath been the product of God's remembering (Exod. vi. 5, 6). O let us rather beseech Him to think of—(1) Her former prosperity (Psa. xxv. 6, lxxxix. 49, 50). Men commiserate them in penury that have lived in plenty. (2) Her present afflictions (Psa. cxxxii. 1; Job x. 9; Isa. lxiv. 10–12). The Church's sorrows make her an object of pity in the Lord's thoughts. (3) His Covenant for mercy to His people in distress (Psa. lxxiv. 20, 21; Jer. xiv. 21; 2 Chron. vii. 14; Psa. l. 15). (4) Her enemies for execution of Divine justice (Psa. cxxxvii. 7). (5) The sadness of her spirit to speak cheering to her heart (Psa. cvi.). Relief is the best remembrance of a friend.

3. Fervency must accompany our prayers. This interjective particle denotes the vehemency, the earnestness of her desire (Gen. xvii. 18; Deut. v. 29; 2 Sam. xxiii. 15; Job. vi. 8). Want of mercy with sense of misery will make the soul cry O unto its God. Christians, be not like glowworms, fiery in appearance and cold when you come to the touch; take heed of lukewarmness, Laodicea's temper; remember that as prayer is set out by wrestling, which is the best way for prevailing (Gen. xxxii. 26; Hos. xii. 4), so under the law the sweet perfumes in the censers were burnt before they ascended; for believers' prayers go up in pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh, to the throne of God (Cant. iv. 6). Therefore get spiritual fire into your hearts, as fast as you can kindle and inflame your affections, that they may flame up in devout and religious ascents to the Lord Himself. Sometimes "Lord" will not serve your turn, you must go with "O Lord" unto your God.

4. We must only have recourse to God in distress. The Church's affliction is now become to her the school of devotion. Where should we make our addresses, but where we may find relief? 5. Heavy sorrows make Christians moderate in their desires. She doth not desire the Lord forthwith to cause the fulgent and glorious beams of prosperity to shine upon her, or immediately by some heavy judgment upon her enemy, to complete her own delivery, she only calls for a memento, a remembrance, some thoughts of her unto her God. That great sufferings make Christians modest and moderate in their demands. Beggars in their extremest exigence cry not for pounds but pence. A little relief goes far in the apprehension of a distressed soul.

6. Grievous miseries may fall upon God's precious saints. 7. God eyes our particular exigence. The original denotes such a consideration as is conjoined with seeing and looking upon. The eye presenting the object to the thoughts, makes the deeper impress upon the spirit. When God takes the Church's sorrows into His thoughts, He looks down from heaven to see the particulars of her distress. 8. Prayer the means to get a reflex from God. 9. As reproach is heavy so it quickens the prayers of saints. The saints are not hopeless under the greatest evils, they sing not the doleful ditty of accursed Cain, they despair not of Divine hope, and therefore because they conceive hope of favour, they betake themselves unto fervent prayer (Job xiii. 15; Prov. xiv. 32; Psa. xxvii. 12, 13). 10. Sense of misery would have God to make present supply. Equity in the Lord's administration of justice, hath ever been their encouragement, as for appeal, so for this request unto Himself (Jer. xii. 1–3). Learn what to do when the wicked with the most violent evils are stinging and piercing your very souls. (1) Present your troubles, your reproaches upon your bended knees in the Lord's presence (Psa. lxxix. 19, &c.). (2) Plead mercies and promises for yourselves (Dan. ix. 15–17; 1 King viii. 5–7). (3) Multiply prayers for your enlargement (Neh. iv. 4, 5; Joel. ii. 17). 11. Christians are gradual, they have their ascents in their earnest prayers. Remember, consider, behold. As God goes out gradually in giving out the dispensations of Divine goodness, so His people in their afflictions, when they are most earnest petitioners, are gradual in their prayers (Psa. xli. 4, cvi. 4, 5; Dan. ix. 19). (*D. Swift.*) *Sin's garden*:—1. Probably there is nothing like this chapter in all the elegies of the world. For what is there here more than elegy? There is a death deeper than death. Here is a prayer that never got itself into heaven. Blessed be God, there are some prayers that never get higher than the clouds. Look at it. Behold how internally rotten it is. "Remember, O Lord, what is come upon us" (ver. 1). No man can pray who begins in that tone. There is not one particle of devotion in such an utterance.

"What is come upon us." It is a falsehood. It is putting the suppliant into a wrong position at the very first. So long as men talk in that tone they are a long way from the only tone that prevails in heaven.—"God be merciful to me a sinner." "Consider, and behold our reproach" (ver. 1). How possible it is for penitence to have a lie in the heart of it; how possible it is for petitions addressed to heaven to be inspired by the meanest selfishness! Note well the inventory which is particularised by these persons, who are very careful to note all that they have lost. Read the bill; it is a bill of particulars: "Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens" (ver. 2). Here is material dispossession. If the inheritance had been retained, would the prayer have been offered? Probably not. "We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows" (ver. 3). Here is personal desolation. If the fathers had lived, would the prayers have been offered? "We have drunken our water for money; our wood is sold unto us" (ver. 4). Here is social humiliation. The emphasis is upon the pronoun, "Our" water, the water that we have in our own gardens, water taken out of the wells which our own fathers did dig. What an awful lot! what a sad doom! If it had been otherwise, where would the prayer have been? where would the confession, such as it is, have been? "Our necks are under persecution; we labour, and have no rest" (ver. 5). Here is a sense of grievous oppression. "Servants have ruled over us" (ver. 8). Here is an inversion of natural position. The greater the man, the greater the ruler, should be the law in social administration. Let me have a great man to direct me, superintend me, and revise my doings, and it shall be well with me at eventide. Some kings have been slaves; some noblemen have been servants. We are only speaking of the soul that is a slave, and whenever the slave mounts his horse he gallops to the devil. 2. Read this chapter and look upon it as a garden which sin has planted. All these black flowers, all these awful trees of poison, sin planted. God did not plant one of them. It is so with all our pains and penalties. It is so with that bad luck in business, with that misfortune in the open way of life. We are reaping what has been sown by ourselves or by our forerunners. It is quite right to remember our ancestors in this particular. It is quite true that our fathers have sinned, and that we in a sense bear their iniquities, and cannot help it, for manhood is one; but it is also true that we ourselves have adopted all they did. To adopt what Adam did is to have sinned in Adam and through Adam. We need not go behind our own signature; we have signed the catalogue, we have adopted it, and therefore we have to account for our own lapse in our own religion. 3. Wondrous it is how men turn to God in their distresses. The Lord said it would be so—"In their affliction they will seek Me early." So we have God in this great plaint, and what position does God occupy in it? He occupies the position of the only Helper of man. "Remember, O Lord, what is come upon us." Then comes the cry for old days: "Renew our days as of old." There is a sense in which the old days were better than these. What is that peculiar religious fascination which acts upon the mind and leads us back again into the nursery? We cry for the days of childhood, when we were unconscious of sin, when we played in the wood, when we gathered the primroses, when we came back from bird-nesting and summer joys. Oh, that these days would come back again in all their blueness, in all their simple joyousness! Sometimes the soul says, "Renew our days as of old"—when our bread was honest. Since then we have become tradesmen, merchants, adventurers, gamblers, speculators, and now there is not a loaf in the cupboard that has not poison in the very middle of it. We are richer at the bank, but we are poorer in heaven. God pity us! "Renew our days as of old"—when our prayers were unhindered, when we never doubted their going to heaven and coming back again with blessings; when we used to pray at our mother's knee we never thought that the prayer could fail of heaven. Oh, for the old child days, when God was in every flower and in every bird, and when all the sky was a great open Bible, written all over in capitals of love! The old days will not come. Still we can have a new youth; we can be born again. That is the great cry of Christ's Gospel. "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again"—and thus get the true childhood. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) **Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens.—Comfortable directions for such as have been, or may be driven from their houses, goods, or country:—I. IT IS A SORE AFFLICTION, AND MATTER OF GREAT LAMENTATION, FOR A MAN TO BE DRIVEN FROM HIS HOUSE AND HABITATION.** His house and habitation is the meeting-place of all his outward comforts; the seat and centre and receptacle of all those outward

blessings that he doth enjoy in this world. As a man's house is the nest where all these eggs are laid, and therefore when a man is driven from thence, the meeting-place of all his outward comforts, surely it must be an exceeding sad thing and very lamentable. To say nothing of the reproach that doth come thereby, or of the violence that doth come therewith; it is the judgment threatened, threatened against the wicked, and those that are most ungodly. The contrary is often promised unto God's people (Isa. lxxv. 21, 22, 23). On the contrary, when God threatens evil to a place and people, this is the evil that He denounceth; that He will drive them from their houses and habitations, and that others shall be brought into them (Deut. xv. 28, 29, 30). Now is it nothing for a man to go up and down under the wounds of a threatening? Again, a man loseth many, if not most of his opportunities of doing good and receiving. So long as a man is at home, and hath a habitation to resort unto, he may pray, read, meditate, sing, and have a little church and heaven on earth. He may there receive strangers, for which many have been blest. There he may exercise good duties, the only way unto heaven and happiness. When he is thrust out, and strangers brought in, he doth therefore lose many of these opportunities; and therefore how justly may he take up this lamentation and say, Have pity, have pity upon me, oh, all my friends, for the hand of the Lord hath touched me.

II. GOD SUFFERS HIS OWN PEOPLE AND DEAR CHILDREN MANY TIMES TO FALL INTO THIS CONDITION. Our Saviour Christ Himself, who bare our sins, had not whereon to lay His head. The apostle tells us (Heb. xi.) that many saints wandered up and down the world in woods and caves, of whom the world was not worthy. They did not only wander, and were removed from their own houses; but, as Chrysostom observes, they were not quiet even in the woods: they did not only want their own house in the city, but they wanted a quiet seat in the wilderness. Four especial causes there are, or occasions, as Musculus observes, whereby men have been driven from their houses and habitations. First, war. Secondly, famine. Thirdly, inhumanity, cruelty, exaction of evil men and magistrates. Fourthly, want of liberty in the matter of religion: and in all these respects God's people have been driven from their houses.

III. WHY DOETH GOD SUFFER THIS TO BEFALL HIS OWN PEOPLE; THAT HIS OWN SERVANTS AND DEAREST CHILDREN SHOULD BE DRIVEN OUT OF THEIR HOUSES AND HABITATIONS? In general it is for their good. Hereby first a man may be, and is, if godly, emptied of that slime and filth that did lie within him. The sea water, though it be exceeding salt, and very brackish, yet if it run through several earths, the brackishness is lost thereby, as we find in all sweetest springs which, as philosophers say, come from the sea, and lose the saltness of the sea water by running through the earths: and in experience if you take water, though it be salt in your hand, yet if you cause it to pass through divers earths it will lose that saltness: so that though there may be much saltness and brackishness in the spirits of men, yet if the Lord by His providence cause them to pass through divers earths, it is a special means to lose that brackish, brinish disposition, and to grow more quiet, sweet, and savoury. Again, thereby sometimes the saints, though unwillingly, are carried from greater judgments that are coming upon the places where they dwell and live. Thereby also truth and knowledge is carried and scattered into other places, many shall run to and fro, "and knowledge shall be increased," &c. Thereby a man is fitted and prepared for God's own house, and those revelations and manifestations that God hath to communicate to him concerning the house of God. A man is never more fit to see the beauty of God's house, than when he is driven from his own.

IV. WHAT SHALL WE DO, THAT IF IT SHALL PLEASE THE LORD TO DRIVE US OUT OF OUR HOUSES AND HABITATIONS AS WELL AS OUR BRETHREN, WE MAY BOTH PREPARE FOR IT, AND SO CARRY THE MATTER, AS WE MAY BE PATIENTLY AND SWEETLY SUPPORTED IN THAT ESTATE? By way of preparation, for the present, before that condition come, and the Lord grant it may never come, be sure of this, that you make good your interest in God Himself, clear up your evidence for heaven, your assurance of God in Christ. Learn now before the rainy day come to be dead unto all the world. The man that is dying is senseless, not affected with the cries of his children, wife, and friends that stand round about him; though they weep and wring their hands, he is not stirred, why? because being a dying man he is dead to them; and if you be dead to your houses, liberties, and estates aforehand, you will be able to buckle and grapple with that condition: so it was with Paul who died daily. Be sure of this also, that you take heed now of all those things that may make your condition uncomfortable then. There are three things that will make that condition

very uncomfortable : pride, wanton abuse of your creature-comforts, and unwillingness to lay them out in the case of God. But in case this evil feared should come, and who knows how soon it may ? then some things are to be practised, and some things considered. By way of practice. If it pleased the Lord to bring you or me or any of us into this sad condition, first humble yourselves, accept of the punishment of your iniquity, kiss the rod, and say, the Lord is righteous in all that is come upon you ; so did Daniel (Dan. ix. 6). Then be sure you bless and praise the Lord for that little that you have left ; and if nothing be left, praise God for others that are free from your condition. Again, by way of consideration. Though such a condition as this be exceeding sad and very lamentable, yet consider this, that it is not any new thing that doth befall you, but such as befalls the saints and best of God's servants. Consider the way that God takes ordinarily to bring His people to mercy. He seldom brings them to any mercy but He brings them about by the way of the contrary misery. Consider seriously with yourselves what that is which you leave, what the cause is that you do leave it for, and who it is you do leave it with : you leave your house, your habitation, your land, your riches, which shortly would leave you, whose wings are like the wings of an eagle, strong to fly again ; you leave it for your God, your country, your religion. And is that lost which you do lose for truth ? Is there any loss in losing for Jesus Christ ? If you would have comfort and supportance in that condition, consider seriously and much how God hath dealt with His people that have been thus served and used. And if you look into Scripture, you shall find that He still hath provided for them, given them favour in the places where they have come, and brought them back again from those places into which they have been scattered. He hath provided for them. (*W. Bridge, M.A.*)

Ver. 4. *We have drunken our water for money, our wood is sold unto us.—Zion's sufferings* :—1. Common necessities denied by adversaries. Fire and water are two necessary elements, but though God in nature have given these in common to His creatures, the Jews being captives are now denied them by their cruel adversaries. Time was when they could command the fields, the wheat, the olives, and the wines, but at this instant, such is their misery, that they cannot so much as have wood or water without price, unless for money. (1) Enemies are cruel, they know this will be vexatious. (2) Adversaries are covetous, our spoils, our moneys will be their riches. It is not water alone, or wood alone that is now defective, it is both water and wood that they are forced to buy. War seldom deprives us of a single mercy, it strips us at once of many necessities (Lam. iv. 1-5). It takes away gold, silver, possessions, habitations, victuals, wood, and water from its captives. 2. Wood and water sweet mercies. 3. We must not sit fast upon our present enjoyments. Full little did these Jews in their prosperity think that their water should become their charge, and that their wood, their fire, should be sold to themselves for money. From whence we note—That Christians ought to sit loose upon their enjoyments, and to look upon themselves as strangers and pilgrims in their most sure possessions. Do not glory, be not proud of what you have now at your own command (Eccles. v. 13 ; Jer. ix. 23). The tide may turn, your condition may alter and not yourselves, not your friends, but your enemies may be their possessors. Though we may complain we must not murmur, we must in patience possess our souls, when our very necessities become a prey to others. Thus did the primitive Christians in their great afflictions (Heb. x. 34, xi. 37, 38). (*D. Swift.*)

Ver. 5. *Our necks are under persecution, we labour, and have no rest.—Zion's sufferings* :—1. The words explained. This is the miserable servitude of a conquered people, this is the insulting and domineering pride of a potent and victorious enemy. When enemies come in power, menaces and insultations speak the pride, the venom, and bitterness of their hearts, whilst the Egyptians are Israel's masters, they will make their lives bitter with hard bondage in mortar, and cause them to serve with rigour (Exod. i. 13, 14). 2. Insultations, aggravations of the Church's miseries. You may see by the deportment of these Assyrians to the Jews, what was their disposition, what was their nature. If you open the vessel you may taste the liquor. You may judge of wicked men's hearts by their speeches, by their usage of the saints (Matt. xii. 34). 3. Wicked men care not what they do to augment the troubles of the saints. 4. The reason why their

necks are under persecution. But why do they complain of the yoke, the burden, the persecution upon their necks; what, were not the rest of their members sensible of the pressure? though the rest were affected, yet now the principal weight lies upon their necks, because themselves had ever been a stiff-necked people before the Lord (Isa. xlviii. 4; Jer. vii. 25, 26; Ezek. xxii. 29). You may sometimes read of people's sin in the punishments that are laid upon them by the Lord (Hos. iv. 6, 14; Zech. vii. 12, 13). 5. Sorrow without intermission very grievous. Intermissions are mercies, but pressures continued are very tedious; hope deferred breaketh the heart, and misery daily augmented cannot but be crushing to the spirit. Wicked men, when they get God's people under their commands, are very insatiable in their exactions (Exod. v. 7, 8; Lam. i. 3). But what have this people done that they can have no laxation, no ease, no rest, in the land of Babylon? There be two sins in special for which God brings this evil upon a people, violence to others (Jer. li. 34, 35, 38), and insatiableness or restlessness in the ways of sin. It is very likely God now pays her home with her own coin. She hath been exacting, and grating upon her servants; she is now a servant, and her masters do the like unto herself. She would not cease or rest from sin, now God hath laid restlessness upon her as a punishment for sin. (*D. Swift.*)

Ver. 7. Our fathers have sinned, and are not, and we have borne their iniquities.—*Zion's sufferings*:—The terms unfolded. When in the depths of our distress the iniquities of our forefathers come to our remembrance, at once they aggravate our sins and augment our sorrows (2 Kings xxii. 13; Dan. ix. 16; Jer. xiv. 19, 20). When God comes to find sin successive in generations, the last shall be sure to drink deep of the cup of Divine vengeance (Neh. ix. 34, 35, 38; Jer. iv. 24, 25). When ancestors' sins are not our cautions (Ezek. xviii. 14), it deeply aggravates the guilt of our souls (Neh. xiii. 18; Ezra ix. 7; Jer. xvi. 11–13; Zech. i. 4–6). The longer heaven's patience is abused, the greater and more dreadful is the wrath of God that is deserved (Rom. ii. 4, 5, i. 18; Jer. xlix. 9–11). If we promote sin by indulgence, or by example in our posterities, we shall be sure to entail judgment upon our issue (1 Sam. ii. 29, 34, 36). Children are many times executors, they enter upon their father's sins, and you know that in justice the executor may be sued, the debtor being dead. God may punish the sins of the parents upon the children, and yet the cause of the punishment may be in themselves (Hos. iv. 12, 13). As if any being sick of the plague infect others, every one that dies, is said to die, not of others', but of his own plague. Had their parents been good, had they been pious and zealous for God, there would have been no ground, no cause for this complaint; they could not then have said, "Our fathers' iniquity is laid as a burden upon our shoulders." It is good to be good parents, parental holiness is advantageous to posterity (Psa. cii. 28, cxii. 1, 2; Prov. xiv. 26; Jer. xxxii. 39). 1. Exemplary piety in the fathers makes an impression upon the children's hearts (Zech. x. 7). 2. Heaven's benediction descends from the parents to the children (Acts. ii. 39). 3. Wicked fathers infelicitate their posterity (Job v. 3, 4). The Jews were very unhappy parents (Matt. xxvii. 25). Children, plead if you can your ancestors' integrity before the Lord. The father's piety is the child's privilege (Psa. cxvi. 16, lxxxvi. 16; 1 Kings viii. 23–25). Let us labour to be good ourselves, and to plant holiness in our families, that so we may have God's blessings estated upon our children (Gen. xviii. 19). (*D. Swift.*)

Vers. 12–18. The elders have ceased from the gate.—*The seat of justice overthrown*:—1. It is a grievous plague unto a people when the seat of justice is overthrown from among them. (1) Reasons. (a) It bringeth in all confusion and disorder. (b) No man can enjoy anything as his own. (c) Every one lieth open to the violence of spoilers, and hath no succour nor redress. (2) Uses. (a) Better have tyrants govern us, than be void of all government. (b) Pray unto God for the government under which we live, that in the prosperity thereof we may have peace. (c) Acknowledge all lawful magistrates to be the special ordinances of God, appointed for our good, and therefore to be obeyed and revered. 2. The overthrow of magistracy among a people taketh all occasions of rejoicing from all sorts of people. "The young men from their music." (1) Reasons. (a) Many great blessings are lost, and many griefs come upon them which will make the heart heavy. (b) They have no safety, but have cause every one to fear another, and to stand

upon his own guard, as though he were in the midst of his enemies. (2) Use. Pray to God that He would never leave us without those heads and governors that may take care to protect us in peace; for if He do, our life will be more bitter than death itself. 3. Honest recreations and delights are to be esteemed among the good blessings that God giveth His people in this life. (1) It is here accounted by the Holy Ghost a grievous thing that they are deprived of them. (2) Neither body nor mind can continue able and apt to their duties without some intermission, but it is never lawful to be idle. (*J. Udal.*) **The joy of our heart is ceased, our dance is turned into mourning.**—*God's people may apprehend themselves stripped of all cause of joy:*—This is the condition of these distressed creatures in the land of Babylon; whilst they were in Judea, they used to rejoice in their harvest, and to shout at their vintage (*Isa. xvi. 10*). They had the mirth of tabrets and their harps melodiously sounding in their streets (*Isa. xxiv. 8*). But now there is a crying for wine in all quarters, their joy is darkened, and the mirth of the land is gone (*Isa. xxiv. 11*). All causes of joy are sometimes taken from God's precious saints; thus it fared with Israel upon the pursuit of Pharaoh, when she was passing out of Egypt into the land of Canaan (*Exod. xiv. 10*). Neither was it better with Job in the time of his affliction (*Job xxx. 17, 18, 31*). Do but look upon the sweet singer of Israel, and you shall find him in as bad a condition; for the sorrows of death encompassed him, the pains of hell got hold upon him, and he found nothing but trouble and sorrow (*Psa. cxvi.*). The Lord takes away all cause of rejoicing from, that He may the more deeply humble them for the evil of their ways. Great afflictions effect the like submissions, with strong cries to the God of heaven (*Judg. vi. 6, x. 13-15*). God's great design in thus dealing with them, is to purge them from their dross (*Isa. xxvii. 9*), to make them cast off the sin of their souls; you know gold, that it may be refined, must as it were be encompassed with flames (*Zech. xiii. 8, 9*). The best are prone to rest upon the reeds of Egypt, to rely too much upon worldly vanities, therefore God makes the joy of their hearts to cease, that He may take them off from dependency upon creature comforts (*Jer. iii. 22, 23*; *Hos. xiv. 2, 3*). Beware of sin, it will cause both sad looks and heavy hearts (*Gen. iv. 7*; *Amos viii. 8-10*). Keep your eye upon heaven (*2 Chron. xx. 12*), it is only a ray of His favour that can cheer your hearts (*Psa. ix. 9, 10*). Disclaim help from others, trust not to yourselves (*Isa. xxx. 1-3, xxxi. 1*; *Psa. xx. 7*; *2 Cor. i. 9*). Created substances are but vanities. 1. The precious sons of Zion may be much discouraged in their sufferings. And when Zion was in affliction, did she not as one in despair cry out, My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord (*Lam. iii. 17, 18*)? (1) Sudden and boisterous storms sometimes make stout-hearted seamen to give up all for gone (*Psa. lxxxviii. 3-8*; *Isa. liv. 11*; *Matt. xxvii. 46*). (2) Feeble things are soon thrown down, they want strength, it is weakness of faith that dejects their spirits (*Matt. viii. 24-26*). Give a check to the heaviness, to the sadness of your souls, when you are in afflictions (*Psa. xliii. 5*). The apostles carried themselves gallantly with much cheerfulness in the worst of times (*Rom. v. 3*; *Acts xxi. 13*). Now that you may come near them in the same spirit, consider—(1) That the sorrows of our Saviour were very dolorous (*Matt. xxvi. 38*; *Luke xxii. 42*). (2) That what befalls you is incident to the best of saints (*1 Cor. x. 13*; *Cant. ii. 2*). (3) That death will put a period to all your troubles. (4) That God hath promised to deliver His chosen ones (*Psa. cxxvi. 5, 6*; *Job xvi. 33*). Brag not of what spirit you will be when you come to suffer; you have but a little strength in yourselves, your hearts may come to deceive you, to fail you when troubles come with a strong current upon you; thus did Peter, yet denied his Master (*Mark xiv. 29, 31, 68, &c.*). 2. Keep up your heads, your hearts above the waters of sorrow, let them not sink your spirits, but under the worst of evils, retain your joy, and in patience possess your souls (*Lam. iii. 26*; *Psa. xxvii. 13, 14*). (*D. Swift.*) **The crown is fallen from our head: woe unto us, that we have sinned!**—*Man's fall from love into selfishness:*—The secret of man's perfection may be summed up in these short words, Love to God. The secret of man's sin may be stated as shortly, Defect of love to God. As the former implied truth and holiness, and purity of motive, and unity of will with His will, so this latter implies the departure of all these graces. But not only this. The heart allows no vacuum: sin is not a negative only, but a positive condition; where love has departed, there the opposite of love enters, namely, selfishness, with all its baneful consequences. And the essence of selfishness is, that a man lives not for and in another, be that other his neighbour, or his God, but for and in himself. Now notice, that this selfishness, arising out of defect of

love to God, and in God to others, is not an act, or a series of acts in man, but a state, out of which spring, as the symptoms out of a disease, those sinful acts of selfishness, which we call sins. Selfishness has turned love into lust, dignity into pride, humility into meanness, zeal into ambition, charity into ostentation; has made the strong man into a tyrant, the womanly into the womanish character, the childlike into the childish; has turned family and friendly love into partisanship, patriotism into faction, religion itself into bigotry. It penetrates into, and infiltrates every thought, every desire, every word, every act; so that whatsoever is of it, and not of faith, is sin. And its seat is in the noblest, the godlike, the immortal and responsible spirit of man. So that it is no longer worthy of that noble title of the Spirit, reminding us of God; but they who are thus, are named in Scripture unspiritual, and their whole state is called "the flesh"; not that it springs from the flesh, but because it sinks them into the flesh. Another degrading consequence results from this usurpation by self of the place of God within us. Man placed under love, though in bond and covenant to God and his neighbour, was really and essentially free; a child of God's family; his will and God's will being one, law became to him liberty. But under selfishness, though he has broken loose from covenant with God and his neighbour, he is to all intents and purposes, a slave; in bondage to his own desires and passions, which he ought to be, and wishes to be, ruling. "The truth," declares our Lord, "shall make you free"; but all sin is a lie. It practically denies God,—whose being, and whose power, and whose love constitute the great truth of this universe: this is the negative side of its falsehood; and it sets up self and other creatures in God's place as lord and guide of man's being: this is its positive side. It apes the perfections and attributes of God, and makes man into a miserable counterfeit, betraying, by that which he wishes to appear, that which he really ought to be. Well then, it now comes before us as a solemn question, seeing that our whole nature, the nature of each man, is thus gone astray, and that every one of us has an abiding tendency to selfishness and to evil—Whence came this tendency? How had it its beginning? This tendency is a departure from God who made us; and cannot therefore have been God's work. And this departure can only have begun by an act of the will of man. God created us free, gave our first parents a command to keep, which very fact implied that they had power to break it. Now there was no reasonable ground for breaking it, but every imaginable reason against such conduct; the departure was not an act of the convinced reason, but an act of that which we know as self-will—a leaning to self in spite of reason and conscience. So that sin had its practical beginning in the will of man. And this beginning we read of in Scripture in the history of the Fall. At once man's personality, the inner soul of his nature, passes into a different relation to God: it is torn out of the covenant of His love; stands over against Him as His enemy; trembles at His approach. All peace, all innocence, is gone. The body, God's beautiful and wonderful work, becomes the seat of shame. Man, knowing that he is naked, flies from God and hides himself. And as the spirit of man has renounced its allegiance to God, so have now the animal soul and the body thrown off their allegiance to the spirit. Anarchy enters into his being, and holds wild misrule. The gravitation of the spiritual world is overthrown, its laws of attraction are suspended; the lower revolts against the higher, the lowest against the lower. And as in man, so in man's world. In a moment the poison spreads, electric, over the kingdom which he should have ruled; the elements disown him, the beasts of the forest glare upon him, the ground is cursed for his sake. The king of nature is self-deposed,—his palace is broken up, his delights are scattered, his sweet fellowship with his helpmate is marred,—and he is driven out a wanderer. Then first spring forth the bitter fountains of tears, destined to furrow the cheeks of untold generations; then first the hands, were clenched, and the brow grasped, and the breast beaten,—and the vastness of inward woe sought relief in outward gesture. Verily, the crown had fallen from his head; woe unto him, that he had sinned. (*Dean Alford.*)

Vers. 17, 18. **For this our heart is faint, for these things our eyes are dim.—Zion's sufferings:**—1. The best are exposed to sorrow. That the best are not out of the reach of misery, or that there is no outward calamity, but it may fall upon the godly as well as others (*Eccles. ix. 1*). Ahab's and Josiah's ends concur in their circumstances, and Saul and Jonathan, though different in their deportments yet in their deaths they were not divided (*2 Sam. i. 23*). No man knows either love or hatred by that, that is before them. The snow and hail of adversity lights

upon the best gardens, as well as the barren wastes. The best of saints have the same nature with others (1 Cor. x. 13). The most eminent Christians sometimes as well as others sin against their God. Here we are soldiers and must look for hot skirmishes, mariners and must not think to sail without tedious storms. Be not discouraged, O ye poor souls, though the world be a sea, a rough, a raging, and a dangerous sea unto yourselves, yea be not dejected and altogether cast down, though a heavy weight of grief by reason of sin and troubles, the effects of sin come to lie pressing upon your spirits; though your hearts be faint, let them not die. (1) That there is transcendent mercy, mercy far greater to be hoped for from our God, than any misery we can endure. (2) That there is a hand put down from heaven, when the saints are in danger, to keep up their heads from sinking. (3) That great sorrows do but accelerate, do but hasten Divine compassions. It is not God's opportunity, until your souls be in great extremity. (4) Though God multiply His strokes upon you, it is not because He hates, but rather because He loves you, His design is not to destroy you, but to reform you. (5) Light shall spring out of your darkness, good shall come out of your evils, and joy out of the sorrow that is in your hearts (Rom. viii. 28). God hath ever had His fire in Zion, and His furnace in Jerusalem (Isa. xxxi. 9), and the choicest saints like the finest gold for trial must pass the flames. 2. Christians have bowels for others in afflictions. The Chaldee paraphrase will have these first words to relate to the ruins of Zion in the next verse, and therefore it renders them, for this house of the Sanctuary which is desolate our heart is faint, and indeed it shows us as the affections, so the Christian's deportment in the Church's troubles. Zion's sufferings, like darts, penetrate the souls of God's precious saints. And no marvel if they have been thus affected with the Church's miseries. (1) The downfall, the desolation of Zion is the wicked's triumph (Psa. xiii. 3, 4). Moab skipped for joy when Israel was distressed, she was to her a derision in the day of her affliction (Jer. xlviii. 27). (2) When the Church suffers, God is dishonoured (Deut. ix. 28), and His honour hath ever been precious to gracious hearts (Exod. xxxii. 32; Rom. ix. 3). (3) Zion's prosperity is not only joy, but hath always been a chief joy to a Christian's soul (Psa. cxxxvii. 6). 3. We must not stand at a distance each from other in the day of sorrow. 4. Sad sufferings cause sad, yea, fainting spirits. 5. Extremity of sorrow brings dimness into our eyes. That dimness of sight is the effect of sorrow. This was the condition of Job, when his face was foul with weeping, and on his eyelids was the shadow of death (Job xvi. 16). When his eye was dim by reason of grief, and all his thoughts as a very shadow (Job xvii. 7). And in the like case you may see the kingly prophet, having his heart panting, his strength failing, and the light of his eyes departing from him (Psa. xxxviii. 9-11, vi. 7). (*D. Swift.*) Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate.—*Zion's desolations contemplated and improved*.—I. A DISTRESSING EXPERIENCE. The spectacle which Mount Zion exhibited was necessarily fitted both to agitate and afflict a pious and patriotic soul. God had visited His own holy habitation in anger. Because of the transgressions of His people, He had afflicted them; because of their forgetfulness of His mercies, He had forsaken them; because of their abuse of His ordinances, He had carried them away captive. If such a state of things occasioned to the prophet a feeling of the deepest distress, similar must be the experience of the Lord's people, when any portion of the Church is visited with tokens of the Divine displeasure. Sins, by us unrepented of—sins, forgotten it may be by us, but not forgotten by God—these, undoubtedly, as affording cause of humiliation, grief, and bitterness, are to be considered in connection with the removal of the light of the Divine countenance; and if we cast our eyes abroad on any portion of the visible Church, if we look either at its past history or present condition, where can we take our station, and say that difficulties, or trials, or threatenings of judgment are being made manifest, without being constrained to acknowledge that there are sins to be accounted for, and for which a fearful reckoning may be demanded? II. A REVIVING SENTIMENT. The prophet, amidst the very tears that were shed by him over the fallen fortunes of Jerusalem, could fix his thoughts upon One who is ever the same; and his spirit was revived in consequence. And thus have God's people in all ages been sustained. The Lord, as it regards His own cause, may hide His face; but it will only be for a season. He may remove His candle from one corner of the earth; but it will be to plant it in another—He will not suffer it to be extinguished. As His own existence and purposes are eternal and unchangeable, so is that provision which He has made for His Church, and for

a continued succession of believers, who shall know His name, and rejoice in His salvation. III. A HOLY EXPOSTULATION. Animated with a holy zeal for the glory of God as associated with the prosperity of His Church, the prophet asks whether it could be that God would afford no sign of His returning favour, which might reanimate the hopes of His afflicted people, and keep them from fainting under the reproach of their enemies? It is more than prayer; it is expostulation. Yet the sentiments which he breathed were not those of unhallowed presumption; for he bowed with the deepest reverence before God when he addressed Him. It was that enlargement of soul, which they only know, who, in the strength of a living faith, have long walked with the Most High as their Father and their Friend. And similar, accordingly, at times has been the experience of the saints in after ages. Thus, for instance, it was with Luther in that most eventful of all passages in his history, when his enemies who had gathered around him on every side, thought they had swallowed him up; when the proudest of earth's potentates sat in judgment over him; when the papacy had written out the sentence which doomed him to death, and which doomed the Reformation to destruction along with him. In these distressing circumstances, when, to the eye of man, the cause of truth seemed on the eve of perishing, he was overheard in an agony of soul to exclaim, "O God, Almighty God everlasting! if I am to depend on any strength of this world, all is over; the knell is struck; sentence is gone forth. O God! O God! O Thou my God, help me against the wisdom of this world: the work is not mine, but Thine. I have no business here. I would gladly spend my days in happiness and peace. But the cause is Thine; and it is righteous and everlasting. O Lord, help me. O faithful and unchangeable God, I lean not upon man. My God, my God, dost Thou not hear: my God, art Thou no longer living? Nay, Thou canst not die: Thou dost but hide Thyself. My God, where art Thou? The cause is holy; it is Thine own. I will not let Thee go; no, nor yet for all eternity." (*T. Doig, M.A.*)

The foxes walk upon it.—*Zion's sufferings*:—1. The Church's miseries make deep impressions in the hearts of saints. Time was when God chose this place, and desired it for His habitation (Psa. cxxxii. 13), when it was a principal object of His affection (Psa. lxxxvii. 2); when the people from all quarters of Judea resorted to it for Divine instruction (Isa. ii. 3); when of all other places it was the most precious in the repute of the saints (Psa. cxxxvii. 1). But now this mountain, this stately mountain is divested of all her glory, her ordinances are polluted, her inhabitants are driven into exile, her princes are carried away captive, and all her ornaments, all her jewels, all her riches, are the spoils of Babylon, now she is as a desert, she sits solitary, she hath none to visit her but the foxes that walk about her, she is laid waste like a wilderness, and even brought to utter destruction. So that by this we are taught—That Zion may become like Shilo, the choicest places notwithstanding their more than ordinary privileges may come to ruin (Jer. vii. 12–14; Isa. lxxiv. 10, 11; Lam. i. 17, 18). But why must Zion become a desolation? (1) The Jews rested more upon the holiness of this place than upon their God whose name was called upon in this place (Jer. vii. 4, &c.). It is the Lord, not created substances, not places, that must have the truth, the confidence of our souls. God is jealous of His glory, He cannot endure that His mercies should become our idols. (2) The people estranged this place, and burnt incense in it to other gods, and therefore, as they fall by the sword, so their city, this Zion, must be desolate (Jer. xix. 4, 7–9). If you pollute your temple, God will destroy your temple. (3) The sins of the priests and prophets that belonged to this mountain were very grievous; witness their riot and excess (Isa. xxviii. 7), their base avarice (Isa. lvi. 11), their wicked flatteries (Jer. vi. 13, 14), their pernicious examples (Jer. xxiii. 14), and their horrid neglect of their duties (Ezek. xxxiv. 3, 4). These the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests, have fetched wrath from heaven, caused God to accomplish His fury, and to kindle a fire in Zion (Lam. iv. 11, 13). (4) The people, the inhabitants were abusive to God's messengers (Jer. xi. 21, 22; Amos vii. 10–12, 16, 17; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16), and pitiless one towards another (Jer. ii. 34, xv. 5; Micah iii. 2, 3). Her sins that were more obvious to every eye, were idolatry (Isa. x. 11, 12), formality (Isa. xxix. 13, 14), hypocrisy (Isa. lviii. 2–4), infertility (Isa. v. 2, 5, 6), obstinacy (Jer. xviii. 11, 12, 17), security (Amos vi. 1).

2. The Assyrians like crafty foxes. (1) The fox is looked upon as that which exceeds in subtlety; shall I say, that faction and sedition come short of these, no, their counsels and their consultations are very crafty against God's precious ones (Psa. lxxxiii. 3). (2) The fox is not only nimble and light of foot, but usually he

shuns the common roads, choosing bushy and unbeaten places for his paths, that as himself may not be seen, so that with more safety he may take his prey. Man's locomotive faculty was bestowed upon him, not that fox-like he should run to mischief, but that he should be quick to walk in the way which is called holy. (3) These have the fox's ears, the fox's eyes, and the fox's teeth as well as his nimble feet, as they are capable of hearing the least sound, that echoes detraction, and speak reproach unto the saints, lies, not truth being the delight of their hearts (Psa. lxi. 4), so they look every way how to mischief you, how to get from you, how to get something to themselves, besides their teeth are as swords, they pierce where they enter (Prov. xxx. 14). (4) Whatsoever you do to the fox he still retains his nature, men may chain him, but they can never tame him; so these pestiferous wretches which annoy the Church, they resolve against conviction, against reformation (Jer. ii. 25), with Solomon's fool, you may bray them in a mortar, but yet they will not leave their folly (Prov. xxvii. 22). (5) Lastly, you know young cubs in time will prove both greedy and crafty foxes, if they be let alone; so it is with profane and schismatical persons, if they be not timely suppressed; the first will become atheists (Psa. xiv. 1-3), and the other heretics (1 Cor. xi. 18, 19). Here we see it adds much unto Zion's sorrows, when she lies open to the rapine of subtle and cruel foxes, and well may it. For men like foxes are bloody, deceitful, and devouring creatures. No part of God's worship can be advanced, where these have their dens in Zion. What is more destructive to shepherds' flocks than foxes? (*D. Swift.*)

Vers. 19-22. **Thou, O Lord, remainest for ever; Thy throne from generation to generation.**—*The everlasting throne:*—Thus at last our attention is turned from earth to heaven, from man to God. In this change of vision the mood which gave rise to the Lamentations disappears. Since earthly things lose their value in view of the treasures in heaven, the ruin of them also becomes of less account. For the moment the poet forgets himself and his surroundings in a rapt contemplation of God. This is the glory of adoration, the very highest form of prayer, that prayer in which a man comes nearest to the condition ascribed to angels and the spirits of the blessed who surround the throne and gaze on the eternal light. The continuance of the throne of God is the idea that now lays hold of the elegist as he turns his thoughts from the miserable scenes of the ruined city to the glory above. This is brought home to his consciousness by the fleeting nature of all things earthly. God only remains, eternal, unchangeable. His is the only throne that stands secure above every revolution. The unwavering faith of our poet is apparent at this point after it has been tried by the most severe tests. Jerusalem has been destroyed, her king has fallen into the hands of the enemy, her people have been scattered; and yet the elegist has not the faintest doubt that her God remains and that His throne is steadfast, immovable, everlasting. The fall of Israel in no way affects the throne of God; it is even brought about by His will; it could not have occurred if He had been pleased to hinder it. This idea of the elegist is in line with a familiar stream of Hebrew thought, and his very words have many an echo in the language of prophet and psalmist, as, for example, in the forty-fifth Psalm, where we read, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever." The grand Messianic hope is founded on the conviction that the ultimate establishment of God's reign throughout the world will be the best blessing imaginable for all mankind. Sometimes this is associated with the advent of a Divinely anointed earthly monarch of the line of David. At other times God's direct sovereignty is expected to be manifested in the "day of the Lord." For Christians, at least as much as for Jews, the eternal sovereignty of God should be a source of profound confidence, inspiring hope and joy. Now the elegist ventures to expostulate with God on the ground of the eternity of His throne. A long time had passed since the siege, and still the Jews were in distress. It was as though God had forgotten them or voluntarily forsaken them. This is a dilemma to which we are often driven. If God is almighty can He be also all-merciful? If what we knew furnished all the possible data of the problem this would be indeed a serious position. But our ignorance silences us. Some hint of an explanation is given in the next phrase of the poet's prayer. God is besought to turn the people to Himself. The language of the elegy here points to a personal and spiritual change. We cannot water it down to the expression of a desire to be restored to Palestine. Nor is it enough to take it as a prayer to be restored to God's favour. The double expression, "Turn Thou us unto Thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned," points to a deeper longing,

a longing for real conversion, the turning round of the heart and life to God, the return of the prodigal to his Father. In the next place, it is to be observed that the turning here contemplated is positive in its aims, not merely a flight from the wrong way. To turn from sin to blank vacaney and nothingness is an impossibility. The great motive must be the attraction of a better course rather than revulsion from the old life. This is the reason why the preaching of the Gospel of Christ succeeds where pure appeals to conscience fail. Then we may notice, further, that the particular aim of the change here indicated is to turn back to God. As sin is forsaking God, so the commencement of a better life must consist in a return to Him. But this is not to be regarded as a means towards some other end. We must not have the home-coming made use of as a mere convenience. It must be an end in itself, and the chief end of the prayer and effort of the soul, or it can be nothing at all. The poet is perfectly confident that when God takes His people in hand to lead them round to Himself He will surely do so. If He turns them they will be turned. The words suggest that previous efforts had been made from other quarters, and had failed. The prophets, speaking from God, had urged repentance, but their words had been ineffectual. It is only when God undertakes the work that there is any chance of success. Next, we see that the return is to be a renewal of a previous condition. The poet prays, "Renew our days as of old"—a phrase which suggests the recovery of apostates. Possibly here we have some reference to more external conditions. There is a hope that the prosperity of the former times may be brought back. And yet the previous line, which is concerned with the spiritual return to God, should lead us to take this one also in a spiritual sense. The memory of a lost blessing makes the prayer for restoration the more intense. In some respects restoration is more difficult than a new beginning. The past will not come back. The innocence of childhood, when once it is lost, can never be restored. That first, fresh bloom of youth is irrecoverable. On the other hand, what the restoration lacks in one respect may be more than made up in other directions. Though the old paradise will not be regained, though it has withered long since, and the site of it has become a desert, God will create new heavens and a new earth which shall be better than the lost past. In our English Bible the last verse of the chapter reads like a final outburst of the language of despair. It seems to say that the prayer is all in vain, for God has utterly forsaken His people. But another rendering is now generally accepted, though our revisers have only placed it in the margin. According to this we read, "Unless Thou hast utterly rejected us," &c. There is still a melancholy tone in the sentence, as there is throughout the book that it concludes; but this is softened, and now it by no means breathes the spirit of despair. Turn it round, and the phrase will even contain an encouragement. If God has not utterly rejected His people assuredly He will attend to their prayer to be restored to Him. But it cannot be that He has quite cast them off. Then it must be that He will respond and turn them back to Himself. Thus we are led even by this most melancholy book in the Bible to see, as with eyes purged by tears, that the love of God is greater than the sorrow of man, and His redeeming power more mighty than the sin which lies at the root of the worst of that sorrow, the eternity of His throne, in spite of the present havoc of evil in the universe, assuring us that the end of all will be not a mournful elegy, but a psalm of victory. (*W. F. Adeney, M.A.*) *Thou, O Lord, remainest for ever, Thy throne from generation to generation*:—1. God's unchangeableness a support in troubles. (1) Look upon the choicest things that the world affords as mutable, this will take off thine affections from them, they perish, but the Lord endures, they all wax old like a garment, but God is the same for ever (*Psa. cii. 26, 27*). This will make their loss to thee, thy deprivation of them to be no sore affliction, for who will breathe out sighs, at the breaking of an earthen vessel, at the scattering of a vapour, at the withering of a flower, or the vanishing of a shadow? (2) In your worst condition, when you are afflicted and tossed with the waves of sorrow, stay, and still yourselves with the thoughts of the unchangeableness of your God, He is immutable as well in His mercy as in His holiness, He is that Sun that shineth always with a like brightness, and remember that as this is the way to bring serenity in your hearts, so also your safety at all times depends upon God's immutability (*Mal. iii. 6*; *Psa. lxxiii. 23-26*). (3) Hold out alacrity, be cheerful, let not your souls faint, and your hearts die within you, though your lovers have forsaken you, your friends turn enemies, and your adversaries set up their ensigns for banners, your God is unchangeable in His love, neither life, nor death, principalities, nor powers shall take you out of

His thoughts, He thinks as well of you when you are black with persecution, as when you are fair, and shine in a prosperous condition; for the Church is His beloved, though a lily among thorns (Cant. ii. 2). And the immutability of His rule will terminate the worst of your sorrows (Psa. vii. 9; Jer. xxix. 11). (4) Lastly, remember what God is, and that in a degree it is your duties to assimilate Himself, therefore humble yourselves for your fickleness in your purposes, and for your changeableness in your resolves for holiness, have not hereafter a heart loving to wander (Jer. xiv. 10). Be not soon removed (Gal. i. 6). Keep close to your determinations for the things of heaven, let not the blasts of seducers take your spirits from their hinges, either in relation to principles or duties (Eph. iv. 14). You must imitate your Father, and you see He is a God that is immutable. 2. God is eternal as well as immutable. (1) Look upon this attribute of God which, like a golden thread, runs through all the rest, and admire it; let thy soul echo out the praises of Divine eternity upon all occasions (1 Tim. i. 17). And well mayest thou, for this the eternity of God exceeds that of the most glorious creatures: theirs is but an half eternity, it is to everlasting, not like the Lord's from everlasting; theirs is not intrinsic in themselves, they receive it, but God's is independent; they cannot communicate to others, or extend it beyond themselves as the Lord can, therefore now extol God's eternity, and let it be matter of wonder to thy soul. (2) Be not dismayed when the rage and fury of your adversaries speaks a stripping, a deprivation of all enjoyments, when they tell you they will enter upon your houses, seize upon your lands, take away your food, and deprive you of the delight of your eyes, tell them you know these things are but mutable, and they may take them, but they cannot take away your God, who is eternal in the heavens. (3) Rest not upon creatures, Solomon gives you to know that their strength, their help is vanity, put your trust in this the eternal God, He hath said He will never fail you nor forsake you, He is not as man that He should repent, He is faithful as well as eternal, and cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. ii. 13). (*D. Swift.*) Wherefore dost Thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time?—I. *Helps for time of desertion.*—For the ship doth not more naturally arise with the flowing in of the waters, than doubts in the soul with the coming in of troubles. For all this while God is but either trying thy disposition, and the frame and temper of thy spirit towards Himself, He is but seeing whether thou wilt love Him frowning as well as smiling upon thy soul (Isa. viii. 17), or ransacking of thine heart, and making discovery to thee of the filth and guilt of sin that is within thee, for man feels his sins with most hatred and sorrow in the times of God's withdrawals (1 Sam. xxi. 1, 2), or He is but putting thee into that most excellent life of His most precious saints. Thou wouldest live by sense, but He will now teach thee with David to live by faith (Psa. xxvii. 13), or else the Lord is preparing thee for greater apprehensions of His love and favour for the time to come. Yet still, for all that hath been spoken, methinks I see you, O ye captived Jews, like Rachel, weeping and refusing consolation; what, are you like the marigold, which opens and shuts with the sun? are you as court favourites, whose comforts and discomforts depend upon the countenance or discountenance of their prince? I must needs acknowledge, that heaven's frowning, God's neglecting, or the Lord's deserting, wounds deep, and pierceth through a Christian's heart. And this hath been the cause why in an expostulatory way they have breathed out these, or the like complaints; if the Lord be with us, why is all this befallen us? Will the Lord cast off for ever, will He not again show favour? hath He forgotten to be gracious, and doth His promise fail for evermore (Psa. lxxvii. 7-9)? Neither do I marvel if, in this pang those have been the expressses of their souls. For where is a believer's love concentrate, as it were, and gathered together, but in the Lord its God? and therefore it languisheth in His absence, and is ill at ease, until it enjoy His presence (Cant. v. 8). Hath not the saints' rejoicing ever been principally in Divine communion (Psa. iv. 7)? Is not the assurance of His love the very day and joy of a Christian heart? (*Ibid.*) Turn Thou us unto Thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old.—*Genuine conversion.*—I. It is a turning of the soul to the Lord. Not to creeds, not to churches, but to the Lord Himself, as the object of supreme love. The centreing of the whole soul upon Him. If the Lord is loved supremely, He will be the dominant subject of thought, the leading theme of conversation, the paramount sovereign of life. II. It is a turning of the soul to the Lord by the Lord. No one can turn the human soul to God but Himself. A man may as well endeavour to roll back the Mississippi to its

mountain springs as to turn back the soul to the Lord; He alone can do it, and He does it by the influence of nature, historic events, Gospel truths, and Christly ministries. (*Homilist*.) *Zion's sufferings*:—1. Afflictions send the saints unto their God. O happy sorrows, O blessed troubles that thus bring poor souls nearer to their God. Now, having been thus doctinated in the school of the Cross, thou mayest experimentally say with the sweet singer of Israel, it is good for me that I have been afflicted, thereby I have learned to know Thy statutes. 2. Troubles no discouragements to God's precious servants. 3. Repentance the work of the great God. 4. Pressures put not God's children besides their prayers. 5. Deliverances are only perfected by the Lord. (*D. Swift*.)

THE END