

THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.

THE MINOR PROPHETS.

VOL. I.

HOSEA, JOEL, AMOS, OBADIAH,
JONAH, AND MICAH.

THE
BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR:

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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HOSEA.

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INTRODUCTION TO HOSEA.

GOD has many ways by which He prepares His servants for the doing of His work—many schools to which He sends them. But there is no teacher whom He uses more frequently than the stern teacher whose name is Sorrow. He makes His children acquainted with bitter trial and privation and loss; He “brings them into the wilderness,” as Hosea says, in order that among the barren rocks and sands He may speak to their hearts; He imparts to them their wisdom and their strength through the discipline of sacrifice and pain. Moses is sent to the deserts of Midian, that he may be accustomed there to the endurance of difficulty and opposition, and that in these lonely solitudes, where he is shut out from intercourse with his fellow-men, he may learn to hold close fellowship with his Divine Master and King. Paul writes his loftiest and profoundest letters from the prison-house of Nero, where for the hope of Israel he is bound with a chain. It was in the school-house of sorrow that God fashioned the prophet Hosea into fitness for his life-task.

I. THE NATURE OF THE MISSION WHICH GOD GAVE HOSEA TO FULFIL.—He was a prophet of the Northern Kingdom—a preacher to Israel rather than to Judah. Amos had the same sphere of labour assigned him. But Amos was himself a native of Judea, although his public career, so far as we know it, was confined to the North. He came to Bethel and Samaria, a stranger from the wilderness of Tekoa away in the South—a stranger who had been charged to deliver a terrible message of denunciation and of impending punishment. He carried out his commission, and then he withdrew again to his own land and people. Having spent a few stirring and memorable days in the guilty cities of Israel—having seen their violence and immorality and forgetfulness of God, and lifted up his voice like a trumpet against them—he went back to the silent pastures of the desert, to write down in quietness the story of what he had said and done at the Lord's commandment, and to live and die far from the scenes of his brief prophetic labours. It was different altogether with Hosea, the son of Beeri. That he was himself a child of that evil Northern land with whose inhabitants he pled on behalf of God is evident to every one who reads his book. Only one born and brought up in the very midst of the sinful people whose disobedience he bewails, linked to them by the tenderest bonds of family affection and national feeling, could pity them so truly, and yearn over them with so fond a love, and entreat them with such a beseeching and persistent earnestness to return to the Lord. Then, too, throughout his prophecy there are constantly recurring allusions to places in the territory of the ten tribes, to Mount Tabor, and the streams of Gilead, and the idolatrous shrines of Gilgal, and the splendid woods of Lebanon—references which speak of the writer's perfect familiarity with the scenery of the Northern Kingdom. It was indeed a goodly land. The fairest and grandest regions within the entire country were to be found in it. Its plains and forests and rivers were nobler by far than those of Judah. And Hosea knew it well, and was proud of its beauty, and grieved much that men and women to whom God had given a home so happy

and so richly dowered should yet be unmindful of Him and rebel against Him. His religion, we may even venture to say, was coloured to some extent by the pleasantness and geniality of his natural surroundings. It had in it more of freedom and of trust and of joy than that of the dwellers in the South, where nature was less kindly and her moods more severe. If it had not been that his heart was kept in perpetual sadness by the contemplation of his people's sin his would certainly have been a very glad and peace-bringing faith. A native of this attractive land, and gifted himself with a temperament naturally joyous, Hosea was nevertheless called to work that plunged him into gloom. His lot was cast in a period when his country had to contend with many fears and fightings from without, and when it was full of utter corruption within. His prophetic activity extended over a long time, and in this respect too he stands in sharp contrast to Amos, whose ministry was but an episode in his life and was quickly fulfilled. All his days he seems to have preached righteousness and temperance and judgment to come in the hearing of men who paid little heed to his message. His labours stretched over a series of terrible years, during which he saw his people sink from one depth of degradation and sorrow to other and lower depths. He began to speak in God's name while Jeroboam II., the greatest of the rulers of Israel, was still on the throne. But the reign of this monarch was drawing to its close, and the deluge came when he was gone. Amos had, indeed, found much to condemn in Israel even in the days of Jeroboam; but, bad as things undoubtedly were then, society was compact and pure compared with what it became after the king's death. A long interregnum followed, and for years no governor guided the affairs of the commonwealth. Then one sovereign after another—Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah—mounted the throne, placed on it like the later Roman emperors by the rough soldiers of the palace, and each of them permitted to rule for only a few months. It was in the midst of this unquiet time that Hosea addressed his countrymen. With these changes in the state he was familiar. And, while the government of the land was so unsettled, its inhabitants went from stage to stage in the evil ways of sin. They seemed to have lost all sense of shame. They had cast every restraining influence to the winds. There was no moral energy in their hearts, and no self-control in their lives. Few prophets draw such pictures of prevalent ungodliness as the son of Beeri does. "Whoredom and wine and new wine," he tells us, "took away the understanding" of his people. "False swearing, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery broke out, and blood touched blood," one dark crime treading close on the heels of another. If princes and subjects had only been wise, what a glorious history a land so favoured by heaven might well have had! And now the strength of the nation was spent; it had fought and finished an evil fight; its powers were wasted; there was no great future in store for it—only a future of misery during which it would reap as it had sown; it was already old. "Strangers have devoured the strength of Israel, and he knows it not," Hosea mourned, "yea, grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knows not." The enthusiasm and the possibilities of youth were gone for ever; the weakness of age had come long before the time; and so blind were the people that they were unconscious of their sad decay. Hosea was the prophet of the decline and fall of the Northern Kingdom. He has been called "the Jeremiah of Israel," and the name is a good one, for he preached when his nation was tottering to its ruin, as Jeremiah preached in the troublous days when the sun of Judah was about to set in clouds and darkness. God raised him up to speak plain words to his fellow-countrymen about their sin, and to predict the heavy doom which such sin must bring on the wrong-doers. This was a sore and bitter duty—was it not?—for one who had in him a very tender heart, and who loved his people with an overmastering affection. What wonder was it that he should resemble Jeremiah in another characteristic also—in this, that he was scarcely able to utter his message for weeping? The herdsman of Tekoa might journey from his southern home to Bethel, and proclaim against it God's exceeding great and fearful woe; and his voice might never once so much as falter while he thundered out his message of death; he might show himself stern and inexorable from first to last. It was little marvel that he should be so unflinching; he was himself an alien from the commonwealth of Israel. But it was impossible for Hosea to fulfil his task in such a fashion. For they were his brothers and sisters whose transgression he was bidden expose, and whose punishment he had to foretell. He had grown up among them. He was bound to them by the strongest ties. He did not hide or extenuate the tidings of wrath

which Jehovah had commanded him to publish abroad ; he was too faithful to do that ; but when he tried to announce them he was almost overcome by his emotion. His prophecy is a succession of sighs and sobs. Each verse is "one heavy toll in a funeral knell." That was the mission entrusted to Hosea.

II. But if the task itself seemed painful in the extreme, **THE PROPHET WAS MADE READY FOR EXECUTING IT BY A DISCIPLINE WHICH WAS MORE PAINFUL STILL.**—It was through sore experiences in his own history that he was moulded into God's messenger and representative. What these experiences were he explains in the opening chapters of his book. This, then, is the miserable recital. Some time in the reign of Jeroboam II., when the nation was already far from perfect in God's sight, and yet was not so confirmed in its wickedness as it afterwards became, Hosea married Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim. He hoped, we may be sure, that she would prove a good and loyal wife to him ; for the supposition of some expositors that Jehovah commanded His prophet to unite himself with a woman who was already known to be of impure character is absurd and revolting. But the trustfulness with which Hosea regarded his spouse was not justified in actual fact : she showed herself unfaithful to him ; she left his roof to go after other lovers, and became the mother of children born in infidelity. Was it not the most grievous wound which a man could receive ? On Ezekiel, another in the goodly fellowship of the prophets, a great sorrow fell once. His wife, the desire of his eyes, was taken from him with a stroke. He spake unto the people in the morning, and at even she died, and God bade him refrain from every token of mourning, that he might be a sign to the nation of the Jews. But death, though it overwhelms us with grief, is not so dreadful as dishonour ; and they were deeper floods of trouble into which Hosea went down with his naked feet than any which Ezekiel knew. And yet, despite Gomer's disloyalty, he loved her still. His love was that master-feeling which the Song of Solomon calls "strong as death" and "obstinate as the grave." He acknowledged her three children for his own, and gave them names, to each of which a prophetic lesson was attached. And by and by he resolved that, if it were possible, he would win her back to her old allegiance. He went after her, and found her in a state of utter misery, apparently sold as a slave, for he had to buy her to himself "for fifteen pieces of silver, and for a homer of barley, and a half homer of barley." So she came to dwell once more under her husband's roof, yet not to dwell there just as she had done formerly. Things could not go on as though there had been no faithlessness on her part. For many days the prophet had to watch over his wife, secluding her from temptation, exercising a wise carefulness and jealousy. It was with Hosea just as it was with the Arthur of our literature. Gomer was untrue like Guinevere, and her conduct pierced her lord's heart and cut him to the quick. But the prophet was as compassionate and long-suffering, as changeless in his affection, as willing to pardon, as the blameless king. And in the end there was a reconciliation. If the past could not be cancelled quite, it was at least forgiven. The poor foolish wanderer returned to her loyalty. The truant was welcomed home. These are the details of Hosea's home life, so far as they are related in the first and third chapters of his prophecy. It is difficult to understand why some interpreters should have denied the literal and historical significance of the account, and should have resolved the story into nothing more than parable or allegory. The whole narrative is given with perfect simplicity, and yet with touching reserve. It has an air of truthfulness about every one of its particulars. It appears only too real. But many of us may be inclined to ask why the prophet should have said anything about this great struggle and bitterness of his life. Ought he not to have kept such a matter with sacred care from the view of the world ? Was it not one of those secret things about which God only should have been told ? He had a very sufficient reason for the disclosure. He wished to show how it was that he became a prophet, and to explain why he was led to those conceptions which he had formed, of the conduct of Israel and of the character of God. It was from his own history that he learned at once the disobedience of his native land and the long-suffering pity of its Lord. He saw that the shame which had blighted his home was a representation in miniature of that shame which the seed of Jacob, whom Jehovah had espoused to Himself, had cruelly inflicted on Him ; that the grief which he felt over the erring Gomer—a grief without an element of anger in it—was symbolic of God's grief over His backsliding nation ; that the Divine heart was but his own

human heart, with all its feelings deepened and all its emotions intensified. As Hosea passed through the sad troubles of his household, his eyes were opened, and the thought dawned on him that his experience was only a type of God's experience in His dealings with His people. His sufferings lifted him into fellowship with God, taught him to think as God thought, gave him a sympathetic insight into God's heart; and so he came out of the fires God's prophet and spokesman.

III. And now let us inquire HOW HOSEA PERFORMED THE WORK FOR WHICH HE HAD BEEN TRAINED BY SO TERRIBLE A DISCIPLINE—how he made known God's message to Israel. His words are strong and passionate. His heart seems ready to break with sorrow. His whole prophecy is a cry of agony. There is no finish or elaboration in his style, for a man whose spirit is moved to its depths is not careful how he orders his speech. But what his utterance lacks in sweetness it makes up in pathos and power. And through all the sudden transitions and swift changes of feeling that are characteristic of these chapters we can trace the effects of the painful education which Hosea had undergone to fit him for his duty. Israel at large, he fancied, was like the wayward Gomer of his home. Unfaithfulness to Jehovah—apostasy from the heavenly Husband whose kindness surpassed the kindness of men—that was the sin of his nation. And still, after all the provocations of the past, the aggrieved and injured Lord cared for His thankless spouse. The framer of hearts felt towards foolish Israel the same unselfish affection with which Hosea knew that he had himself followed the unstedfast daughter of Diblaim. Whatever gentleness and pity dwelt in his breast had been kindled at God's altar. Whatever readiness to forgive he might display, God would display far more willingly and gladly. The disloyalty of Israel and the pitifulness of God—these are the two prominent ideas of this book. The former—the disloyalty of his nation—Hosea sets forth with great fulness of detail. He finds many tokens of ingratitude as he looks around him. There was, for example, the general and flagrant immorality of the land. How dark that was, and how notorious! Those who should have been freest from pollution were often ringleaders in crime. The very priests rejoiced in the spread of iniquity, and were foremost in outraging the law, lying in wait as robbers and murdering in the way to Shechem. The king and his princes found an unholy pleasure in conforming to the prevailing licence, and were glad rather than grieved when they contemplated the wickedness of their subjects. But besides this abounding lawlessness, and lying at its root and foundation, there were the religious declension and the false worship of the people. The prophet knew well that the outward errors of his fellow-countrymen sprang, as external transgressions so frequently do, from backsliding in religion. Had not Israel forsaken the spiritual worship of Jehovah? Had not the nation long since demanded a visible symbol of Him? Was it not given up to the adoration of the golden calves? Hosea was indeed very jealous for the honour of his God. No doubt he had heard many Israelites urge in extenuation of the image worship that it was really the service of Jehovah, and that those who went up to the local sanctuaries in Samaria and Bethel and Gilgal simply sought to give definiteness to their idea of the one living and true God when they knelt before an outward representation of Him. But he brushed aside with impatience the weak excuse. What was the calf but an idol? "The workman made it; therefore it was not God." Moreover, this materialising of religion was leading only too directly and speedily to unmistakable Baal worship. The old Phœnician idolatry, against which Elijah had waged so fierce a battle on the summit of Carmel, was threatening again to overspread the land. The children of Ephraim were sinning more and more; they had made them molten images of their silver; they sacrificed upon the tops of the mountains, and burned incense upon the hills. Another indication of the fickleness of Israel, and of its want of true and deep attachment to its heavenly Bridegroom, Hosea discovered in its foolish foreign policy. It would rather lean on the nations round about its borders than on the strong arm of its Maker, who should have been its Husband too. It was far from giving Him the whole-hearted devotion which He claimed as His rightful portion. Sometimes it turned to one side, and sometimes to another. It fluttered from place to place, like a silly dove, calling now to Egypt and then going to Assyria. Such conduct the prophet felt to be not merely a crime but a blunder, for whenever the Israelites should forsake one of these great empires, the other would become indignant and would take revenge for the neglect inflicted upon it. But this

coquetting with powerful neighbours—this “hiring lovers among the nations”—was sad and pitiable, chiefly because it showed that the heart of the chosen generation no longer beat true to its God. The people had forgotten Him who ought to have been their fortress and high-tower; and their forgetfulness would bring its chastisement. Still another proof of Israel's faithlessness Hosea laid stress upon in his preaching. Was it not wrong, he asked, that the nation should remain separated from Judah, its brother? Was there not rebellion against God, disregard of His purposes, opposition to His will, in this division of the kingdom? Were not the ten tribes in grievous fault when they continued to foster their quarrel with the house and dynasty of David—the house which the Lord had blessed? This, the prophet declared, was part of God's indictment of the subjects of the North: “They have set up kings, but not by Me; they have made princes, and I knew it not.” And he prayed eagerly for the healing of the ancient wound. A bright vision rose before him even in the midst of his griefs. For a moment he caught a glimpse of the glory of the latter days, when “the children of Israel should return and seek Jehovah their God and David their king.” Such was the country's infidelity towards God—an infidelity which pierced as with a sharp knife the heart of Hosea, and wounded him as the unsteadfastness of Gomer had done. But this was not the whole of his message. Over against the fickle and unreliable nation he saw standing the good and faithful God, and he had much to tell of the Divine mercy and graciousness. Like his own clinging, inextinguishable affection for his wife even in the period of her folly, like it, but purer and stronger and more persevering, was the affection of the Lord Jehovah for the land which He had wedded to Himself, and of which He was both the Father and the Husband. It was the high honour of Hosea that, first among all the prophets, he was prompted to call the feeling with which God regarded His people by the name of “love.” None had used so sweet and pregnant a word before. Joel had said that the Lord was “gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness.” Amos had spoken of His goodness in redeeming the children of Israel from Egypt and in planting them in Canaan. But Hosea went further than either of his predecessors had done. He lit upon a treasure which they had not been permitted to find—he discovered a pearl of great price—when he realised that the chiefest of God's perfections, the very glory and crown of His character, is His love. These were some of the words which this old preacher put into the lips of the Lord: “When Israel was a child, then I loved him”; and these also, “I will heal their backslidings; I will love them freely.” No doubt, it was upon the community as a whole rather than upon individual hearts that Hosea thought of Jehovah as lavishing this best of all His gifts. He concerned himself with the kingdom of God in its entirety, and not with the units that went to compose it. God's affection for His people was in truth an invincible affection. He hoped against hope, when they went on in sin. He felt that He could not abandon them to utter ruin. His soul wept over them. “How can I give thee up, Ephraim? How can I cast thee away, Israel? My heart burns within Me; I am overcome with sympathy; I will not execute the fierceness of Mine anger; I will not turn to destroy thee.” These were the thoughts of God which Hosea learned in the time of his sorrow, when he was taught to find in the emotions of his own breast a picture of the feelings that throbbed within the breast of the Lord of heaven and earth. If Israel persisted now in her folly and disobedience, she was without excuse. Amos had spoken to her of the righteousness and justice of God. But the knowledge that God is sternly righteous and inflexibly just will help none of us. But Hosea succeeded Amos; and the burden of Hosea's message was this: “God is love; He will save you from your sins, if you seek His forgiveness; He will not retain His anger for ever.” And that is all that we need. This revelation of God should break down our rebelliousness. It should drive every suspicious thought far from our minds. It should melt us into submission. (*Original Secession Magazine.*)

THE HOMILETIC USE OF HOSEA.—I. THE PROPHET.—We have no biography of Hosea, but his book leaves upon us such a clear impression of his character that the person who brings the message is as real as the message. He has five qualities which especially equip the man who would save souls. 1. Devotion to God. He loves God, is loyal to Him, is deeply interested in His cause. He dwells on His very names with fond and tender stress. 2. Yet he has a wondrous sympathy with Israel in her woes, and, what is far more, a vicarious fellowship in her guilt. 3. Zeal for righteousness. He denounces formal religion

as worthless, however costly and elaborate. He denounces the lying, swearing, stealing, adultery, and murder which pervaded the nation, in spite of its religious show, and declares that the Lord desires mercy and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings. 4. Fidelity to truth. He declares the whole counsel of God as he knows it. Even sympathy for Israel does not keep him from affirming that "Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke." 5. Hopefulness. With all the sorrow, reproof, and forecast of woe there is a spirit of hope that rises above all he sees and forebodes. II. THE TIMES.—Hosea's ministry certainly lay in the later years of the reign of Jeroboam II., and the troublous days that came just afterward. The reign of Jeroboam II. was the most brilliant of all in the kingdom. The brief account in the Book of Kings suggests power, enterprise, and military glory. But the account in Kings says: "Jeroboam did evil in the sight of the Lord." Hosea's description accords. This prosperity covers and decorates disease. Israel has forgotten that God has prospered her. Jeroboam is succeeded by a son, Zechariah, who is killed by a conspiracy after six months. His assassin, Shallum, reigns one month and is killed. His slayer and successor, Menahem, reigns longer. The Book of Kings gives him ten years; the critics say eight. But he has to pay heavy tribute to Assyria, and loads his people with taxes to do so. So the history goes on. They look for help now to Assyria, now to Egypt. Disaster, ruin, exile are close. The homiletic bearing of this is plain. Here is a picture of material prosperity and religious display gilding spiritual destitution and moral rottenness, and inevitably ending in overthrow. III. THE TEACHINGS OF THE PROPHET.—1. His doctrine of God. There is a conception here of lasting value to our theology. Ineffable holiness is combined with yearning love for the sinner. 2. His doctrine of sin. This is thoroughly practical. Little or nothing is said of original sin. Actual transgression gets the chief attention. When people are lying, cheating, stealing, killing, and committing adultery, the philosophy of sin draws less notice than its phenomena. The indictment under which the several counts of transgression are to be marshalled is in viii. 12. The progress of sin is shown in xiii. 2; its peril in xiii. 9 and in xiii. 16. The latter teaches also the true character of sin to be not misfortune, but rebellion against God. 3. The nature and the duty of the knowledge of God. This is a doctrine which is valuable to-day as a corrective of agnosticism. Hosea regards ignorance of God to be not a mishap or a mere limitation, but a grievous sin. In iv. 1 he says God has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no knowledge of God in the land; in vi. 3 he says, "So shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord" (R.V. substitutes "let us" for "shall we"). The knowledge is experiential and ethical. It is reached by repentance and prayer. It is retained by obedience. It is lost by transgression and neglect. The Christian pulpit to-day may fairly face the agnostic with the truth that the knowledge of God comes by ethical activity rather than metaphysical inquiry, that the thesaurus of its data is the spiritual consciousness rather than the realm of material nature, and that the phenomena of the latter can receive their highest and truest interpretation only in the light of the former. 4. The sin of schism. Hosea was a patriot of the Northern Kingdom, loyal to that part of the Lord's people to which he belonged. Yet he exalts the ideal of unity and predicts the day when the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together and appoint themselves one head. Unity was lost through folly, sin, oppression, unwillingness to reform abuses. It was predicted, permitted, ordered in the providence of God; but it was not the ideal of the kingdom. It was the outgrowth of circumstances, but not a state where-with to be content. The same is true of the Church. Historic causes produced divisions, which were permitted, even ordered, in God's providence. But divided Christendom is not the ideal. Hosea's prophecy must be fulfilled in its broad spiritual meaning. The divided hosts of Jehovah must be gathered under the one Head. For this Christ prayed; for this we pray. (*T. C. Straus.*)

THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.

HOSEA.

CHAPTER I.

VER. 1. **The Word of the Lord that came to Hosea.**—*The prophet Hosea*.—I. HE WAS DIVINELY COMMISSIONED. Holy men of old spake not of their own wisdom or of their own will; they spake the Word of God. In what a contemptuous light their conduct places those who in the present day quote the sayings of the Fathers, the Church, or Tradition, or suggest modern innovations, and strange interpretations. We have the Word of God, and the prompting of the Spirit; and is not that enough? II. HE HAD WORTHY ANCESTRY. His father's name would not have been mentioned had it not been to honour the son. How the father can strengthen and establish the son, or the son ruin and crush the father! III. HE PROPHESED AT A CRITICAL PERIOD. 1. It was a long time. Probably eighty years. 2. It was a changeable time. Various scenes. Different characters of kings and peoples. He lived in the reigns of one good king and four bad ones. He saw plenty and famine. He saw one revival and much sin. 3. It was a tentative time. Upon the conduct of the Jews depended their ultimate existence. IV. PRACTICAL THOUGHTS. 1. Hosea must have begun his ministry very young. 2. How very little we have of his prophesying. His chief work was directly relative to his age. God has preserved what was of permanent interest. 3. How long a man of God may labour, and yet how little good he may accomplish. He did not prevent the Captivity. We are not answerable for our success, but we are for our duty. We are not to relax our efforts because men are blind or fools. (*William Jay.*) *The prophet Hosea*.—I. WHO HE WAS. His name means a saviour, one who brings salvation, and many saving and savoury truths this prophet brings to us. The Jews say that when a prophet's father's name is given, the father was a prophet as well as the son. "Beeri" means a well that has springing water in it, freely and clearly running. II. TO WHOM WAS THE PROPHET SENT? Especially to the Ten Tribes. The Ten Tribes, rending themselves from the house of David, separated themselves also from the true worship of God, and horrible wickedness and all manner of abominations grew up amongst them. III. WHAT WAS HOSEA'S ERRAND TO THEM? To convince them of their abominable idolatry, and those other wickednesses in which they lived, and to denounce severe threatenings, yea, most fearful destruction. His threatening is more severe than any given before. Yet he, too, has a message of mercy. IV. WHAT WAS HIS COMMISSION? He had the "Word of Jehovah." Hosea did not go for the Word of the Lord, but the Word came to him. The knowledge of a call to a work will help a man through the difficulties of the work. V. THE TIME WHEN HOSEA PROPHESED. About the time that the city of Rome was built. The beginning of the Olympiads. During the reign of four kings, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. A lengthened prophesying of nearly fourscore years. See what of God's mind will spring from this. 1. It pleases God sometimes that some men's labours shall abide more full to posterity than others, though the labours of those others are greater and as excellent as theirs. 2. It appears that Hosea began to prophesy very young. 3. Hosea prophesying thus long it appears he lived to grow old in his work. 4. By Hosea's continuance in so many kings' reigns, it is evident he must have gone through a variety of conditions. He preserved

a constancy of spirit, however varied might be the difficulties of his work. 5. God may continue a prophet a long time amongst a people, and yet they may never be converted. 6. It is an honour to the ministers of God, who meet with many difficulties and discouragements in their way, yet continue fresh and lively to the very end. 7. It pleases God many times to let His prophets see the fulfilling of their threatenings upon the people against whom they have denounced them. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *Scripture, kings, and truth.*—I. THE ESSENCE OF SCRIPTURE. What is the essence of the Bible? It is here called "The Word of the Lord." Analyse the expression. 1. It is a "Word." A word fulfils two functions; it is a revelation and an instrument. The Bible is the manifestation of God, it shows His intellect and heart, and is His instrument as well; by which He accomplishes His purpose on the human mind. By it He is said to enlighten,—quicken,—cleanse,—conquer, &c. 2. It is a Divine Word. "The Word of the Lord." Words are always powerful and important according to the nature and character of the speaker. Because the Lord is all-mighty and holy, His Word is all-powerful and pure. 3. It is a Divine Word concerning men. The prophecy came to Hosea in relation to Israel. The Bible is a Word to man. 4. It is a Divine Word concerning man coming through men. In the Bible God speaks to man through man. This gives the charm of an imperishable humanity to the Bible. II. THE MORTALITY OF KINGS. Several kings are here mentioned who appeared and passed away during the ministry of Hosea. Uzziah was the eleventh king of Judah. His example was holy, and his reign peaceful and prosperous. Ahaz was a son of Jotham: at the age of twenty he succeeded his royal sire. He gave himself up to idolatry, and sacrificed even his own children to the gods of the heathen. Hezekiah, the son and successor of Ahaz, was a man of distinguished virtue and religion, animated by true piety and patriotism. Jeroboam was the son of Joash, and great grandson of Jehu, and followed the former Jeroboam, the man who made Israel to sin, and, like him, sank into the lowest idolatry and corruption. Some of these kings had come and gone during the ministry of Hosea;—kings die, &c. 1. This fact is a blessing. When we think of such kings as those of which Ahaz and Jeroboam were types, we thank God for death, and rejoice in the "king of terrors," who comes to strike the despots down. 2. This fact is a lesson. What does the death of kings teach? (1) The rigorous impartiality of death. Death is no respecter of persons, it treats the pauper and the prince alike. (2) The utter powerlessness of wealth. (3) The sad hollowness of worldly glory. Death strips sovereigns of all their pageantry and reduces them to common dust. III. THE PERPETUITY OF TRUTH. Although these kings successively appeared and passed away, the ministry of Hosea kept on. 1. The "Word of the Lord" is adapted to all generations. It is congruous with all intellects, it chimes in with all hearts, it provides for the common wants of all. 2. The "Word of the Lord" is necessary for all generations. (*Homilist.*) *Trouble a teacher.*—A wonderful book is this prophecy of Hosea (B.C. 800-725). The man himself at once attracts our sympathy and regard by his personal sufferings. There is no teacher of Divine truth to be compared for one moment for excellence so deep and great as trouble. Hosea had an infinite sorrow at home; therefore he was so great and tender a teacher of Divine truth. He read everything through his tears; hence the enlargement, the colour, the variety, the striking beauty of his visions. When the sorrow is home grief it assumes a tenderer quality. Hosea had children, but they had evil names; their very names were millstones round the prophet's neck. If one of them had a name historically and ideally beautiful, it was to be used for the expression of judgment and vengeance. As for the others, one represented the vanished mercy of God, and the other represented the alienation of the people from God, and the alienation of God from the people. Only sorrow should read some parts of the Bible, because only sorrow could have written them. You cannot properly sing a man's music until you know the man himself. Hosea will have a tone of his own; he will talk like nobody else; he will be an eccentric, peculiar individual; he will begin when he pleases, and he will take a circuit marked out for him by an invisible guide; but now and again he will come down to the road we travel, and will present us with flowers and fruits, and will say little sweet sentences to us that shall be as angels, covered with light, and tremulous with music. The sorrow of Hosea was symbolic. All sorrow is meant to be symbolic. Whoso has sorrow is meant to be a teacher. You have no right to the exclusive use of your own sorrow. Sorrow should only be silent for a time; by and by it should find all

its words, refine, enlarge, and dignify them, and pass them on as messages, bright as Gospels. But for his own sorrow, he never could have understood God's grief. Again and again God asks us to look at Him through ourselves. Happy they who come up out of household trouble, public disappointment, and social criticism, and loss and desolation, to pray larger prayers, and offer to those who are outside a larger hospitality of love and rest. If sorrow makes us narrower in thought and purpose, then sorrow has failed to convey God's meaning to the soul. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 2. The beginning of the Word of the Lord by Hosea.—*The prophet Hosea*.—The prophet Hosea is the only individual character that stands out amidst the darkness of this period—the Jeremiah, as he may be called, of Israel. His life had extended over nearly the whole of the last century of the northern kingdom. In early youth, whilst the great Jeroboam was still on the throne, he had been called to the prophetic office. In his own personal history he shared in the misery brought on his country by the profligacy of the age. In early youth he had been united in marriage with a woman who had fallen into the vices which surrounded her. He had loved her with a tender love; she had borne to him two sons and a daughter; she had then deserted him, wandered from her home, fallen again into wild licentiousness, and been carried off as a slave. From this wretched state, with all the tenderness of his nature, he bought her, and gave her one more chance of recovery, by living with him, though apart. No one who has observed the manner in which individual experience often colours the general religious doctrine of a gifted teacher can be surprised at the close connection that exists between the life of Hosea and the mission to which he was called. In his own grief for his own great calamity—the greatest that can befall a tender human soul—he was taught to feel for the Divine grief over the lost opportunities of the nation once so full of hope. (*Dean Stanley.*) **Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms.**—*God's strange command to Hosea*.—Holy Scripture relates that all this was done, and tells us the birth and names of the children, as real history. As such, then, we must receive it. We must not imagine things to be unworthy of God, because they do not commend themselves to us. God does not dispense with the moral law, because the moral law has its source in the mind of God Himself. To dispense with it would be to contradict Himself. But God, who is the absolute Lord of all things which He made, may, at His sovereign will, dispose of the lives or things which He created. Thus, as Sovereign Judge, He commanded the lives of the Canaanites to be taken away by Israel, as, in His ordinary providence, He has ordained that the magistrate should not bear the sword in vain, but has made him His "minister, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." So, again, He, whose are all things, willed to repay to the Israelites their hard and unjust servitude, by commanding them to "spoil the Egyptians." He who created marriage, commanded to Hosea whom he should marry. The prophet was not defiled, by taking as his lawful wife, at God's bidding, one defiled, however hard a thing this was. "He who remains good, is not defiled by coming in contact with one evil; but the evil, following his example, is turned into good." But through his simple obedience, he foreshadowed Him, God the Word, who was called the "friend of publicans and sinners"; who warned the Pharisees, that "the publicans and harlots should enter into the kingdom of God before them"; and who now vouchsafes to espouse, dwell in, and unite Himself with, and so to hallow, our sinful souls. The acts which God enjoined to the prophets, and which to us seem strange, must have had an impressiveness to the people, in proportion to their strangeness. The life of the prophet became a sermon to the people. Sight impresses more than words. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *Scripture picture-teaching*.—In modern times picture-teaching is almost confined to work among children, because education and culture have made adults capable of apprehending plain statements, and even elaborate arguments. In child-conditions of nations child methods of instruction were wisely employed. And it is well for preachers to bear in mind that a large proportion of those whom they address are as incapable of following argument as children, and therefore need the pictorial, dramatic, and illustrative methods of instruction. It is even more to the point to observe that the dramatic acting out of representative and suggestive scenes, has always been, and still is, one of the most effective methods of moral instruction. What we have in Hosea, whether what is stated concerning him be regarded as history

or vision, is a dramatising of the history of the nation of the Ten Tribes in its relation to God figured as its husband. The facts of individual experience are these. Hosea takes as wife a woman who had gone astray. All his love and care fail to recover her and settle her in her home-life. Presently the old wilfulness revives, and she breaks away from home, to live again a life of sinful indulgence, and come under burdens of pain and slavery. Spite of it all, Hosea is willing, if she will give up her sins, to receive her back, and give her the old place in home and love. The individual represents the national. The Ten Tribes wilfully broke away under Jeroboam I. determined to live an independent life of self-willedness, which always means a life of sin. God graciously took this nation as His, and strove with tending, patience, gentleness, and love to win it as His own. But it was in vain. The nation again and again broke away from God, dishonoured Him, and at last in its seemingly outward prosperity, under Jeroboam II., broke away entirely from Him. Nevertheless patient mercy still pleads. Only now there is the intimation that it is the nation's last chance. Hosea, then, in his ways with his wife is to represent God's ways with the nation. In telling how he thought and felt, and what he did, and was willing to do, Hosea revealed to the people the thought and hope and anxiety of God concerning them. I. IN TAKING THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL AS HIS, GOD DID NOT TAKE A CHASTE NATION. Under Jeroboam I. the nation broke away from its home, and duty, and right relations. It was a soiled, wilful nation. Nevertheless, and as such God took it for His own. II. WHILE CALLING IT HIS OWN, GOD DID EVERYTHING THAT LOVE AND CARE COULD DO TO WIN THE NATION WHOLLY FOR HIMSELF AND RIGHT-EOUSNESS. Pathetic is the tender love of Hosea, as representing the patience, gentleness, and love of God. III. THE OLD WILFULNESS WILL NOT BE SUBDUED, AND AT LAST IT BROKE OUT AGAIN, LEADING TO WORSE SINS THAN AT FIRST. Compare the moral and social life of Israel under Jeroboam I. and Jeroboam II. IV. DIVINE SEVERITIES MUST ATTEND ON DIVINE LOVE WHEN MORAL CONDITIONS BECOME SO UTTERLY HOPELESS. And yet how evident it becomes, that judgment is God's strange work, and mercy His delight! (*J. Burroughs.*) *Mysterious commands* :—In the Memorial Hall at Harvard University there is a wonderful array of beautiful sentences frescoed on the walls in various colours, but they are all in Latin. And it is said that some of the workmen did not know the meaning of the sentences they painted, but could only put the letters and the colours on the walls as they were told, without understanding the wondrous meaning wrapped up in them. So we are often writing our lives in an unknown tongue; we can only do as we are bidden. (*Christian Age.*)

Ver. 4. *Call his name Jezreel.*—*Judgment on the house of Ahab* :—Jezreel means, the child of guilt; therefore not Israel, but Jezreel (or more exactly, Izreel). The name is referred to for its historical associations. It points both backwards and forwards—backward to the massacre of Ahab's family by Jehu (2 Kings ix. 10), and forward to the punishment for that wild and cruel act. Hosea (in whom natural peculiarities have been purified and not extinguished by the spirit of prophecy) regards the conduct of Jehu in a different light from the writer of 2 Kings x. 30. The latter praises Jehu for having "done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in My mind"; he speaks on the assumption that Jehu had the interests of Jehovah's worship at heart, and that he destroyed the house of Ahab as the only effectual means of advancing them. The former blames Jehu apparently on the high moral ground that Jehovah desires mercy (love) and not sacrifice (chap. vi. 6). He speaks as the Israelites of his time doubtless felt. They no more recognised Jehu as a champion of Jehovah than did the priests of Baal whom he basely entrapped. But Hosea doubtless felt in addition that the idolatry to which the house of Jehu was addicted rendered a permanent religious reform hopeless. Image-worship could not be suppressed by such half-hearted worshippers of Jehovah, and hence, Jehovah's moral government of His people must have made it certain to Hosea that even on this ground alone the dynasty of Jehu could not escape an overthrow. (*T. K. Cheyne, D.D.*) *And I will avenge the blood of Jezreel.*—*God as the family God, or Avenger* :—We have no such associations with the word "avenge" as were familiar to ancient Eastern people, and are familiar in tribal life to-day. In the East the avenger is the vindicator of a family wrong by securing the adequate punishment of the wrong-doer. In a rude state of society, the nearest relative of a person slain was conceived as under obligation to put the slayer to death. He had to be

the "avenger of blood." Dr. S. Cox tells us that the main functions of the Goel were three, or rather that there were three tragic contingencies in which the legal redeemer and avenger was bound to interpose. 1. If any Hebrew had fallen into such penury as that he was compelled to part with his ancestral estate, the Goel was bound to purchase it, and, after certain conditions had been observed, to restore it to his impoverished kinsman. 2. If any Hebrew had been taken captive, or had sold himself for a slave, the Goel was bound to pay the price of his redemption, to unloose and set him free. 3. If any Hebrew had suffered grievous wrong, or had been slain, the Goel was bound to exact compensation for the wrong, or to avenge his murder. In the case introduced by the text, we are to understand that the slaughter of the house of Ahab had not yet been avenged, though three generations had passed. There seemed to be no one left of the house of Ahab to do the duty of the avenger. So God took it directly upon Himself. "I will avenge the blood of Jezreel." This must be regarded as a striking instance of representing God as feeling, and then doing, as a man would feel and do under such circumstances. The case occasions difficulty to us, because no private and personal avengements of wrongs done are now permitted. All wrongs are judicially treated. But in revealing Himself and His will, God must always speak in the range of knowledge, sentiment, and association of those whom He addresses, or He could not be understood by them. To those who knew about avengers He could present Himself as the great Avenger. And if there are bad sides to the avenger's work, we must not fail to see that there are also good sides, and that we may take the good sides to represent God. The idea that can be helpfully worked out for a modern congregation is, that God never neglects wrongs that are done to His people. He may seem to delay, He may even wait for generations; but His injured people are always vindicated at last. The wrong-doer may seem to escape punishment, he never really does. He may seem to prosper, but there is surely a worm whose work is spoiling his prosperity. The Lord is the Avenger of all His injured ones; and the woes that eventually come upon all wrong-doers vindicate His people and vindicate Him. God's avenging is always only a part of His redeeming. (*Robert Tuck, B.A.*)

The blood of Jezreel.—The name signifies the "scattered of the Lord." Five reasons why the son of Hosea was to be called by this name. 1. That hereby God might show that He intended to avenge that blood which was shed in Jezreel. 2. To show that Israel had lost the honour of His name, and was no more Israel, but Jezreel. (Israel is one that prevails by the "strength of the Lord." Jezreel is one that is "scattered by the Lord.") 3. To show the way that God intended to bring judgment upon these ten tribes. 4. To note that the Lord would scatter them in that very place wherein they most gloried. (Jerome says the Israelite army was defeated in the valley of Jezreel before Samaria was taken.) 5. The Lord would hereby show that He would turn these conceits and apprehensions that they might have of themselves quite the contrary way. I. WHAT IS THIS "BLOOD OF JEZREEL" THAT GOD WILL AVENGE? (2 Kings ix. 10, 11). It was the blood of the house of Ahab. II. WHY WILL GOD "AVENGE THE BLOOD OF JEZREEL UPON THE HOUSE OF JEHU"? Because—1. Jehu looked to his own ends, rather than to God. 2. Because he did his work but by halves. 3. Because he proved Ahab's successor in his idolatry. A man may do that which God commands, and yet not really obey God. And God knows how to make use of men's parts and abilities, and yet to punish them for their wickedness notwithstanding. III. WHY IS IT CALLED "THE HOUSE OF JEHU"? The house of Jehu is his posterity, or family, who were to succeed. The posterity of the ungodly shall suffer for their father's sin. Only the second commandment threatens the sin of the fathers upon the children. IV. WHAT IS THIS "LITTLE WHILE" GOD SPEAKS OF? It was a long time—three generations—before God came upon the house of Jehu, still He saith, yet but a little while, or, I will stay but a little longer, ere I avenge the blood of Jezreel. 1. God sometimes comes upon sinners for their sins. It is likely that these sins of Jehu were forgotten, yet God comes now at last to avenge the sins of Jehu upon his house. Youthful sins may prove to be the terror of age. 2. A long time after the flourishing of a nation God may reckon with it in ways of judgment. 3. Seventy-six years are but a little while in God's account. 4. The apprehension of a judgment just at hand is that which will stir the heart and work upon it most. 5. God suffers some sinners to continue long, others He cuts off speedily. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*)

Scattered by God:—1. Whatever present fruits men may seem to reap by sin, yet at last, being

continued in, it will ripen to a height, and fit for strokes. 2. Notwithstanding that sinners in the Church do conceit of their privileges, God will plague them, and make their judgment conspicuous. 3. Men may not only be doing what God in His providence will permit to succeed, but even that which is in itself just, and yet be guilty before God, and justly punished for it, when either they do not the Lord's work sincerely, but for their own base ends and interests, or when they do it not thoroughly, but only in so far as may serve their own turn. (*George Hutcheson.*)

Ver. 5. I will break the bow.—*A nation's humiliation through its army*.—This verse was intentionally added; for the Israelites were so inflated with their present good fortune, that they laughed at the judgment denounced. They indeed knew that they were well furnished with arms, men, and money; they thought themselves in every way unassailable. Hence the prophet declares that all this could not prevent God from punishing them. "Ye are," he says, "inflated with pride; ye set up your valour against God, thinking yourselves strong in arms and power; and because ye are military men, ye think that God can do nothing, and yet your bows cannot restrain His hand from destroying you." When He says, "I will break the bow," He mentions a part for the whole; for under one sort He comprehends every kind of arms. As to what the prophet had in view, we see that his only object was to break down their false confidence; for the Israelites thought that they should not be exposed to the destruction which Hosea had predicted; for they were dazzled by their own power, and thought themselves beyond the reach of any danger, while they were so well fortified on every side. Hence the prophet says that all their fortresses would be nothing against God; for in that day, when the ripe time for vengeance shall come, the Lord will break all their bows, He will tear in pieces all their arms, and reduce to nothing their power. We are here warned ever to take heed, lest anything should lead us to a torpid state when God threatens us. Though we may have strength, though fortune (so to speak) may smile on us, though, in a word, the whole world should combine to secure our safety, yet there is no reason why we should felicitate ourselves, when God declares Himself opposed to and angry with us. Why so? Because, as He can preserve us when unarmed whenever He pleases, so He can spoil us of all our arms, and reduce our power to nothing. Let this verse then come to our minds whenever God terrifies us by His threatenings; and what it teaches us is, that He can take away all the defences in which we vainly trust. (*John Calvin.*) *Jehu's bow* (2 Kings ix. 24).—Observe—1. In those things wherein wicked men have been most successful, God will curse them and let out His wrath upon them. 2. Carnal hearts trust much in their warlike weapons. 3. Fortified cities cannot help when God comes out against a people. 4. Even in the place in which a kingdom most glories, and seems to trust most in, God many times comes, and breaks the kingdom in that very place. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *Retribution*.—The word Jezreel means God's seed, or sowing. Jezreel was the plain between Tabor and Carmel, called by the Greeks, Esdraelon. The royal city was in it. Here the Eternal threatens to break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel. I. GOD'S RETRIBUTION TAKES AWAY THE POWER OF ITS VICTIM. The bow of Israel is to be broken. The language means the utter destruction of all their military power. When justice comes to deal out suffering to the sinner, it strips him entirely of his power. Thus he is left to the mercies of his enemies. What are the great enemies of the soul? Carnality, prejudice, selfishness, corrupt impulses and habits. II. GOD'S RETRIBUTION DESPISES THE PRESTIGE OF ITS VICTIM. The bow is to be broken in the valley of Jezreel, which had been the scene of Israel's grandest military exploits. It was to Israel what Marathon was to Greece, and Waterloo to England. In this very scene the punishment should come. The place of their glory should be the place of their ruin and shame. Thus it is ever. III. GOD'S RETRIBUTION DEFIES THE OPPOSITION OF ITS VICTIMS. Jezreel was well fortified. Retribution will strike the sinner in his strongest place. Notwithstanding Jezreel, the kingdom of Israel was broken. Conclusion. Retribution must always follow sin. It may move slowly and silently, but its pace is steady, resolute, and increasing. Swifter and swifter it moves towards the victim. "Be sure your sins will find you out." (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 6. I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel.—*Mercy put in the background*.—There is a time when God will not have mercy upon

a kingdom, or upon a particular people. 'There is a time for the decree to come forth against a kingdom; a time when, though Noah, Job, and Daniel should stand before Him, yet He will not be entreated; though they cry, cry early, cry aloud, cry with tears, cry with fasting, yet God will not be entreated. God's mercy is precious, and He will not let it run out to waste; He will not be prodigal of it; a time wherein God will say, Now I have done, I have done with this people, mercy has had her turn. Men best know what the worth of mercy is, when mercy is taken away from them. Well, saith God, you shall have no more; you have taken no notice that it was My mercy that helped you before, but when My mercy is gone, then you will know it; but then I will not add more. God usually takes not away His mercy fully from a people, or from a soul, until after much mercy has been received and abused. It is just with God, when mercy is abused, that we should never know further what mercy meant. Mercy as it is a precious thing, so it is a tender thing, and a dangerous thing to abuse. There is nothing that more quickly works the ruin of a people, or of a soul, than abused mercy. (*Jeremiah Burroughs*.) *God's mercy*:—Mercy is a modification of goodness. God is good to all, but is only merciful to the suffering sinner. Mercy not only implies suffering, but suffering arising from sin. I. *MERCY WITHHELD FROM SOME*. Burroughs says, There are three estates of the people, signified by the three children of Hosea: first, their scattered estate, and that was signified by Jezreel, the first son. Their low and weak condition, signified by the daughter. Their being rejected and carried away, signified by the third child. God now threatened to withhold mercy from Israel, and we know that when He did so the consequence was national ruin. "My Spirit shall not always strive with men." II. *MERCY BESTOWED UPON OTHERS*. "I will have mercy upon the house of Judah." This mercy was signally shown to Judah. When the Assyrian armies had destroyed Samaria, and carried the Ten Tribes away into captivity, they proceeded to besiege Jerusalem; but God had mercy on the house of Judah, and saved them; they were saved by the Lord their God immediately, and not by sword or "bow." When the Ten Tribes were contained in captivity, and their land was possessed by others, they being utterly taken away, God had mercy on the house of Judah and saved them, and after seventy years brought them back, not by might or power, but by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts. And truly most signal was the mercy shown to Judah, when in one night one hundred and eighty-five thousand of the Assyrian warriors were slain. Looking at the words in their spiritual application they suggest two remarks in relation to man's deliverance. 1. It is of mercy. "I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God." The deliverance of man from the guilt, the power and consequence of sin is entirely of God's mercy, free, sovereign, boundless mercy. It is suggested that man's deliverance is—2. By moral means. "Will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen." No material force can deliver the soul from its spiritual difficulties and perils. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord." Conclusion. Use mercy rightly while you have it. Its grand design is to produce reformation of character and meetness for the high service and lofty fellowship with the great God, here and yonder, now and for ever. (*Homilist*.) *The sin against love*:—Men say they cannot believe in hell, because they cannot conceive how God may sentence men to misery for the breaking of laws they were born without power to keep. And one would agree with the inference if God had done any such thing. But for them which are under the law and the sentence of death, Christ died once for all, that He might redeem them. Yet this does not make a hell less believable. When we see how almighty was that love of God in Christ Jesus, lifting our whole race and sending them forward with a freedom and a power of growth nothing else in history has won for them; when we prove again how weak it is, so that it is possible for millions of characters that have felt it to refuse its eternal influence for the sake of some base and transient passion; nay, when *I myself* know this power and this weakness of Christ's love, so that one day being loyal I am raised beyond the reach of fear and of doubt, beyond the desire of sin and the habit of evil, and the next day finds me capable of putting it aside in preference for some slight enjoyment or ambition—then I know the peril and the terror of this love, that it may be to a man either heaven or hell. Believe then in hell, because you believe in the love of God—not in a hell to which God condemns men of His will and pleasure, but a hell into which men cast themselves from the very face of His love in Jesus Christ. (*Geo. Adam Smith, D.D.*)

The time of mercy ended.—The Macedonian king, Alexander the Great, observed a very singular custom in his method of carrying on war. Whenever he encamped before a fortified city, and laid siege to it, he caused to be set up a great lantern, which was kept lighted by day and night. This was a signal to the besieged, and what it meant was that as long as the lamp burned they had time to save themselves by surrender, but that when once the light should be extinguished the city and all that were in it would be irrevocably given over to destruction. And the conqueror kept his word with terrible consistency. Now it is the good pleasure of our God to have compassion and to show mercy. But a city or a people can arrive at such a pitch of moral corruption that the moral order of the world can only be saved by its destruction. (*Otto Funcke.*)

Ver. 7. But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God, and I will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen.—*The vanity of the positive philosophy*.—The first three chapters are symbolic, and directed chiefly against the Ten Tribes, whom Hosea addresses as Israel and Ephraim. Hosea condemned their departure from the Almighty, as being a sort of spiritual adultery. One sign was an undue reliance upon material and temporal helps in times of emergency. Against this characteristic of a corrupt religion, and a declining national life, the text is directed. **I. ALL HUMAN AND MATERIAL SUCCOURS ARE ALONE AND BY THEMSELVES INADEQUATE.** In their better days the people of Israel reposed all their confidence in Jehovah. Now they had lapsed into idolatry. Their spiritual vision had by degrees narrowed itself down to merely material views of things. They lost spiritual insight, and saw only the seen. They trusted in their military strength, and in political alliance with the great powers. From the human standpoint this conduct was not unreasonable. In our own age this error prevails. It is reserved to our time to systematise these views into a philosophy, which, calling itself positive, excludes from its domain the least element of the supernatural. It is found that there is a constancy in the operations of nature. Law has been discovered, where it was thought that there was but fortuity. So we are bidden to turn to science, where once we turned to God. Instead of praying, we are to study, and to adjust ourselves to ever-operating laws. If we would remain prosperous as a nation, say the positivists, we must have recourse to material helps, practise political economy, reform our social administration, and push to their farthest limits the practical application of scientific principles. But all this trust to science and scientific helps against the evils and emergencies of human life, is miserably and woefully mistaken. There is no incompatibility between true science and true religion. But a mere trust in means, or secondary causes, is vain and presumptuous. The shrewdest anticipations of man are constantly disappointed. Material succours—those helps which arise out of an observation, classification, and adaptation of secondary causes merely, are by themselves utterly unworthy. **II. HELP FROM GOD IS ALONE SUFFICIENT.** God is the disposer of all events. At any moment this Supreme Power may, by a volition of His creative will, disappoint the cleverest calculation of the cleverest sociologist. God deigns to employ human and material agencies in the execution of His purposes; but because He works in a regular and orderly manner, we are not to think only of the mere means and instruments, and forget that Divine omnipresent agency, without which the mere instrumentality would be as the body without life, or as the machine without motive-power. It is then God, and God alone, who is worthy of trust. The means are with us, the issues are with the Lord. God can work with means, and He can also work without them. Man may calculate and scheme for results, but in vain, except as God may succeed his efforts. If we would make the best of both worlds, we must most distinctly remember that our only reliable help is to be found in the Lord, and in Him alone. **III. IN ALL CASES IT IS OUR DUTY TO TRUST ONLY IN GOD.** Here we see the practical bearing of the truth enforced by the prophecy. The lesson of the text is, that we are not to trust to any use of means for the result or results which we may desire. Secondary causes are only efficient as they are so made by the informing agency of God. (*D. Clark, M.A.*) *Saved by Jehovah*.—Salvation is here set in opposition to the destruction which the prophet mentioned in the last verse. But Hosea shows that salvation depends not in the least either on arms, or on any of the intervenients, as they say, of this world; but has its foundation only on God's favour. The connection ought to be carefully noticed. Where

the Lord's favour is, there is life. Hence the prophet here connects salvation with God's gratuitous favour, for we cannot continue safe, but as long as God is propitious to us. But he says, "By Jehovah their God." An antithesis is to be understood here between the false gods and Jehovah, who was the God of the house of Judah. It is the same as though the prophet said, "Ye indeed profess the name of God, but ye worship the devil and not God; for ye have nothing to do with Jehovah, with the God who is the Creator and Maker of heaven and earth; for He dwells in His own temple; He pledged His faith to David, when He commanded him to build a temple for Him on Mount Zion; He dwells there between the cherubim, but the true God has become exiled from you, Israelites." (*John Calvin.*) *God the Deliverer*:—England has often shown her Christian character in acknowledging the hand of God. After the glorious deliverance from her enemies, by the destruction of the Spanish Armada, Queen Elizabeth ordered a medal to be struck, having on it, *Affavit Deus, et dissipantur*—"God blew on them, and they were scattered."

Ver. 9. Lo-ammi: ye are not My people, and I will not be your God.—*Lo-ammi: the type of the third child*:—The last period of their sins' ripening for God's judgments, is represented under the type of the third child, called *Lo-ammi*, or not My people; pointing to the time of their utter captivity by Shalmaneser, whereby God made void the relation betwixt Him and that people, scattering them among the nations, and making them cease from being His Church and people. Whence learn—1. Such is the long-suffering patience of God, especially toward the visible Church, that He is not only slow to anger, and to manifest the same by judgments; but even when He hath begun to strike, He yet waits patiently, to see what use they will make of present judgments, to prevent future and sadder strokes; and in particular it is very long ere the Lord come to unchurch a people that have been in covenant with Him. 2. However the Lord's long-suffering patience be great and admirable, yet it will not always last towards a sinful people, especially after He hath begun to plead with them, but will at last come to a sad period. 3. Howbeit no limits ought to be set to the freedom and efficacy of the grace of God, who can and doth sanctify afflictions unto the Church, and make them a means to turn her, and cause her to cleave faster to Him: yet it doth oftentimes also prove too true, that when the Lord begins to contend with her, she proves so obstinate in sin, and so incorrigible and incessant in defection, that nothing ends it but her utter rejection, at least for a time. 4. The capstone of all judgment upon a people is their unchurching, and the cutting off the relations between God and them. 5. Whenever the Lord gives up with a people as to being their God, He will make it appear that the breach began on their side, and that they first voluntarily rejected Him, and chose that state and condition sinfully, to which, and the effects thereof, He gives them up judicially. (*George Hutcheson.*) *Lo-ammi*:—"Ye are not My people." This is the final disowning of them. They had been before called *Jezreelites*, and then by the name of the daughter God testified that He was alienated from them; but now the third name is still more grievous, "*Ye are not My people*," for God here abolishes, in a manner, the covenant He made with the holy fathers, so that the people would cease to have any pre-eminence over the other nations. The Israelites were reduced to a condition in which they differed nothing from the profane Gentiles: and thus God wholly disinherited them. Let us hence learn, that those awfully mistake who are blind to their own vices, because God spares and indulges them. There is no reason for hypocrites to felicitate themselves in prosperity; they ought, on the contrary, to have regard to God's judgment. But though these, as we see to be the case, heedlessly despise God, yet this passage reminds us carefully to beware lest we abuse the present favours of God. (*John Calvin.*)

Ver. 10. There it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.—*A promise of mercy*:—I. A PROMISE OF MERCY TO ISRAEL. 1. The Lord in judgment remembers mercy. When God threatens most dreadfully, yet He promises most graciously. 2. It is usual when we are in prosperity to forget all threatenings, and when we are in adversity to forget all promises. 3. God in the midst of His anger, knows those that trust in Him. 4. Not only when God threatens judgments, but when judgments are actually upon us, let us sanctify God's name in looking up to the promises. II. TO WHOM DID THIS PROMISE REFER? It

was not a promise to any that then lived, it was to be fulfilled in future ages; yet it is introduced by the prophet as a comfort to the people of God then living. Gracious hearts are comforted with the promises of God made to the Church, though not to be fulfilled in their days. **III. WHAT WAS THIS PROMISE?** That Israel should be a multitude. The Lord remembers His promises, though made a long time since, so long ago as the time of Abraham. Observe—1. There is nothing lost in being willing, as Abraham was, to lose for God. 2. When we are willing to lose for God, then is the time when God will renew and confirm His covenant with us. Note—(1) God has a time to bring in abundance of people to the profession of the faith. (2) Although God defers fulfilling His promise for a time, yet at last He does it gloriously. (3) We should greatly rejoice in multitudes joining the Church. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *The destiny of the race* :—We shall take Israel for mankind, and use the text to illustrate the destiny of the race. **I. The race is destined to an INDEFINITE INCREASE** in the number of good men. "The number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered or measured." The good, the spiritual Israel, have been comparatively few in all ages, though perhaps there is a larger number now than in any preceding period. But the time will come when they shall be innumerable. What mean such passages as these? "He shall have dominion from sea to sea, from the rivers to the end of the earth." Again, "All kings shall fall down before Him." Again, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ." Numerous as the sand on the sea-shore! A Jewish Rabbi regards the good as the sand, not only in relation to number, but for usefulness. As the sand keeps the sea from breaking in and drowning the world, so the saints keep the world from being drowned by the waves of eternal retribution. This is true. Were it not for the good the world would not stand long. But it is to represent number not protection, that the figure is employed. Do you say that to all appearances such an increase is impossible? When God promised to Abraham that his seed should be as the stars of heaven and the sand upon the shore, what could seem more improbable than the fulfilment? Do not judge from appearances. Trust God's Word; it will come to pass. There is a glorious future for the world. **II. The race is destined to a TRANSCENDENT PRIVILEGE.** "And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not My people, there shall it be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God." 1. They are destined to a general conversion to God. From not being His people they are to become His people. The places of the earth now populated with the enemies of God will one day be crowded with His friends. 2. They are destined to a general adoption into the family of God. "Ye are the sons of the living God." They shall be endowed and animated with the true Spirit, the spirit of reverence and adoring love. "The living God." The world has abounded with dead gods; there is but one "living" God. **III. The race is destined to a COMMON LEADERSHIP.** 1. This leadership shall unite the most hostile. "Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together." Great and long enduring was the hostility existing between these people. The time will come when all antipathies existing amongst peoples shall be destroyed. "Ephraim shall not envy Judah: they shall be of one heart and one mind." 2. This leadership shall be by common appointment. They shall "appoint themselves one head." Their leader will not be forced upon them contrary to their consent, nor will He force Himself. Who is the leader? Christ. He is the Leader of the people. He is the Commander-in-Chief, the Captain of our salvation. All shall unite in Him. 3. This leadership will be glorious. As Moses led the Jews out of the wilderness, as Cyrus delivered them from Babylon, Christ will lead them out of Egyptian darkness and Babylonian corruption. (*Homilist.*) *Sons of the living God* :—It was the special sin of Israel, the source of all his other sins, that he had left the living God, to serve idols. In the times of the Gospel, not only should he own God as his God, but he should have the greatest of all gifts, that the living God, the Fountain of all life, of the life of nature, of grace, of glory, should be his Father, should communicate to him that life, which He has and is. For He who is Life, imparts life. God doth not only pour into the souls of His elect, grace and faith, hope and love, or all the manifold gifts of His Spirit, but He, the living God, maketh them to be His living sons, by His Spirit dwelling in them, by whom He adopteth them as His sons, through whom He giveth them grace. For by His Spirit He adopteth them as sons. . . . God not only

accounteth us, but maketh us His sons. He maketh us sons, not outwardly, but inwardly; not by inward grace alone, but by His Spirit. God is our Father, not by nature, but by grace. He giveth us of His substance, of His nature, although not by nature; not united with us (as it is personally, with His Son), but dwelling in us, and making us partakers of the Divine nature. Sons of the living God must be living by Him and to Him, by His life, yea, through Himself living in them. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *Old Testament prediction*:—"Fossil sunlight," is what Herschel named anthracite coal. The vast stores of sunlight poured out upon the globe during the old geological ages were consolidated and packed away in the bowels of the earth because this busy twentieth century, with its myriads of railways and ocean steamers and manufactories, would need it. And have you thought how large a proportion of the Old Testament is prediction? And is it, therefore, of no use to the practical working Church of to-day? Nay. This vast profusion of prophetic light falling upon the minds of Isaiah and Ezekiel and Jeremiah and David, and the minor prophets, and treasured up in their inspired pages, may soon be needed. And they who are delving in these mines of eschatology, instead of being engaged in an aimless and profitless toil, may be providing the Church with the needed warmth for that predicted time when "iniquity shall abound, and the love of many wax cold." (*A. J. Gordon, D.D.*)

Ver. 11. *Great shall be the day of Jezreel.*—*The day of Jezreel*:—Jezreel signifies "the arm of the Lord." And it intimates that when He arises to bless the world, the spiritual seed of Messiah shall be numberless. The text may be taken as descriptive of the future triumphs of the Gospel. I. *THE DAY OF JEZREEL SHALL BE GREAT IN THE MULTITUDES OF CONVERTS TO THE FAITH OF CHRIST.* Hitherto the flock of real believers has been a little flock. The "whole world lieth in wickedness." May we not affirm that one-half of the inhabitants of any city, town, or village possess not the semblance of religion? But painful as the contemplation of this picture is, our eyes look forward to happier days. There are seeds of a glorious harvest springing up. II. *GREAT IN THE UNANIMITY OF ITS SUBJECTS.* The two houses were long divided; but under Zerubbabel they were to return from Babylon, and together rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. Under the mediatorial dominion of Christ, there shall be one fold, one shepherd. Jews and Gentiles shall be united in crowning the Saviour Lord of all. The fair form of Christianity shall be clouded by no stormy contentions—disfigured by no angry disputes—defiled by no human inventions—dishonoured by no unscriptural elements. We may not assume that any one particular form of Divine service will become the only mode of public worship. All will worship in spirit and in truth. III. *GREAT IN THE HOLINESS OF ITS FRIENDS.* There is a threefold departure from the world. The first is by death. This we may call involuntary. The second is by superstition. This we may call voluntary. It is "will-worship." The third is the one which grace effects. It is a commendable renunciation of the world. To live in it, while we forsake its spirit. IV. *GREAT IN THE GLORY OF ITS TRIUMPHS.* 1. In the victories it shall achieve. All false religion shall perish. Idolatry shall be destroyed. 2. Great in the zeal of its subjects. It will no longer be a day of small things. All shall be ready with their offerings, and none shall appear before the Lord empty. 3. The day of Jezreel shall be great for the consummation of the work and glory of the Redeemer. He then will "see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied." (*Anon.*) *Mercy in view of the day of Jezreel*:—Because there will be such a dreadful day of Jezreel, therefore God will make it up by this restitution. Or it may be, albeit there hath been such a great day of Jezreel, yet this mercy shall also come to pass. It teaches—1. In a time of love, the Lord can and will turn His people's hardest lots into mercies. 2. Days of the Lord's manifesting mercy towards His people are great days, and worth the marking, as affording mercies above any mercies besides. 3. As all the times wherein God is kind to His people are remarkable times, so in particular, a time of love after sad calamities, His bringing forth the fruits of their afflictions, and of His love after a long interruption, will make a refreshful time. (*George Hutcheson.*)

CHAPTER II.

VER. 3. Lest I strip her naked.—*Eastern divorce custom.*—It was the custom among the Jews when any married that what dowry they brought their husbands was written down in a table; and if afterwards the husband should divorce his wife, except there could be proved some gross and vile thing against the woman, she was to go away with her table, with her dowry; she must not go away empty, or naked. But if there could be proved some notorious villainy which she had committed, then she was sent away naked, without her tables, her dowry. Thus God threatens this people. "She is not My wife." She shall be sent away without any tables, naked and wholly destitute. Observe—1. The beginnings of great excellences are sometimes very low and mean. "Set her as in the day that she was born." 2. God's mercy is a people's beauty and glory. When we have any excellency, any beauty upon us, it is God's mercy that is all our beauty. 3. Though sinners deserve great evils, to be stripped of all comforts, yet God, in patience and clemency continues them a long time. 4. The mercies that God bestows upon a nation, are but common favours, not spiritual graces, they are such ornaments as a people may be stripped of. The great mercies a people have, they may wholly lose. 5. Continuance in sin, and especially the sin of spiritual whoredom, is that which will strip a nation from all their excellences, from all their ornaments and beauty. 6. It is time for a people to plead, when there is danger of desolation. 7. Those who will not be convinced by the Word, God has other means to convince them besides the Word. If pleading and convincing arguments will not do it, well then, stripping naked shall do it. 8. Whatever are the means of stripping a nation, it is really God that does it. 9. It is a grievous judgment for one that is advanced from a low to a high degree to be brought down again. 10. When God has delivered a people out of misery, and bestowed upon them great mercies, it is their duty often to think of the poor condition in which they were, and to use all the means they can that they may not be brought thither again. God loves this, that we should remember and seriously take to heart what once we were. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *Spiritual chastity.*—It is not enough that God should choose any people for Himself, except the people themselves persevere in the obedience of faith; for this is the spiritual chastity which the Lord requires from all His people. But when is a wife, whom God hath bound to Himself by a sacred marriage, said to become wanton? When she falls away from pure and sound faith. Then it follows that the marriage between God and men so long endures as they who have been adopted continue in pure faith. Apostasy in a manner frees God from us, so that He may justly repudiate us. (*John Calvin.*)

Ver. 4. I will not have mercy.—*Threatening and pleading* (compare ver. 2):—"Let her put away her whoredoms," &c. What should we learn hereby, but that it hangs upon our own will whether God suspend the judgment or no? For we ought not to impute our own evil to God, or impiously think that fate rules us. In other words, this or that evil comes, not because God foreknew or foreordained it, but because this evil was to be, or would be, done, therefore God both foreknew it, and prefixed His sentence upon it. Why then does God predetermine an irrevocable sentence? Because He foresaw incorrigible malice. Why, again, after pronouncing sentence, doth God counsel amendment? That we may know, by experience, that they are incorrigible. Therefore He waits for them, although they will not return, and with much patience invites them to repentance. Moreover, individuals repented, although the nation was incorrigible. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *Incorrigible sinners.*—1. However the Lord may for a time spare sinners, and they be ready to sleep because of this; yet at last when their cup is full, and they have proven themselves incorrigible, judgment will certainly come. 2. However a carnal church may be ready to swell with conceit of her own enjoyments and excellences, yet the Lord needs no more to make her miserable, but take away what He hath given her, and leave her as He found her. Sin will prove a wasting plague to souls. (*George Hutcheson.*)

Ver. 5. For she said, I will go after my lovers.—*The sin of Israel.*—The sin of Israel was not simple whoredom, which may be done in the dark, but avowed, effronted idolatry. Whence learn—1. Such is the stupidity of

grossest sinners, that they neither see the ill nor danger of their way, unless it be much and frequently inculcated. 2. A visible church declining, will readily turn impudent in sin. The more corruption hath been hemmed in by the external bonds of order, it swells the more over all banks and bounds; and God justly giveth such up to be filled with their own devices. 3. It is a great aggravation of the sin of idolatry, that idols do become lovers, and do bewitch and draw the heart from God. 4. As it is a great sin to depart from God and His true worship, so especially it is a shameful way of departing from Him, when men's ends are so low and base, that they will follow any way of religion for interest and advantage, and account the thriving way to be the best way. 5. It is also a great evidence of impudence, when men do not sin through infirmity or temptation, but deliberately, and do wilfully follow their resolutions, whatever may be said to the contrary. For, herein also she did shamefully, in that she said, "I will go after my lovers." She avowed it, and was obstinate in it against all warnings. (*George Hutcheson.*)

Vers. 6, 7. **Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns.**—*Divine restraints* :—God puts forth restraints on the sinner here. I. THESE RESTRAINTS ARE MANIFOLD. "I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall." The first metaphor is taken from a husbandman who to prevent the cattle from breaking away plants a prickly hedge. The other is taken from architecture. If the thorns are insufficient, high and massive walls must be built. 1. The restraint of affliction. 2. The restraint of public sentiment. The most daring cower before the public voice. 3. The restraint of conscience. A Divine officer holding the sinner in. II. THESE RESTRAINTS ARE NECESSARY. 1. For the sinner himself. Were it not for these he would go galloping to perdition. 2. For the world. What would become of the world if the wicked were not reined in? 3. For the Church. Had wicked men their full fling, how long would the Church last? Thank God for thorny hedges and massive walls, for all the restraints He puts on sinful men. (*Homilist.*) *Thorns and walls* :—A way may be found through a hedge of thorns, although with pain and suffering; through a stone wall even a strong man cannot burst a way. Thorns may mean the pains to the flesh with which God visits sinful pleasures, so that the soul, if it would break through to them, is held back and torn; the wall may mean, that all such sinful joys shall be cut off altogether, as by bereavement, poverty, sickness, failure of plans, &c. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *Blessings from apparent evils* :—The idea of disease being a messenger, or under orders from God, has long been a familiar one. Ancient history tells of a merchant who lost his all in a storm at sea, in which his vessels laden with merchandise foundered. The merchant went to Athens to study philosophy, having no capital to resume business. He was so happy in his studies that he was thankful for his losses. "If God had not taken away my fortune," he said, "I had not gained that which is far better." *The benefit of difficulty* :—A few days since there came to me a man whom I had known many years before as a person of good character, and who had made and saved money in business. He had been led to invest his savings in a partnership which had every guarantee of respectability and trustworthiness, but which within a few weeks became bankrupt, and left him not merely without a penny, but responsible for heavy debts. This happened some two years since; and for some time it was a question whether he and his large family must not go to the workhouse. In order to feed and clothe them he had to take to manual labour by day and by night at a very small remuneration; and since then things have somewhat bettered with him, though he is still a very poor man, instead of being, as he was, in very easy circumstances. But he said to me: "I would not for the world, sir, have it otherwise. My troubles have been my greatest blessing in my whole life." And then he reminded me how he had had a religious education, and he told me how he had forgotten God in his years of prosperity, and how he had been driven back upon God as his hope and refuge, and had found in Him more, much more, than he had lost in earthly things. His religious duties, prayer, the Bible, the Holy Communion, all had been forgotten, all had again been resumed, and with a sense of the truest support and strength. (*Canon Liddon.*) *Thankful for a thorn* :—Dr. George Matheson, of Scotland, is totally blind. He is one of the most learned and gifted men, and, above all, a cheerful and happy-hearted Christian. The following touching words from his pen ought to strengthen the Christian patience of afflicted ones: "My God, I have never thanked Thee for

my thorn. I have thanked Thee a thousand times for my roses, but not once for my thorn. I have been looking forward to a world where I shall get compensation for my cross, but I have never thought of my cross as itself a present glory. Thou Divine Love, whose human path has been perfected through sufferings, teach me the glory of my cross; teach me the value of my thorn. Show me that I have climbed to Thee by the path of pain. Show me that my tears have made my rainbow. Reveal to me that my strength was the product of the hour when I wrestled until the break of day. Then shall I know that my thorn was blessed by Thee; then shall I know that my cross was a gift from Thee. I shall raise a monument to the hour of my sorrow, and the words which I shall write upon it will be these: 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted.'"

She shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them.—*The warning lesson of Israel's apostasy*:—Hosea, who lived in a corrupt age of the Israelitish Church, was commissioned to show forth, with great faithfulness and plainness of speech, the gross departures of that people from the laws and service of God, and at the same time to exhibit the mingled actings of judgment and mercy wherewith God would visit His people. **I. THE SIN OF ISRAEL.** Their sin was departing from the Lord, and going after forbidden sources of dependence, and forbidden objects of desire. We need not a more striking proof of the depravity of man's heart universally, than we find in this ungrateful conduct of Israel. The manner in which their sin is set forth is peculiarly striking. They are represented in the character of an unfaithful wife toward the most tender and affectionate husband. There is scarcely anything affects a well-regulated mind more painfully than an instance of unfaithfulness on the part of a beloved wife towards an affectionate husband. It excites in our minds mingled emotions of pity, sorrow, and indignation. How deeply should we feel the dishonour done to God by the unfaithfulness of Israel, and how humbling a lesson should we learn of the depraved nature of our own hearts! The sin of Israel was summed up in this: departing from the God of love—setting at nought the love of God. This is our sin, nationally and individually. We have our national idols; we have our personal idols. The condition of Israel further represents the case of those who have had some experience of the love of God, yet forsake the guide of their youth, and become entangled with the world. **II. THE CHASTISEMENT OF ISRAEL.** God's forbearance and long-suffering with His people was very great. He was continually provoked to anger by their evil doings, but nevertheless He bare long with them. But the time came when it was necessary to throw obstacles in the way of their idolatry, and so hinder the accomplishment of their desires after worldly enjoyments, that they should be like persons hedged in with thorns and briars. This time came with the Captivity. The instruction of this fact belongs to us specially as a nation whom God has signally blessed with the pure light of Gospel truth. It is not, however, to be limited to God's chastisement of nations. It applies to those amongst us who have been personally convinced of sin, and of our need of such a Saviour as Jesus. God's rule of dealing with us is the same as with nations. God will make us feel the bitterness of sin. If ever you are saved, it shall be by first bringing you through the deep waters of soul affliction for sin. You must see yourself hedged in by the greatness and the number of your sins. It is a merciful chastisement which makes us feel the utter vanity of things of time and sense. **III. THE BLESSED CONSEQUENCES OF THE CHASTISEMENT.** As regards us individually, God's dealings with Israel find a perfect parallel. All the chastisements for sin issue in nearness to God, and peaceful communion with God, and holy confidence in His love. (*James Cooper, M.A.*) *Worldly pleasure, a vain pursuit*:—What has been the experience of every man, of every woman, that has tried this world for a portion? Queen Elizabeth, amidst the surroundings of pomp, is unhappy because the painter sketches too minutely the wrinkles on her face, and she indignantly cries out, "You must strike off my likeness without any shadows!" Hogarth, at the very height of his artistic triumph, is stung almost to death with chagrin because the painting he had dedicated to the king does not seem to be acceptable; for George II. cries out, "Who is this Hogarth? Take this trumpery out of my presence!" Brinsley Sheridan, of thrilling eloquence, had for his last words, "I am absolutely undone!" Stephen Girard, the wealthiest man in his day, or, at any rate, only second in wealth, says, "I live the life of a galley-slave; when I arise in the morning my one effort is to work so hard that I can sleep when it gets to be night." Charles Lamb, applauded of all the world, in the very midst

of his literary triumph, says, "Do you remember, Bridget, when we used to laugh from the shilling gallery at the play? There are now no good plays to laugh at from the boxes." But why go so far as that? I need go no farther than your street, and possibly your own house, to find an illustration. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) Then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now.—*The design of affliction*:—Since we derive our knowledge through the medium of the senses, only by the aid of figurative language can spiritual truths forcibly lay hold of the mind. Nothing is more common in the prophecies than to express the relation between God and the Jews of old by the alliance of marriage. He was considered as their husband; hence they were laid under peculiar obligations to Him; and hence their sins had the character of violating the marriage-contract. Because of their unfaithfulness, calamities befell them. But while these were the effects of sin, they were also the means of bringing them to a proper state of mind. They are therefore considered eventually as mercies. The hedge here spoken of is the hedge of affliction, composed of some of those thorns and briars which sin has so plentifully produced in this wilderness world. The metaphor is taken from the husbandman, who, to keep his cattle in the pasture, and prevent their going astray, fences them in; and the sharper the hedge the better. Thus God resolves to make our roving difficult. If we will go astray, we must smart for it. If lighter afflictions fail of their end, God will employ heavier. They may be foolhardy enough to break through the thorns, and may go on though wounded and bleeding, but they shall not get "over the wall"—I have stones as well as brambles—I will present insuperable difficulties. What a variety of troubles God has to dispose of. The passage reminds us—I. OF OUR DEPRAVITY. It appears in our proneness to go astray. We transfer to the creature those regards which are due only to the Creator. We make earthly things our idols. These draw away our hearts from God. Let us not deceive ourselves, and judge of our declensions only by gross acts, but by the state of our minds. Where no vices have appeared in the life, there may have been many deviations from God in our thoughts and affections and pursuits. II. OF THE DIVINE GOODNESS AND CARE. He employs means, various means, to hinder and to reclaim us. Why all these expedients? Is it because He stands in need of us? Nay, but because we stand in need of Him; because He would not have us deceived, ensnared, destroyed. III. OF THE BENEFIT OF AFFLICTION. 1. Afflictions are designed to be trials. Let our earthly blessings be removed, and our reliance will quickly appear. If our dependence has been on them, we sink when they are removed. 2. Afflictions are excitements. They quicken to the exercise of grace, and to the performance of duty. When we become indifferent to communion with God, He will send some fiery trial to bring us to our knees. 3. Afflictions are spiritual preventions,—they are "to keep man from his purpose." Disappointments in favourite wishes are trying, and we are not always wise enough to recollect—that disappointments in time are often the means of preventing disappointments in eternity. It is a most singular mercy for God to render the pursuit of sin difficult. If we are going astray—is it not better to have the road filled with thorns than strewed with flowers? There are some who are now rejoicing because their plans succeed, and everything favours their wishes, who, if they knew all, would see awful reason to weep and mourn. And there are others, who, if they knew all, would no longer be sorrowful because they cannot advance, but are checked in every path they tread. They would see that they are chastened of the Lord, that they may not be condemned with the world. How awful is it when afflictions are useless, and even medicine is administered in vain! IV. OF THE DIFFERENCE THERE IS BETWEEN OUR ADHERING TO GOD AND OUR FORSAKING HIM. Behold the declining Christian, seduced by the world. He would try deviating ways for himself. And God says, "Let him try,"—"that he may know My service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries." By and by he begins to bethink himself, and compare the present with the past, and is miserable. Let those who have been led astray, and have fallen by their iniquity, consider the melancholy change that has taken place in their experience, and remember two things—1. It cannot be better with them than it is until they return to God. 2. They should, in returning, guard against that despondency which would tell you that it will be in vain. Have any of you been restored? Turn not again to folly. Live near to God; your welfare depends upon it. (*William Jay.*) *The first husband*:—I. A RESOLUTION FORMED. 1. The

marriage union. In such an union we look for the consent of the parties; reciprocal affection, harmony of interest, and oneness of spirit. 2. A violation of this union acknowledged. "I will go and return" is an indirect confession of unfaithfulness, due to a culpable inattention to Divine instruction, to a forgetfulness of the Divine law. It is evinced by forming attachments to other objects, and by a violation of their covenant with God. 3. A purpose to renew this union avowed. This purpose was rationally founded, was absolutely expressed, practically to be exemplified. II. A REASON EXPRESSED UPON WHICH THIS RESOLUTION IS FOUNDED. Self-love is a powerful principle; it is the main-spring of human actions. The doctrine of the text is, that fidelity to God is relatively better than apostasy from Him; better in itself, and better for me. 1. As it is more honourable. 2. As it is more comfortable. 3. As it is more safe. Infer from this subject—1. How much saints should prize their privileges; how thankful they should be for them, and how careful not to forfeit them by stretching out their hands to a strange god. 2. The folly of apostates, and the reasons they have for returning to their first husband. (*G. Brooks.*) *Returning to God*.—1. In times of affliction the only rest of the soul is to return to God. 2. So long as men can have anything in their sinful way to satisfy themselves with, they will not return to God. 3. Returning to God, if it be in truth, though it be after we have sought out all other helps, yet God is willing to accept. 4. A heart effectually wrought upon by God, is a resolute heart to return to God. 5. Those who have ever found the sweetness of Christ in their hearts, though they should be backsliders, have something remaining that will at length draw them to Him. 6. There must be a sight and an acknowledgment of our shameful folly, or else there can be no true returning to God. 7. Though acknowledgment must go before, returning must follow. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) **For then was it better with me than now.**—*The way of simple faith best*.—There is a story told of Robert Robinson, the hymn-writer, which forcibly illustrates Browning's words, "Stand back the man I am behind the man I used to be." In his early ministry, Robinson, the Baptist minister at Cambridge, wrote that beautiful and well-known hymn—"Come, Thou Fount of every blessing." In the latter part of his life, Robinson's views of evangelical truth had changed, and he seemed to have lost a good deal of his spiritual fervour. Riding one day on a stage-coach, a lady, who was quite a stranger to him, entered into conversation. The subject of hymns came up, and she asked, little knowing that he was the author, what he thought of the hymn, "Come, Thou Fount of every blessing." But he waived the subject, and turned her attention to some other topic; but, after a short period, she contrived to return to it, and described the benefits she had often derived from the hymn, and her strong admiration of its sentiments. At length, Robinson, entirely overcome by the power of his feelings, burst into tears, and said, "Madam, I am the poor, unhappy man who composed that hymn many years ago; and I would give a thousand worlds, if I had them, to enjoy the feelings I then had." (*A. Hampden Lee.*)

Vers. 8, 9. **For she did not know.**—*Agnosticism*.—There is a theory which is known to-day by the difficult name Agnosticism. A great deal of worthless thinking may be hidden under that dark term. The meaning is supposed to be "not-know-ism." Men do not now say, "There is no God"; they say, "If there is a God, we do not know Him." If this were an intellectual doctrine only, there might appear to be about it somewhat of the charm of modesty. But it is more. What great case does the intellect wholly cover? Is man all intellect? Agnosticism cannot begin and end where it likes. God cannot be expelled from the intellect without the moral quality of the whole nature going down; without the heart also being as agnostic as the mind. Agnosticism is a larger question than any that can be limited to the mere dry intellect. And agnosticism of this kind means not only deprivation of moral sensibility, as expressed in the action of gratitude, but it makes responsibility at once frivolous and impossible. Responsible to whom? Responsibility never reaches its true realisation until it touches the point of reverence—simple, earnest, continual dependence upon God. When a man denies God he cannot do his duty to his fellow-men. The man that does not know God does not know himself. No man can love God without loving God's image as seen in human kind. Theology—not formal and scientific, but spiritual and inspired—is the fount and origin of beneficence and exalted morality. What is God's reply to agnosticism? See

verso 9. "Therefore will I return, and take away My corn," &c. This is rational, just, and simple. Where God is not known, why should He continue His bounty? God never gives bread by itself. When God gives bread to the body He does not want to keep our bones together; He only feeds the body that He may get at the soul. God has therefore determined that if men do not know Him, or ask concerning Him, or recognise the purpose of His ministry, He will come down and claim His corn and wine and wool and flax. This is just. God must keep some control over things. It is good of Him now and then to send a bad harvest. Men begin to ask questions, and to wonder. And what is the issue of this agnosticism? See verses 11, 12. This is not vengeance, this is reason; this is not arbitrary punishment, this is a natural consequence and necessity. Divine gifts are abused, are misunderstood, are in some sense resented; what if Divine patience should be outworn, or if only through a temporary suspension of his fortunes man can be brought to consideration? Providence is not an arbitrary beneficence, but a critical and discriminating ministry. And there comes a time when God will say to the cloud, Rain no more on that unthankful life; and to the sun, No longer shine on ingratitude so base and desperate. This is God's method; it is not mysterious; it is simple, frank, direct, intelligible, and just. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*)

The blindness of ingratitude:—The superstitious sin twice, or in two ways. 1. They ascribe to their idols what rightly belongs to God alone. 2. They deprive God Himself of His own honour, for they understand not that He is the only giver of all things. Hence the prophet now complains of this ingratitude. And this was an inexcusable stupidity in the Israelites, since they had been abundantly instructed that the abundance of all good things, and everything that supports man, flow from God's bounty. (*John Calvin.*)

That I gave her corn, and wine, and oil.—**The misimprovement of providential favours:**—The particular offences here charged, are those of a wilful blindness with regard to the source of their temporal blessings, and a guilty perversion of them to sinful and idolatrous uses. They ascribed them to the agency of their heathen deities, to whom they were also in the habit of consecrating them in sacrifice. But the misimprovement of providential favours is very offensive to God. I. WHEN ARE MEN PROPERLY GUILTY OF THIS CONDUCT? 1. When they fail to recognise God as the sole bestower of them. This was the sin of Israel. Absolute ignorance of the source whence temporal blessings flow is not affirmed. It was that God's agency was ignored. Israel rested in second causes. Men talk of their good fortune, or their luck, or their well-to-do ancestors, but God is not in all their thoughts. 2. When they withhold the due acknowledgment of them. Not to know a thing, in Scripture language, often means not to act in a manner corresponding with our knowledge. The people did not render to God according to that which they had received. For all His gifts God expects a proper return, the return of thanksgiving and service. But how universally is this withheld. 3. When they pervert them to evil and illegitimate uses. "They prepared for Baal." The people took their blessings from God, and devoted them to the service of an idol. This was translating indifference into insult and defiance. And the guilt is as common now as in the olden time. II. WHAT ARE THE FEATURES IN IT THAT EVINCE ITS PECULIAR SINFULNESS? 1. It involves the sin of inconsideration. It argues a mind wrapped up in utter heedlessness of all that is most adapted to awaken and engage its powers. 2. It is characterised by the basest ingratitude. This is a positive element. Ingratitude implies an actual check put upon man's feelings—a sort of moral pressure brought to bear upon them, to prevent their proper exercise and expression. And man wills it. It is not simply the negation of thankfulness; it is the deliberate exercise of its contrary. And this is the sin of the many. 3. It is a species of practical atheism. It is animated by a spirit that militates against the very being of God. Or, if it stop short of this, it yet seeks to limit the extent of His rule, and to shut Him out of this earthly province of His dominions. Atheism is but the bud of dislike to God unfolded and outspread into the garish flower. III. WHAT IS THE PUNISHMENT TO WHICH THIS CONDUCT JUSTLY EXPOSES? The misimprovement, by neglect or perversion, of Divine favours incurs the danger of their resumption by their great Bestower. Blessings unimproved will not always be continued. There is a point beyond which even the patience and forbearance of the God that "delighteth in mercy" will not hold out. Neglect, insult, and defiance must end in condign punishment. Then let us be warned. Let us search into our ways. Let us acknowledge our transgressions, and put away our sins from us. So, in wrath

will He remember mercy, and avert the punishment that we have so righteously deserved. Timely humiliation, repentance, and prayer are never ineffectual. (C. M. Merry.) *God's hand to be acknowledged in His good gifts*:—This was God's charge against His ancient people, a very heavy charge. They were unmindful of their benefactor. The thanks which they owed to Him they paid to devils. This is human nature; it is what we still see continually. It is a great part of religion to see God's hand in everything, to trace every instance of protection to His providence, of deliverance to His care, every good gift to His love. The Bible refers everything either directly or indirectly to God. I. GOD IS CONSTANTLY REPRESENTED AS THE AUTHOR AND GIVER OF ALL GOOD THINGS (by Jer. v. 21-23). God is declared to be the author of all the fruitfulness and plenty which are so beautifully described in Psa. lxxv. Take St. Paul's words to the people at Lystra, or Moses' last charge to the Israelites (Deut. viii. 11-20). In these passages we have the rain, the harvest, the fruitfulness of the fields and the increase of the cattle, preservation in danger, support in want, power to get wealth, daily protection, the gift of children—all ascribed to God. II. EXAMPLES OF GOOD MEN OF OLD, WHO REFERRED EVERY BLESSING THEY ENJOYED TO GOD. Abraham's servant, Jacob, Psalmists, &c. These men had an abiding sense of God's interference in all their concerns. They looked beyond second causes, and fixed their thoughts at once upon the great First Cause. One feels how different from theirs is the way of speaking common among ourselves. We cannot, indeed, prudently use the name of God as freely as they did. But we may err with undue reticence. If God's name is seldom in our mouths, there is reason to fear it is seldom in our hearts. It were well that God's name were more frequently introduced, so it were done with reverence, when we speak of the good gifts which we enjoy. The fixed habit of ascribing all our blessings to God would—1. Be the surest way to secure the continuance of God's mercies, and to draw down more. 2. It would keep our faith in exercise. It would enable us to realise God's presence as our friend and benefactor. It would bring us into sensible communion with God daily. It would draw out our love to Christ. Seeing God in all things helps to make the sunshine of life. To be forward in recognising God's hand, and blessing Him for His good gifts, is an excellent help to diligence and zeal in God's service. It only remains that we each press home upon ourselves this blessed duty; and especially that we make sure of our interest in the greatest of all God's gifts, the gift of His dear Son. (C. A. Hewitney, B.D.) *Misusing gifts*:—1. How graciously their plenty was given to them. God is a bountiful benefactor. 2. How basely was their plenty abused by them. (1) They robbed God of the honour of them. (2) They served and honoured His enemies with them. 3. How justly should their plenty be taken from them. Those that abuse the mercies God gives them to His dishonour cannot expect to enjoy them long. (Matthew Henry.) *All is of God*:—On the forefront of the Royal Exchange in London are inscribed the words, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." There is also stamped on all our coins of the realm the same acknowledgment, *Dei gratia*; it is all of God's grace and goodness. *God acknowledged*:—Jenny Lind always kept the 7th of March most religiously. She asked her friends—and she was a Christian—always to pray for her on the 7th of March. She kept it as a trysting-day with God. What was the reason? It was that on the 7th of March she rose from her bed unaware of the God-given gift that was in her. By the evening she had realised it; she had got the baptism of her life—she realised that God had put into her a gift of song, the notes of which seemed to have been stolen from an angel in the heavenly choir; and she went to her bed conscious that God had called her to the sacred service of song. (T. De Witt Talmage.) *Everything from God*:—The scribe is more properly said to write than the pen; and he that maketh and keepeth the clock is more properly said to make it go and strike, than the wheels and pegs that hang upon it; and every workman to effect his work, rather than the tools which he useth as his instruments. So the Lord, who is the chief agent and mover in all actions, may more fitly and properly be said to effect and bring to pass all things which are done in the earth, than any inferior or subordinate causes, as meat to nourish us, clothes to keep us warm, the sun to lighten us, friends to provide for us, &c., seeing they are all but His tools and instruments, but as they are ruled and guided by the power and providence of so heavenly a workman. (H. G. Salter.) *God overlooked*:—In Madeira there is a grove of camelia trees. A gentleman went to see the flowers, and returned much disappointed, as not one

was visible. He made a second visit, and was delighted when, looking up, as he had been told to do, he saw a canopy of large white and scarlet flowers, forty feet overhead. In times of difficulty we are apt to look round on earthly agencies for aid, forgetting to look up to God, who in spite of all His glory, is willing to be our helper. (*J. Marrat.*) *The worship of fortune*.—Archbishop Trench says, How prone are we all to ascribe to chance or fortune those gifts and blessings which indeed come directly from God—to build altars to Fortune rather than to Him who is the author of every good thing which we have gotten. And this faith of men, that their blessings, even their highest, come to them by a blind chance, they have incorporated in a word; for “happy” and “happiness” are connected with “hap,” which is chance; how unworthy, then, to express any true felicity, whose very essence is that it excludes hap or chance, that the world neither gave nor can take it away. Against a similar misuse of “fortunate,” “unfortunate,” Wordsworth very nobly protests, when, of one who, having lost everything else, had yet kept the truth, he exclaims—

“Call not the royal Swede unfortunate,
Who never did to Fortune bend the knee.”

Success rightly ascribed.—“In all my career,” General Gordon once wrote, “I can lay no claim to cleverness, discretion, or wisdom. My success has been due to a series of (called by the world) flukes. When one knows the little one does of oneself, and any one praises you, I, at any rate, have a rising in the gorge which is a suppressed, ‘You lie!’ Who is he, or who is any man, that he should be praised? I do nothing. Do not flatter yourself that you are wanted—that God could not work without you; it is an honour if He employs you. No one is indispensable, either in this world’s affairs or in spiritual works.” “Do not send me your paper with anything written about me,” he said on parting. “I do not want to see it, or to have anything to do with it. These things are not in my hands, and mind, do not forget—no guilt!”

God the source of blessings.—At the close of the cotton famine in Lancashire the mills in one village had been stopped for months, and the first waggon load of cotton which arrived before they recommenced, seemed to the people like the olive-branch, “newly plucked off,” which told of the abating waters of the deluge. The waggon was met by the women, who hysterically laughed and cried, and hugged the cotton bales as if they were dear old friends, and then ended by singing that grand old hymn—a great favourite with Lancashire people—“Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.”

Which they prepared for Baal.—*Political and social ungodliness*.—The sin of the nation, the misery which Hosea here laments, was this—the people worshipped their prosperity, unmindful of the God who gave it. Baal-worship was substantially a worship of the forces of nature. Ethically, Baal-worship was the enthronement of force; it was the worship of possession. The Jewish idea in calling Jehovah “Lord” was that of righteous authority. The character of God was His supreme claim to government. Baal, as “Lord,” was simply the mysterious unknown proprietor of powers of nature: a mighty possessor, to be honoured as one who could give, propitiated as one who could withhold, or trouble and afflict. Ungodliness in Christian nations corresponds to idolatry among the Jews; the refusal to recognise any higher law than the right of possession, to acknowledge any other rule of conduct than what is prescribed by the necessity of holding and increasing what one has. Baal-worship did not displace the worship of Jehovah, the two existed side by side. Jehovah for the inspiration of their loftiest sentiment; Baal for the meaner concerns of corn and wine and oil. A similar confusion of godliness and ungodliness is found in many a man, perhaps in the most immediately influential majority of the English people to-day. The Gospel has done too much for us to be lightly abandoned. We cannot afford to dispense with the sanctity, the inspiration, the ennobling thoughts and feelings which Christianity brings into individual and family and Church life. But then, how many would confine the Gospel to individual and family and Church life? For politics and society the New Testament morality is too far-fetched, too fine-drawn. This is what we mean by political and social ungodliness. Many a man is personally godly, politically ungodly. This is a fatal mistake. No amount of personal piety will buy God over to give us national and social prosperity while we contemn the principles of righteousness, and regard for men, which the Bible reveals. There is one

God, one morality, one rule; the same for nations as for individuals; the same for our social relations with the world as for our Christian relations within the Church. Political ungodliness has to be rebuked by Christian people. We are called on to be watchful, even jealous, in our criticism of public men and measures. Your judgment on political matters will affect the integrity of your personal character, the clearness of your personal faith. Indifference to righteousness in any sphere will sap the foundation of your piety, and blight your spiritual life. Deal with social ungodliness in relation to the conduct of commercial life. We do not find any such toleration of immorality as is common in political life. The conscience of the community is quick to assert itself; the supremacy of righteousness is vindicated, but we do not find godliness absolute and supreme. Deal with the morality of strikes; the utter bewilderment in which the commercial complications of the day have found men. How is social life presented to us in the Gospel? It says, "We are members one of another." Every one of us lives in a community, for the benefit of which he has been called into being, and all social advantages are conferred on him for the sake of the community. We are here in the world to be trained into spiritual manhood, and all material advantages are conferred on us for the sake of the character they help to form and develop. Consider how commercial activity and social life tend to form spiritual character. Social godliness looks for the fulfilment of God's will in all the action of society. Social godliness and ungodliness are measured if we consider how far we habitually exercise this spirit. (*A. Mackennal, D.D.*)

Ver. 9. Therefore will I return.—*Changes in God's ways with us*:—"Therefore will I return," that is, I will change the way of My administrations toward them; I will go out of My way of mercy, and turn into My way of judgment; I will go back again. "I will take away My corn in the time thereof." That is in the very time of harvest and vintage. "And will recover My wool." I will snatch it away; I will spoil you of it. I will recover it out of the hands of usurpers. Or those creatures, corn, wine, wool, are now in bondage to you, and I will recover them out of your hands. Observe—1. Though God gives mercy out of free grace without cause in ourselves, yet He takes not away mercy without cause. 2. Sin causes God to change the way of His administrations towards His people. 3. Abuse of mercy causes the removing of mercy. 4. God keeps the propriety of all that we have. 5. The taking away the good things which we enjoy is a means of making us return to God. 6. There is an uncertainty in all things in the world; though they promise fair, yet they are ready to fail us when they promise most. 7. God often shows His displeasure to those who provoke Him, when they are at the greatest height of prosperity. 8. When men abuse mercies, they forfeit their right in those mercies. 9. All the time the creature serves wicked men, it is in bondage, and God looks upon it with pity. 10. God gives His blessings to us, not for luxury, but for necessity. 11. When abundance is abused, it is just with God that we should want necessities. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) **And take away My corn.**—*Blessings unimproved resumed by their owner*:—Two subjects for reflection; the goodness of God, and the wickedness of man. The Jews were fair specimens of human nature. I. **THE SOURCE OF OUR MERCIES.** "I gave her." Here we do not refer to those blessings which we call spiritual. We speak of temporal good things. "He giveth us richly all things to enjoy." Never suffer instruments to keep your thoughts from God. 1. Unconscious instrumentality. This takes in what we call nature. 2. Voluntary instrumentality. Our fellow-creatures may do us good in a thousand ways. They act knowingly and freely in relieving us, and display the noblest principles of their nature. But here God has higher claims; for who placed these friends and benefactors in our way? 3. Personal instrumentality. Few of the good things of life are obtained without some exertions of our own. Indeed, if they were, they would not be half so sweet. But from whom have we derived our natural talents? Whose providence fixed us in a situation favourable to our efforts? II. **OUR GUILT IN THE USE OF OUR MERCIES.** Here are two charges. 1. Ignorance. God does much more good in the world than is ever known. He has done us all countless acts of kindness of which we have never been aware. There are two kinds of knowledge, speculative and practical. The former is nothing without the latter; it is no better than ignorance. 2. Perversion. Instead of using God's gifts in the service and for the glory of God, we appropriate them to the use of idols. This is worse than the former, as indifference is exceeded

by insult. What would you feel more provoking than for a man to borrow of you, in order to publish a libel upon your character? Is not God perpetually thus affronted and dishonoured? **III. THE REMOVAL.** "Take away My corn," &c. 1. We see how precarious everything earthly is. 2. God withdraws our comforts as well as gives them. 3. God does not relinquish His propriety in any of His blessings when He bestows them. Still they are His. When He comes for them He comes but to resume. 4. He often removes our blessings and comforts when they seem most attractive and most necessary, when their loss is least expected, and we are rejoicing to see them flourish. 5. God does not deprive us of our enjoyments without a cause. It is our non-improvement, it is our abuse of our mercies that endangers them. 6. His conduct, in the removal of our joys, looks forward as well as backward. He punishes, not for our destruction but advantage, and the very consequences of sin are made to cure. While this subject leads us to magnify the Lord, it should afford instruction and encouragement to those who are afflicted. No affliction will ever do us good unless it excite in us both fear and hope. The day of trouble is a period peculiarly eventful and important. Salvation or destruction may hinge upon it. (*William Jay.*) **Forfeited blessings.**—The goodness of God and the ingratitude of man meet us everywhere, and in our own hearts are as prominent as in the world. **I. GOD'S MERCIES.** All our blessings come direct from God. Whatever may be the instrument, the gift is of God. 1. There is nature. 2. There is human instrumentality. 3. There is personal exertion. "It is the Lord thy God giveth thee power to get wealth." **II. MAN'S ABUSE OF GOD'S MERCIES.** Here are two charges. 1. Ignorance. 2. Perversion. **III. THE JUST AND INEVITABLE RESULT.** 1. God reminds us that our mercies are only lent. 2. God only allots them to us on the condition of using them rightly. (*Homilist.*) **God's gifts taken away.**—God shews us that His gifts come from Him, either by giving them when we almost despair of them, or taking them away, when they are all but ours. It can seem no chance when He so doeth. The chastisement is severer also, when the good things, long looked for, are at the last taken out of our very hands, and that, when there is no remedy. "Recover My wool." God recovers and, as it were, delivers the works of His hands from serving the ungodly. While He leaves His creatures in the possession of the wicked, they are holden, as it were, in captivity, being kept back from their proper uses, and made the hand-maidens and instruments and tempters to sin. It is against the order of nature to use God's gifts to any other end short of God's glory, much more, to turn God's gifts against Himself, and make them serve to pride, or luxury, or sensual sin. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) **Necessaries of life withheld.**—So full and continual are our mercies that we are prone to forget the Giver in the enjoyment of the gift, until a voice of sternness calls us home. I heard recently of a young student at college, who became so interested in sports and other things that he neglected to write to his parents. The mother became exceedingly anxious and wanted the father to go to the city and learn the cause. But the father found a simpler method. The supply of money was withheld, and very soon a letter came. Even so, God sometimes withholds from us the very necessities of life until we learn that while He is willing to supply our needs, He earnestly desires our fellowship. As in the case of the prodigal, He permits a mighty famine in the land where we are feeding swine, in order to bring us to the home table, where His bounty is spread. (*Good Tidings.*) **God's discipline.**—Trees, if the roots run too deep into the earth, must be cut shorter; if the branches spread too far, they must be lopped; and if canker or caterpillar once infest, and cleave to them, then they must be blazed and smoked. Thus, the children of God, when they be too much rooted by their affections in the things of this world, and with great and large boughs of their ability, wrong and impoverish their poor neighbour, or let their money like the canker eat into their souls—God will give them many a cutting, lopping, and fumigating; and as they cannot but naturally do the one, so God, intending to heal them spiritually, will do the other; His care will be still for them, notwithstanding their several failings. (*J. Spencer.*)

Vers. 10-12. None shall deliver her out of My hand.—*The Lord's sentence.*—**I. TAKING AWAY THINGS NECESSARY TO LIFE. Learn.**—1. However the Lord communicate of His bounty with the children of men, yet He still retains the dominion of all the creatures in His own hand, that He may dispose of them at His pleasure. 2. Men's abuse of prosperity, especially to uphold a false religion,

doth justly forefault their right thereunto before God, and doth provoke Him to take away abused mercies. 3. As God's former bounty will not secure prosperity to the abusers of it, so He will take it away when it promises fairest, as when it is come to the harvest. 4. As outward mercies are given for the supply of necessities, and not for fostering of luxury, so it is a special cause of God's stroke that men do so far miscarry, because of that, without which they would be so vile. These things were given to cover her nakedness, and she would be vile without them. Yet she abused them, and therefore God will take them away. II. MAKING HER VILENESS APPEAR TO HER LOVERS. Learn—1. How right soever sinners may appear to themselves or others in their prosperity, yet God will, by judgments, make it appear how lewd and vile their way hath been. 2. God is so strong a party as when He contends with sinners, all their confidences in idolatry, false worship, or confederates, will fail them, and not be able to help them. 3. Idolatry, and abuse of prosperity to uphold it, doth ripen a visible Church for very speedy destruction. III. CUTTING SHORT MIRTH AND WORSHIP. Learn—1. Sin and mirth will not last long together, but were there never so much of mirth, sin will cut it all short. 2. God will not be mocked with external performances of solemn worship to Him, when they join gross idolatry with them. IV. DESTRUCTION EVEN OF THE SOURCES OF BLESSING. Not only their fruits, but the trees they grew upon. Learn—1. Spiritual judgments and deprivation of ordinances will have but little weight with wicked men, unless some other rod be sent with them. 2. Such is the desperate stupidity and obstinacy of declining sinners, as no cutting off of present enjoyments will affect them, unless their future expectations be cut off likewise. 3. As God doth not cut off enjoyments from sinners, but when they do abuse them, so we should take heed of God's quarrel under calamities, and especially the abuse of prosperity, in not acknowledging God, but strengthening ourselves in an ill way, because of it. (*George Hutcheson.*) *God's punishments are just*:—Whenever God deals severely with men, He visits their sins, and inflicts a just punishment: For though men may consider themselves to be chastised by the Lord, they yet do not thoroughly search and examine themselves as they ought. Hence the prophet repeats what we have before met with, and that is, that this chastisement would be just. At the same time, he shows us as by the finger what chiefly displeased God in the Israelites, which was, that religion was corrupted by them: for there is nothing more necessary to be known, than that in order men may ever habituate themselves to worship God in a pure manner, this should be testified to them, that all superstitions are such an abomination to God that He cannot bear them. (*John Calvin.*)

Ver. 11. *I will also cause all her mirth to cease.*—*The conjunction of sin and mirth*:—Mirth is not happiness. It is but the mimicry of real joy. There is but little happiness in the world, but there is much mirth. I. THE CONJUNCTION OF SIN AND MIRTH IS COMMON. The voices of jollity and fun are heard everywhere through society. II. IT IS INCONGRUOUS. Gaiety and laughter in a sinner are most revolting when rightly regarded. III. IT IS TEMPORARY. 1. The separation is certain. An old writer says, "If you will not take away sin from your mirth, God will take away your mirth from your sin." 2. The separation will be solemn. Do not then confound mirth with happiness. Happiness will follow holiness for ever; mirth will only, like the *ignis fatuus*, flare about sin for a short time at most, and then go out. (*Homilist.*) *Mingled promise and threatening*:—The prophet seems in this verse to contradict himself, for he promised reconciliation, and now he speaks of a new repudiation. But the passage is very consistent, and there is in the words no contrariety. He has indeed promised that at a future time God would be propitious to the Israelites: but as they had not yet repented, it was needful to deal again more severely with them, that they might return to their God really and thoroughly subdued. So we see that, in Scripture, promises and threatenings are mingled together, and rightly too. It is necessary for men to be reproved not only once and again, but very often. (*John Calvin.*)

Vers. 12, 13. *She decked herself with her ornaments and her jewels.*—*The prosperity of the wicked*:—The wicked—I. AS PROSPERING IN THE WORLD. Vines and fig-trees stand for prosperity. Wicked men are allowed to prosper on this earth: they are often more successful in worldly enterprises than the righteous.

They live *for* the world and *to* the world, and they have their reward. II. AS ASCRIBING THEIR PROSPERITY TO WRONG CAUSES. Israel ascribes to its idols or lovers. The wicked ascribe to fortune, chance, their own industry, their own scheming. The true source is God. III. DEVOTING THEIR PROSPERITY TO WRONG OBJECTS. Israel is here accused of burning incense to Baalim, these *Dei minores*. Wicked men devote their wealth to their own selfish and superstitious ends. IV. AS DERIVED OF THEIR PROSPERITY BY THE GREAT GOD. The threatening here is, that God will not only destroy all their prosperity, but punish them for their idolatry. "The tinsel glare upon a sinner is too apt to offend the weak eyes of a saint." (*Homilist.*) **And forgot Me, saith the Lord.—Forgetting God:**—Such is the character of all engrossing passion, such is the course of sin, to which the soul gives way, in avarice, ambition, worldliness, sensual sin, godless science. The soul, at last, does not rebel against God, it forgets Him; it is taken up with other things, with itself, with the subjects of its thoughts, the objects of its affections, and it has no time for God. So God complains of Judah by Jeremiah, "Their fathers have forgotten My name for Baal." (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*)

Vers. 14, 15. **I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably to her.**—*Allure:*—The original word is used of one readily enticed, as a simple one, whether to good or ill. God uses, as it were, Satan's weapons against himself. As Satan had enticed the soul to sin, so would God, by holy enticements and persuasiveness, allure her to Himself. God, too, hath sweetness for the penitent soul far above all the sweetness of present joys, much more above the bitter sweetness of sin. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *God's presence in loneliness:*—From the first dawning of conversion to the hour of death, it is in solitude mostly that God speaks to the soul. Here God spoke by His prophet to a nation which, like ourselves, had, in its prosperity, multiplied its idols, made gold and silver into gods to worship, had been unfaithful to its God, and abused His gifts. Of such God says, "I will allure her." He vouchsafes to speak to us after the manner of men. He will give us, He saith, love for love. He speaks as we may best bear to hear, and is fittest for us. Blessed are those holy hours in which the soul retires from the world to be alone with God. God's voice, as Himself, is everywhere. Only the din of the world, or the tumult of our own hearts, deafens our inward ear to it. Chiefly in the inmost soul He speaks, because there He dwells. To be alone is to feel the presence of God, in love or in displeasure, as a friend or a stranger. Until the soul will open its whole self to God, it shrinks from inward and outward loneliness. We must be alone in the hour of death, let us learn to be alone with God now. It is only afar off that the wilderness looks a waste, and terrible and dry. Until, in silence, ye enter into that sacred loneliness, ye know not whither ye are going. In loneliness a man knows himself and his God. Enter thou with Him, and by His grace, thou wilt not come forth as thou goest in. Cherished sin alone deafens us to the voice of God. (*Ibid.*) *Christ allures to the wilderness:*—Apply these words to ourselves, as setting before us the way Almighty God will work upon our souls to bring us to repentance, or to a deeper knowledge of His ways. **I. HE WILL ALLURE THE SOUL AND BRING IT INTO THE WILDERNESS.** This implies that it is elsewhere,—it is in the world. What is meant by the wilderness? It is spoken of our hearts. God will make us, even while living in this world, with all its pleasures and vanities around us, as dead to all as if we were in a wilderness. "I spake unto thee in prosperity, and thou wouldest not hear." This is His lament. Therefore He will destroy all those things wherein we trust, that we may hear His voice and live. There is self-denial involved in following where the Spirit leads us. It allures onwards to the wilderness. Follow willingly. **II. IF GOD HAS THUS DEALT WITH YOU, IT IS THAT HE MAY SPEAK TO YOUR HEARTS.** In silence, in solitude, in the desolation of your hearts, He will come and build up their ruined breaches, and dwell therein Himself. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." God speaks to the heart; He allures it to Him; and when it has found no rest for the sole of its foot on the waters of this troubled world, bids it return to its true rest in His wounded side. (*R. A. Suckling, M.A.*) *God's free grace:*—Therefore, because she will not be restrained by the denunciations of wrath, God will try whether she will be wrought upon by the offers of mercy. The design is plainly to magnify free grace to those on whom God will have mercy purely for mercy's sake. (*Matthew Henry.*) *God's wise and tender love to His people:*—In the

Old Testament we see the struggle between the Divine love and the perverse human will. God will ever impose restraints and place barriers in the way of sin, and so would make sin difficult and painful. In addition to conscience, the inward monitor, there are outward checks placed by God to hinder men from the commission of sin. Toil is a restraint. It is a bit and bridle to the wayward and the vicious. The wave of prosperity often leaves behind it the rubbish and foam of licentiousness. Pain is also a restraint. There is pleasure in sin. It is not real, it is not enduring, but there it is, and the sinner is attracted by it. The forbidden tree is "pleasant to the eyes." The sinfulness of sin may be inferred from its bitter consequences. Pain is a moral word. It implies punishment. It is the penalty of sin, it is therefore a restraint. But God not only checks, He draws. I. **HE WINS BY HIS LOVE.** He "allures," persuades, wooes, attracts. God respects man's freedom. God Himself cannot compel us to trust and love Him. He has constituted us moral beings. God influences the motives, the desires, the judgments, the affections, operates on the secret power of the will. The only power that can win men from their sin is love. Love has the key that fits every lock in the different chambers of the soul. Love can overcome the enmity of our nature. It will not be slain by any other weapon. And thus God deals with us. II. **HE APPOINTS AND USES NECESSARY MEANS OF DISCIPLINE.** Having been "allured," drawn to God, we are then trained, disciplined. This wilderness state is a state of—1. Solitude. A man must get out of the crowd in order to think. Men living in a crowd become mere echoes. In solitude man discovers himself, and realises the presence of God, and these involve a burden of personal responsibility. 2. Trouble. Chastisement was, and still is, the necessary discipline for God's children. Why does God correct them? To make them feel that sin is terribly hateful. And He shews us the tendency of sin. 3. Preparation. The training of the wilderness was necessary. Had they entered Canaan at once, they would have been unfit to take possession of it. God brings us into the wilderness in order to develop our character. The faith that will stand in the storm is the faith that has been tried. III. **GOD SPEAKS TO US.** Lit. "I will speak to her heart." Not to the intellect merely, but also to the heart. But God's words never reach the heart until we have been prepared for them. What are His words that reach the heart? Words of forgiveness, consolation, hope. Are we then making the right use of our Father's discipline? (*James Owen.*) *Mercy, troubles, and end of the Church:*—I. **THE OVERTURES OF MERCY.** "I will allure her." The natural heart is in a state of rebellion against God, and He sends an offer of free pardon to all that will submit to Him. He allures them by His mercies. God works upon men's fears by shewing them their dangers, upon their affections by the offer of His grace. II. **TROUBLES THAT SHALL COME AFTER.** "I will bring her into the wilderness." When souls are delivered from their natural bondage to sin and Satan, they do not immediately taste all the sweets arising from the liberty of the Gospel. They often indeed suffer greater torments of mind, greater terrors of conscience, than ever they did before. But if God brings His people through a wilderness, He will speak comfortably to them at last. III. **THE END OF HER TROUBLES.** Where God, by His Spirit, speaks comfortably to the heart, that is comfort indeed. If the heart be not at ease, nothing can give us comfort. It is one of the offices of the Spirit to comfort God's people. (*R. W. Dibdin, M.A.*) **And I will give her her vineyards from thence.**—*God's dealings with His Church:*—The Church of God means that blessed company of true believers in Christ, and true and faithful servants of God the Father, who are living by the influences of the Holy Spirit, a life of genuine devotedness to God and His Christ—whose religion is that of the Gospel, and who adorn that Gospel in all things—whose affections are set on the things which are above—who seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness—who are living as pilgrims and strangers on earth, and who are looking for a city which hath foundations. These, however dispersed, form one body. Of this Church the Jewish nation was a type and representative. In considering such a passage as the text, it becomes us to exercise a sober discretion, lest we wander into the regions of fancy. We may view it as representing— I. **THE GRACIOUS DEALINGS OF GOD WITH HIS CHURCH.** 1. He allures them by the most gracious invitations, to turn to Him with penitence and prayer. God is love; and amongst the many proofs of this, are the gracious invitations by which He allures His rebellious creatures to seek His face. 2. To these invitations the Lord adds the most encouraging assurances to all who will seek His

mercy, forgiveness of their sins, and acceptance with Him. But the Lord does more than this. He not only gently raises the desire of His favour, but He powerfully strengthens and confirms it—"He brings her into the wilderness." Some suppose this refers to the love of solitude and retirement as affording opportunity for more unrestricted communion with God. Others consider it as alluding to those various afflictive dispensations which are often the means employed by God in leading His people to the living fountains of waters. May we not regard them as denoting more especially that state of spiritual distress into which God in mercy brings the sinner? The Lord brings His believing people into the wilderness of conviction of sin and godly repentance. Conviction leads to consolation, and repentance prepares the new-born soul for the reception of the Saviour. No language can describe the comfort which springs in the heart of the convinced and contrite sinner from the assurance that the door of mercy is not yet closed against him, and that there is a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. Then, indeed, he has reason for blessing God in that He has brought him into the wilderness. II. THE GIFTS WHICH GOD BESTOWS ON THE CHURCH. 1. "I will give her her vineyards," rich blessings and privileges. Through the wilderness is the road to the vineyards. He gives the privileges of children. He gives His Holy Spirit. He gives them peace passing understanding—joy and peace in believing. 2. He gives also "the valley of Achor for a door of hope." The present comforts and privileges of God's people are pledges and foretastes of future and more enlarged felicity, an exceeding and eternal "weight of glory." (*John Vaughan, LL.B.*) *Wilderness-blessings*:—"I will do it," says God. Observe the richness of the supply. Not her corn, which is for necessity; or grapes, which are for delight; or even a vine; but a vineyard. God concerns Himself not only with our safety, our welfare, our relief, our enjoyment; He would even fill us with all joy and peace in believing. Observe the strange way in which these indulgences are to be communicated. From whence are these supplies to come? From a wilderness. Who would expect to find the vineyards of Engedi in a wilderness? 1. Earth is a wilderness. It was not designed to be. The ground is cursed for man's sake. By one man sin entered into the world. But to the Christian the curse is turned into a blessing. He has not only before him a land of promise, but even now, even here, he has a thousand alleviations and succours, and even delights. 2. Solitude is a wilderness. There is not only much to be done alone, but gained alone, and enjoyed alone. There we gain our best knowledge and our richest experience. There we enjoy the freedom of prayer and the most unreserved intercourse with God. They are never less alone than when alone. 3. Outward trouble is a wilderness. Many have been afraid to be brought into it, yet He has given them their vineyards from thence. They have been saved by their undoing, and enriched by their losses. 4. The state of mind produced by the conviction of sin is a wilderness. Who does not remember the surprise, the confusion of mind, the anguish, the self-despair he once felt; and who can forget the feelings induced by a discovery of the Cross, and the joy of God's salvation? 5. The same may be said of that soul abasement and distress the believer himself may feel from increasing views of his unworthiness, depravity, and guilt. The experience is truly lamentable, but will the humiliation hurt him? He giveth grace unto the humble. 6. The valley of the shadow of death is the last wilderness. There is much to render it uninviting and awful; and yet, when it has been actually entered, the apprehension and the gloom have fled. This has been the case generally, even with those who are most subject to bondage by the fear of it. The place has been made glad for them. And what vineyards does He give them from thence! (*William Jay.*) *Vineyards instead of vines*:—He had "destroyed her vines" (ver. 12), but now He will give her whole vineyards; as if for every vine destroyed she should have a vineyard restored, and so be repaid with interest; she shall not only have corn for necessity, but vineyards for delight. These denote the privileges and comforts of the Gospel. Note that God has vineyards of consolation ready to bestow on those who repent and turn to Him; and He can give vineyards "out of a wilderness," which are of all others the most welcome, as rest to the weary. (*Matthew Henry.*) *Desert discipline*:—The age of Hosea was one of great material prosperity, and one of deplorable spiritual decay. The time was at hand when prosperity was to end and privation begin. It is in view of trial-times coming that Hosea brings his message. And his message is a mingled one. He speaks of judgment impending, and of sin as the cause of it. Yet he

has his tale of mercy. The very penalties announced by him have their side of mercy. Whether God wooed the sinful nation by means of His goodness, or chastised them by His righteous severities, He had the same end in view for them—their recovery to Himself, and it was only because the one mode had failed that the other began. The text is more than the tale of God's dealings with Israel: it is the tale of His discipline with the Church, and with individual souls, as many as have forgotten their first love, proved false to their calling, played truant from their God. I. LOVE'S ARTIFICE. "I will allure her." What is the wilderness? A place of blasted ground—ground where life once was, but has withered. A place of desertion and solitude. Surely a strange place for Jehovah to choose as His meeting-place with His bride. This is in its favour, it is a place of silence. The wilderness of the prophet finds its counterpart in the life of the heart. There is blight, through the drying up of the hopes that refreshed you; there is solitude, the sudden awaking to the sense that you are alone, and your desert is a school of silence. It hushes the world, and hushes the heart. There is a blessing for those in the wilderness. The grace that was unsought and unmissed amidst prosperity and plenty, you will learn to recognise and regain amidst the wilderness privations; and the voice you were deaf to amidst prosperity's clamours, you will hear and respond to in the wilderness silence. II. LOVE'S LANGUAGE. "Speak comfortably to her," speak to her heart. He had often spoken to the ear. Words of solemn warning, words of melting entreaty. But He had never before spoken as He speaks now. Now in her heartache and emptiness there is none can speak to her like her Lord Himself. What presses on her heart is her trespass against love, the thought that a grace so great has been slighted, and a trust so true and loyal has been betrayed. It is when a man's sins have created a wilderness around him that the Saviour comes near and speaks to the heart. Wilderness discipline, with all its privations, and with all its pain, its remorse for the past, and its dread for the future, is well worth bearing if at the last it brings the Redeemer to speak to the heart. III. LOVE'S TOKENS. The gifts which love bestows. 1. Blessings in possession. Of the self-same kind as the blessings which the bride had lost. God took away the vines. He grants vines again, and more abundant. Whether our wilderness discipline has its issue in temporal restorations or not, it may always be rich in spiritual blessing. There are grapes of grace to be gathered from the thorns of trial, and a meeting with Christ is always sufficient to turn the wilderness to a vineyard, where the chalice of the soul may be filled, and the strength of the soul be renewed by the fulness and exhilarations of God. 2. Blessings in prospect. Achor was a passage into Canaan. Fertile in itself, it was welcome to Israel as an earnest of the greater fertility of Canaan beyond. By its physical formation the valley of Achor was, in a most literal sense, a door of hope in front of the Israelites. IV. THE EFFECTS WHICH LOVE PRODUCES. "She shall sing there." In the old times there had been unholy mirth. Now she fears to sing the song of the old innocent time. But those whom God pardons, He pardons freely; those whom He restores, He restores right royally. In the days of your Christian youth you could sing. But the glory died, you scarce know how. Grace languished, vows were forgotten, love grew cold, and you fell by degrees from habits of secret neglect into acts of open sin. But yours may be singing days still; for with new material for such singing, the Lord will restore you the heart that can sing, with more than the old love back again. The song will be different, but fuller and richer, set to a steadier cadence, touching a deeper note; the song not of those who are ignorant of sin, but of those who have sinned, and sinned deeply, but by God's grace are forgiven. (*W. A. Gray.*) *The profit of affliction:*—The Jews are to be regarded as a typical people. Their history is all along a parable more or less descriptive of what befalls the Christian Church, whether collectively or in its individual members. The text belongs in a special sense to the Jew. It may, however, be taken in a secondary sense. Notice the expression "allure." We are often actually allured into the wilderness. You may enter the wilderness by a rough path, or by a smooth path. In the majority of cases men are allured into the wilderness. It is in a chase after happiness that men find themselves lonely and wretched. He who follows what attracts him, and finds it end in disappointment, is certainly allured into the wilderness. There is hardly a person under affliction of which this is not a faithful description. God allures, not that He may speak harshly, but that He may speak comfortably. The text declares that afflictions may be made occasions of advantage, or be

converted into instruments of spiritual benefit. We may appeal concerning the gracious uses of affliction to the living and to the dead. With one voice they will reply,—that their best lessons in spiritual truth, their clearest views of the glory of heaven, their largest apprehensions of the work of the Mediator, their fullest proofs of the preciousness of God, were all acquired under processes of chastening. From the reference to the valley of Achor we may learn that sorrows which are specially the chastisement of misdoings may issue in a firmer hope of salvation. “The valley of Achor is a door of hope.” It is when a man is quite confounded with the view of his own sins that he is fitted for the gracious announcement of a free pardon through Christ. The figure applies to cases of conversion and renewal of heart, and also to cases of backsliding. (*Henry Melvill, B.D.*) *The loving discipline of God*.—This is the language of metaphor, borrowed from the facts of history. God is in all history. In the history of Israel He manifested Himself in an especial manner. In the Old Testament the historical passes readily into the typical. When Hosea wrote the children of Israel were once more sunk in idolatry. They were forgetting Jehovah and yielding themselves up to the self-indulgences and immoralities of heathen life. But the principles of Divine government were the same as ever. God made them feel that the land of sin is the land of bondage. He would cause them to experience the miseries that flow from idolatry. Then He would come to their rescue and reveal His compassion. He would win them back to loyalty by the twofold manifestation of His righteousness and mercy. He would make the valley of humiliation the avenue to victory. I. **THE CONSTANCY AND TENDERNESS OF THE DIVINE LOVE.** Observe how the nation of Israel is personified. A faithful husband cannot become indifferent even to a faithless wife. Blended with the Divine wrath against idolatry—yea, lying at the very root of that wrath—is the Eternal Love. These words not only reveal constancy, they also breathe tenderness. Speaking to the heart reaches the affections, thrills the soul, awakens responsive echoes there. Thus God receives the penitent when they plead for pardon. The term “allure” expresses that kind of influence, the very strength of which lies in its subtlety and gentleness. In the Bible the word is generally used of evil enticements (e.g., Samson and Delilah). Men are gradually led into sin, step by step, through a seductive fascination which is far more potent than any obtrusive force. But there is a holy as well as an unholy “allurement.” God has His indirect methods of reaching the human will. Goodness, as well as evil, woos the soul. The love of God, as here set forth in its constancy and tenderness, is a substantial verity. The Bible speaks of Divine love in the terms of human affection. Man is made in the Divine image, and therefore, through the affection of our own souls, we can rise into some conceptions of the eternal love. God’s love is the inspirer of all true affection. His love is the very fountain of ours. By our wanderings God is grieved. God really does wish you to reciprocate His love. God does allure. II. **THE BENEFICENT PURPOSE OF THE DIVINE DISCIPLINE AND CHASTISEMENT.** The wilderness is typical of the discipline to which God subjects His people. The Arabian desert was the school in which the Israelites were trained for the exercise of freedom. In Hosea’s time Israel needed a repetition of the old lesson. She would, therefore, be brought again into the wilderness. God does not subject us to hardship for hardship’s sake. It is needful for us that we be led into the wilderness. To give us the vineyards at once might be only to enervate us—to loosen the fibre of our moral being—to intoxicate, instead of exhilarating, our souls. And so, in one form or another, all men have to pass through discipline. Through all forms of trial there runs the same beneficent purpose. God designs to bring us into a true and safe prosperity; and so He seeks, by strengthening our character, to prepare us for entering into the land of “vineyards.” The “valley of Achor” may be taken as typical of the Divine chastisements. The afflictions with which we are visited often assume to our consciences the aspect of correction. Our calamities, bringing us into the light of God, bring us also face to face with the sins which that light condemns. Sometimes we can trace the connection between our troubles and our transgressions. But accept your trouble as the chastisement of One who loves you, the “valley of Achor” will be made to you a “door of hope.” Never murmur under any of the Divine dealings. Realise the constancy and tenderness of His holy love. He is a “jealous God”; but is there no such thing as a righteous and holy jealousy in man? God cannot love us and be indifferent as to whether we love Him or not. Cling then to hope, even in the midst of

severest trials. These trials are either to chastise us for our transgressions, or else to mould our characters after a nobler type. In either case a loving purpose underlies them.' (*T. Campbell Finlayson.*) *The rod of mercy*:—The text describes the way God takes with those offenders to whom He has "thoughts of peace and not of evil." Apply this to the spiritual Israel, to all who are called into the fold of Christ. I. THE WAY IN WHICH THOSE WHOM GOD LOVES ARE REBUKED AND CHASTENED BY HIM. "I will allure her," &c. The wilderness was to the Israelites an emblem of affliction. It was a wilderness in which their forefathers had spent forty years of trial and chastisement. Into the wilderness of trouble the Lord brings every member of His family, both at the time of their conversion and after it. God often calls the Christian off from the path of ease and satisfaction, and makes him feel the thorns and briars of affliction, because he is loving earthly things too well, and losing sight of God, cleaving to the creature more than to the Creator. But the afflictions of God's people are not like the afflictions of the world. God does not *drive* His people to the wilderness, He *brings* them there,—that is to say, He goes with them Himself. Believers are, in a certain sense, "allured" to trouble, for they are well assured that their Lord knows better than they do what is really good for them. II. THE COMFORT WHICH ATTENDS GOD'S CHASTISEMENTS. "Speak comfortably to her." The Lord speaks thus to the newly awakened soul, and He has comforts for every after stage of experience. Never does He "bring them into the wilderness" of trouble but He comes down and talks with them. In distress of mind they may think God has forsaken them; but it is not so, for He is by, and full of tenderness, though He seem to deal with them severely. Soon they know and feel this, for His comforts flow into their hearts. III. THE GOOD FRUITS WHICH FOLLOW THE AFFLICTIONS OF GOD'S PEOPLE. Vineyards from a wilderness! A crop of grapes from a barren and dry land! In the spiritual wilderness of trouble and affliction such wonders do occur. Had the sinner never smarted for his sins he never would have reaped the fruits of a Redeemer's love. The text is true with respect to all the wildernesses which the Christian enters in his pilgrimage through life. Never does he cross the desert land of trouble but he gathers fruits there. The believer is enriched by his afflictions. When the Lord straitens him in one respect, He enlarges him in another. The spiritual Anchor becomes a door of hope. He expects great things from a God whose mercies and whose loving-kindnesses he has found so plenteous. IV. THE THANKSGIVINGS WHICH GOD'S CHASTENED PEOPLE ARE SURE TO RETURN, IN THE ISSUE, UNTO HIM WHO SMOTE THEM. "She shall sing there." This first refers to the Israelites, and recalls the song at the Red Sea. Applied to the Lord's people generally, it signifies that *their* troubles also should issue in a song of praise. What believer is there who would not sing, with all his heart and soul, the hymn that should bless God for his afflictions? He would never have known his joys but for his sorrows. (*A. Roberts, M.A.*) *The Christian in the wilderness*:—The "wilderness" became, for the Israelites, another word for trouble and sorrow. I. THE AUTHOR OF AFFLICTION. God forces Himself on our notice as the source of His people's troubles. Why this anxiety in a God of love to stand thus forward as the author of misery? 1. Because we are so backward in affliction to discern His hand. 2. We can get no good out of affliction, and no real comfort under it, till we view it as sent to us from Him. When we discern God at the very root of our sufferings, then the knee bends, the prayer goes up, and the blessing comes down. Then, for the first time, we are quieted and subdued. When we see that a Father's hand has mingled the cup of bitterness, we soon do more than say, "Shall I not drink it?" II. WHY GOD AFFLICTS US. The text discovers to us one of the most frequent causes of our sorrows. It is our forgetfulness of God, and that not in His judgments, but in His mercies, a failing to recognise His hand in them. It may be you have lost some of your earthly mercies; but you know why God has stripped you bare, as well as though His own voice sounded it from heaven in your ears. You had forgotten Him in His gifts. You tried to live "without God in the world." In jealousy for His own honour, in love for your souls, He withdrew the gifts you had abused. He made you feel once again that you need Him. God never deprives us of things without a cause. But if you will not see Him in the enjoyment of them, He will make you see Him in their loss. III. HOW GOD SOMETIMES AFFLICTS US. Gradually, compassionately, tenderly. Sometimes His judgments appear to come suddenly. This is His way usually with the strong. He carries the weak and inexperienced

"into the wilderness." A mother's tenderness could not equal His. He shows them how much they need affliction, and how much good they will derive from it. Other men are driven into the wilderness, the Christian is allured into it.

IV. THE COMFORT WHICH THE LORD IMPARTS IN THE WILDERNESS. Others speak comfortably to us in our sorrow, but if that sorrow is deep, what power have their words? God speaks to the heart, and then everything comforts, for God speaks by everything. V. THE SUPPLIES WHICH GOD FURNISHES IN TRIBULATION. He represents Himself as more than a Comforter, He is a Benefactor, and a rich one. He has promised vineyards in the wilderness. Such blessings as will more than supply the place of those lost. And these are actually to grow out of our afflictions. VI. THE HOPE THAT GOD EXCITES IN AFFLICTION. Even when trouble came on trouble, and things seemed to be quite hopeless, God opened a door of hope. Learn the effect to be produced on Israel by the mercies vouchsafed to her. (C. Bradley.) *Soul-restoration* :—These words are poetically descriptive of the restoration of Israel to the Divine fellowship and favour. They reveal God's purpose in regard to every penitent prodigal in all ages. I. SOUL-RESTORATION—IN ITS ORIGIN. The originating causes, for the most part, lie back of what is seen. The agencies that go to make summer are Divine. And the same is true of the soul. The only agencies that can prove effective in restoring it to summer experience and fruitfulness must come from God. It is not repentance, nor faith, nor service, nor sacrifice does it. As the sun carries all the influences needful to give richness to the trees and fragrance to the flowers, even so does God treasure up within Himself all those influences and inspirations which are essential to the enrichment of the soul. It would be a sad thing for us if our spiritual restoration were dependent on our good deeds. The Divine effulgence is necessary to our illumination. The Divine inflowing of life and warmth is essential to the production of Christian sensibility. The sun does not shine upon this earth because it is fair and fruitful; he shines rather to make it so. It is not our goodness or our prayers that cause God to love and bless, but He loves and blesses that we might become recipients of all Christian grace and excellence. II. IN ITS METHODS. How does God restore the soul? In a family the disobedient one is punished. No treatment could be too severe to meet the case of backsliding Israel; and yet God in His mercy says, "I will allure her." He had left her for awhile. He had permitted her to indulge her vanities unrestrained. At length He hedged up her way. But all these methods proved to be ineffectual. Is it not amazing that He did not turn away in disgust? But with infinite tenderness He says, "I will allure her into the wilderness." I have tried these various methods without result. I will now exercise my fascinations to win back her love. What is the "wilderness" into which God leads?

1. The wilderness is suggestive of barrenness. The Arabian desert is a fitting type of that soul's experiences which has been led away from its vanities, and brought into a conscious sense of the Divine nearness and purity. The best men who have ever lived have shrivelled up in the all-radiant presence of the Holy One. The wilderness ever stands between guilt and holiness. You cannot become estranged from God in affection and be restored to the experiences of His favour without being brought into the wilderness. He makes you realise your poverty and guilt that you may be prepared to rejoice in His forgiveness.
2. The wilderness is suggestive of solitude. There is no scene more isolated from the busy life of the world. Solitude is necessary to repentance. It is only when alone with our great Lord that we learn to despise our frivolities and sins and yearn for succour in His unchanging love.
3. The wilderness is suggestive of terror. The Sinai Mount is in the wilderness. The flaming law lifts up its awful voice of condemnation. Sinai must frown before Calvary can smile.

III. IN ITS BLESSINGS. She is only brought into the wilderness that she might be weaned away from her illicit loves. No sooner does she begin to blush and weep and tremble than her gracious Lord takes her into His arms and presses her to His bosom, and enriches her with all the wealth of His affection. Here we have—

1. Affluent experiences. No imagery could be more expressive. The desert transformed into a paradise. The experiences of the Christian life are too rich and exquisite to be exhausted by any imagery. The Lord gives, not merely a sufficiency but a superabundance.
2. An inspiring hope. The valley of trouble has often become a door of hope to God's chosen. When they have been most perplexed, their deliverance has been most glorious. On the darkest night of their sorrow has broken the effulgence of the brightest day.
- IV. IN

ITS EFFECTS. When our souls have been restored, we too shall "sing as in the days of our youth." How was it with us then? 1. What praise! 2. What triumph! 3. What exultation! How many of us stand in supreme need of soul-restoration! We have lost the power and blessedness of a songful life. Our spiritual sensibilities are benumbed, and our spiritual energies paralysed. O Lord, be gracious unto us as in the days that are past! (*Benjamin D. Thomas.*)

Soul-restoration :—These words refer to the restoration of Israel to friendship and fellowship with God. I. THE STAGES IN SOUL-RESTORATION ARE GRADUAL. 1. The first step to soul-restoration is from bondage to liberty. All souls are in moral Egypt, and the first step to their restoration is their exodus into the moral Arabia. 2. The next step is from despondency to hope. In spiritual restoration the soul passes from trouble into hope. Through much tribulation we enter into kingdoms. 3. The next step is from sterility to fruitfulness. The wilderness was a barren district, but Canaan was a land of vineyards. 4. The next step is from sadness to exultation. The song of the redeemed at last will be the song of Moses and the Lamb. II. THE AGENCY IN SOUL-RESTORATION IS DIVINE. No one but God can restore souls. Mark how He does it. 1. Morally. Not by force. 2. Lovingly. "Speak comfortably to her." 3. Generously. He who gave Canaan to the Jews gives heaven to restored souls. (*Homilist.*)

The valley of Achor for a door of hope.—*The valley of Achor* :—The history of the nation is the history of the individual magnified. The records of God's dealings with the nation represent to us, on a larger scale, God's dealings with the individual. The dealings of God with the individual human heart are generally of so delicate a character, and are so frequently concealed in the secret experiences of our inner life, that it is extremely difficult for even a careful observer to follow them in detail, and apprehend them with any degree of completeness. We are helped, however, by having the history of God's dealings with the nation, and knowing that these are His dealings with the individual magnified. In this chapter we have the record of God's dealings with Israel at a period of national apostasy and backsliding. It is evident that God does not think slightly of sin. The first consequence of national sin is national judgment, inflicted by a rejected God. At last judgments begin to produce the designed effect, and Israel begins to discover that the God who seemed to be her enemy is her real and only faithful friend. In all this we have a picture of God's dealing with the wayward heart, by which His Divine love designs to win it back from its apostasy and forgetfulness of Him. Observe the first step that Divine love and pity takes. God finds us in our pride and wilfulness, and endeavouring to obtain that satisfaction in the creature which is only to be found in the Creator; and He begins by opening our eyes to the emptiness of all these things in which we have sought our satisfaction; and however slow we are to learn the lesson, He waits His opportunity to allure us into the wilderness. And a dreary wilderness it is. It is a painful process, this opening of the eyes. We shrink from being undeceived; we are reluctant to believe that the world is a grand imposture. We try to persuade ourselves that we shall find in it all we want, and shrink from the dissipation of our fondly cherished anticipations. Sometimes it is by sorrow and bereavement that we are allured into the wilderness. Sometimes God deals with His wandering ones by an inward impression, by the direct and indescribable influences of His Holy Spirit, by outward circumstances, by unlooked-for relief and deliverance. Thus He allures us into the wilderness, to draw us away from our love for, and our confidence in earthly things, and then, when we are thus prepared, to speak to our hearts as He only can. "Speak comfortably," should be, "speak to her heart." The world can speak to our fancy, and to our intellect, God can speak to our heart; that heart whose wants you have ignored, or to which you have denied what it most needed. He brings to our mind all His wondrous dealings with us in the past. As we look back a flood of recognition rolls over the soul, and a burden of contrition begins to weigh upon our heart, such as it never felt before. Yet from the wilderness where God's voice has spoken to the heart, the new era of true fruitfulness is to begin. "I will give her her vineyards from thence." The firstfruits of the new life are to be gathered in the vintage of joy—the wine that maketh glad the heart of man. Other fruits may follow, but this generally comes first. But how are we to enter upon this new life of fruitful joy and of joyful fruit? If we are to get into the vineyards, we must enter them through God's appointed door—the "valley of Achor." God makes it a "door of hope." What we need above everything is a "door of

hope," a way out of the hideous desolation of our despair. But where shall it be found? None but God knows of a door of hope for perishing man, and He must give it, or our hope is vain. The valley of Achor recalls a national repentance for a national sin: an act of solemn repudiation of sin; it was the place of a great and tragic national expiation. We, too, have a door of hope, strangely similar, and yet strangely different from this. There was One found among the sons of men, who was able and willing to make expiation for man's sins. (*W. Hay Aitken, M.A.*) *A door of hope*:—1. How is this valley of Achor a door of hope to Israel? (1) Because it was the first place of which they took possession in Israel, and began to have outward means of subsistence, and to eat of the corn of the land. (2) God made their great trouble there a means of much good to them, for by that they were brought to purge their camp. 2. How was the valley of Achor to be a door of hope to Israel in after-times? The Jews think that Israel shall return into their own country again by the same way to Canaan, by that valley, which shall thus be a door of hope to them. As God turned this valley of trouble to much good to them, so He would turn all the sore afflictions of Israel in after days to their great advantage, grievous afflictions which should make way for glorious mercies. Sin will make the pleasantest place in the world a place of trouble. When may we assure ourselves that our mercies are doors of hope to further mercies? 1. When they are wrought by the more immediate hand of God. 2. When they are spiritual mercies. 3. When mercies carry to us the God of mercy, and are turned into duties. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *A door of hope*:—These words reminded an Israelite of a great failure, and, as the word "Achor" means, of a great trouble—nay, of a great tragedy. It implied to him that history was repeating itself, that old sins were to be followed by old punishments, and that beyond those punishments, as of old, there was hope. Israel, in Hosea's days, was largely apostate and idolatrous. Here it is addressed as the unfaithful bride of Jehovah. Achor is Hebrew for "trouble," and it was chosen for its likeness to Achan, the "troubler." Achan's sin was not an open scandal which brought dishonour on the cause of God by its publicity. Secret sins are more common than public ones. They satisfy the sinful instinct more economically, and those who commit them are tempted to persuade themselves that because they do not corrupt others by the taint of bad example they are really much more venial. Achan had persuaded no one to join him in his act of sacrilege. We often wonder why great causes flag and fail, why so little comes of schemes for doing good into which much heart has been thrown, and for which great sacrifices have been made. We count up, we measure, we lay stress on the difficulties of the undertaking itself, and we satisfy ourselves that these difficulties furnish the real reason of the failure. May it not be that the true cause of failure lies nearer home, that something is hidden away in the tent of the soul? And moral weakness is contagious; it radiates from soul to soul just as does moral force. We feel its presence by a sure though inexplicable instinct, when we cannot give an account of it to ourselves or to others. As the strength of the Church of Christ lies not in her external circumstances, but in the secret prayers and deeds of souls whose names are unknown, so the weakness of the Church lies not in the number or fierceness of her enemies, but in the secret unbelief and sins of her children. Achan, Judas, Diotrephes, these had a fearful power of traversing God's purposes of mercy. If we knew more, we should see how God acts at times even now by His providence as He acted of old by Joshua: how men are removed with swift decisions from this earthly scene because they bring to the cause of truth and goodness that moral paralysis and collapse which comes with cherished wrong-doing. None of us are too high or too low to promote or to weaken the cause of Christ in the world. The well-being of God's Israel from age to age is the law of God's constant government, and the valley of trouble for the individual wrong-doer is the door of hope for the Church, for the nation, for the race. The fate of the family of Achan has been an occasion of difficulty. No doubt he and his family were regarded as forming, in some sense, a moral whole, not merely as a set of individuals. Scripture does take these two views of human beings. On the individual aspect the Gospel, no doubt, specially insists, but it does not by any means ignore or dispense with the corporate aspect. A common human nature we all share. This principle of the reality of a common human nature which we all share explains our loss of righteousness in Adam; but it tells to our advantage even more decisively, for it explains our recovery of righteousness in Christ. How can

this be unless Christ is the head of a family which He endows with His saving righteousness, just as Adam endowed his descendants with a legacy of sin and death? The principle of the solidarity of human beings tells for good as it tells for evil. We see the operation of this law in the physical and social life of man written in characters too plain to be mistaken. Achan's children were involved in their father's guilt on a somewhat like principle. But the truth is, that we see here a deeper sense in which the valley of Achor is a door of hope. In order to explain the tragedy we must resort to that larger conception of the destiny of man which was affirmed with varying degrees of distinctness by the Jewish revelation. If all ended with this life it would be very difficult if not impossible to explain occurrences of this sort consistently with the belief that the world is governed by an absolute and unerring justice. Those who do not believe in a future after death are perfectly right in taking as they do, the very gloomiest view of our present existence; while, on the other hand, faith in such a future enables us to understand how the tragedies of human life and history are strictly consistent with the moral attributes of God. In later ages than Joshua's the separate relation of each individual soul with God was more distinctly marked by revelation. And Christ our Lord, if I may say so, yet further extricated the individual soul from the mass of human nature, and placed it face to face, in an awful and a blessed solitude, with the mercy and with the justice of God. Each Christian is redeemed as though redemption had been wrought for him alone. The general truth, which is independent of the cases of Israel and Achan, is that the punishment which God sends may open the way to life's choicest blessings, or to blessings which lie far away beyond it. What is of most importance is that when trouble comes to each one of us it should be recognised as coming from God, and accepted as His will, as due certainly to our sins, and therefore as the best thing possible that could happen. Trial is from God, and there is therefore a hope beyond it. (*H. P. Liddon, D.D.*) *A door of hope*:—In the language that God used when there was not much writing, signal events often took the place of books. Points of natural scenery were turned into historic ciphers, and geography into a chronicle. Give the story of Achan. That "day" was lengthened out till, seven centuries later, when another seer is lifting the curtain of Israel's still later future, he takes up the old name to signify the new sorrow, the greater sacrifice, and the sublimer deliverance to come. Every Jew would understand the historic allusion, "I will give her the valley of Achor for a door of hope." It is true of the first beginnings of the Christian life, and of its subsequent recovery from decline and coldness. There must be some suffering at the narrow door by which the imperilled and straitened soul passes through into liberty and rest. It is just as true of most of our richest gains, our noblest advancements, in all spiritual clear-sightedness and strength, that they are reached through pain and privation. It very rarely happens that we receive what we particularly need, without being obliged to give up what we particularly prize. If the sacrifice is not laid upon us voluntarily by ourselves, it has to be laid on by a hand more merciful than our own, and more concerned in our salvation. Trouble is the price of power. From one side of the globe to another, from the beginning to the end, the glory of the earth, the openings of its everlasting hope, are its valleys of trouble. The way to Christ's final majesty lies through the humiliations of pain. From Gethsemane to Calvary was the one true valley of Achor. (*F. D. Huntington, D.D.*) *A door of hope*:—As there is light in the darkest cloud, so there is a ray of heavenly hope in the greatest calamities; yea, there is light in God's most terrible judgments, for in punishment God mercifully opens before the sinner a door of hope. Illustrated in the incidents associated with Ai. There is no punishment so heavy, no misery so great, no sorrow so deep, and no trial so bitter, that God cannot change it into a door of hope. **L HUMAN SUFFERING A DOOR OF HEAVENLY HOPE.** For sinful and imperfect beings there is no door of hope but in suffering, and this fact transfigures and glorifies suffering itself, and teaches sinful men to look for their redemption in what they strive to escape from. This is the glorious truth taught in the text. The wilderness itself will be changed into a glorious and blessed inheritance unto her. The valley of trouble is the threshold of the promised inheritance. There is a great difference between delivering from trouble and changing the trouble itself into a door of hope. This gives a new character to the sufferings and trials of life, and to God's chastisements, punishments, and judgments, because there is in them all a door of hope, to which God graciously

and patiently leads the sufferer. It was in this respect only that the valley of Achor could be a door of hope. The captivity in Babylon was a valley of Achor, and it proved a door of hope. National calamities are doors of hope for nations. In what respect can it be said that there is a door of hope in punishments and sufferings deserved? If they are retributive only, there cannot be a ray of hope in them, but if they are redemptive and reformative as well, they are God's wise and merciful method of leading sinners to Himself. The notion that they are retributive only is unworthy of God, for we can never conceive of Him as administering punishment for its own sake. God's punishments are means to bless, and have great and glorious ends. God is sympathetic in all suffering, not with sin, of course, but with the sufferer, whether he is guilty or not. He is ever striving with intense yearning to lead him to Himself. Every good and holy man, who lives for the good of others and the glory of God, suffers in the sufferings of all those to whom he ministers. If this is true of man, how much more must it be so of God? II. WE ARE NOT TO DESPAIR OF THE WORST CHARACTERS. However sinful and hard-hearted men may become, they can never go beyond God's power to touch their hearts. A man who lost all his senses by paralysis was found to have a tender spot on his cheek, by which communications could be made to him. So God can always find a tender spot in the worst, and He can speak words that will melt the hardest hearts into repentance because of their sins. (*Z. Mather.*) *The valley of Achor* :—At each mention of this valley it is a door of hope. I. THE VALLEY OF ENTRANCE. It was the gateway of Canaan. It marked a great transition. Here pilgrimage ceased; here residence began. Here great changes occurred, which are accomplished by a very short march across a great boundary line. The valley of Achor was to Israel a door of hope, because it was the gateway to the full possession of the land. Across the line within the kingdom of God's grace there is a door of hope. He who obeys the Divine command, crosses, enters, dwells, may through this entrance valley pass into all the treasures of grace and glory. II. THE VALLEY OF TROUBLE. The first camp became a scene of disorder and dismay. Story of Achan. Hard lessons yield a rich reward. Rough places become monumental. Success is the fruit of failure. The valley of trouble becomes a door of hope to brighter scenes and deeper joys. III. THE VALLEY OF RENEWAL. The silence of centuries passed over Achor's vale. Israel had forgotten God, and broken all their vows. Then God recalled to Israel the valley of early vows and glad consecration, and proposed to make it the valley of renewal. From farthest wandering, greatest sin, saddest ruin, deepest sorrow, God can bring back the troubled one to the valley of Achor. With God nothing is irreparable. A ruined life, irreparable by human skill, may here be renewed. Its sad record may be erased. Life may be begun again. God invites the wanderer back to the starting-point. (*Homiletic Magazine.*) *The valley of troubling* :—"Achor" means "troubling," and the valley got its name from a great crime, a great disaster, and a great act of judicial punishment. The crime was that of Achan, who hid in his tent spoil that ought to have been consecrated to Jehovah. The disaster was the consequent defeat of the Israelites in their assault upon one of the hill cities of Canaan. Hosea is prophesying of the captivity in Babylon under the figure of a repetition of the earlier history and the experience of the Exodus, and he takes some of the ancient incidents that would be familiar to his hearers' memories, in order to illustrate one thought—that this second bondage shall be different from the trials of the Exodus, in so far as much that was terrible then shall be changed into blessedness. For instance, "I will bring her into the wilderness, . . . and I will give her vineyards from thence,"—grapes and fertility in the barren sand! Similarly, "the valley of trouble" shall be turned "into a door of hope." Let me, then, suggest two or three ways in which, in our daily experience, this great promise may, in spirit and substance, be fulfilled. It tells us how defeat may become victory. Go back to the old story. Achan hid the Babylonish garment and the wedge of gold in his tent, and did not say a word about it to anybody. God commanded Joshua to hurl his men against Ai. The Hebrews went in obedience to God's commandment, and were beaten back. But after that, they stoned Achan, and then they were victorious. It is very often the case that Christian people cannot do what they evidently are intended to do. Very often we fail in power to carry out some plain duty. That is often because there is an Achan somewhere; kill him, and you will capture Ai. And every hidden sin of ours that we take hold of by the throat and drag from

its lair into the light, and unsparingly slay and bury under a cairn of stones, contributes to our capacity to do our duty, and to our victory over all adverse circumstances—

"His strength was as the strength of ten,
Because his heart was pure."

And so we may learn that if we have been beaten once, and again attack, and again are foiled, the shameful disaster is a Divine warning to us to look not only to our equipment, but our temper, and to see whether the reason for failure lies not only in something wrong in the details or accompaniments of our effort, but in something lacking in the communion which we have with God Himself. But again, Hosea's imaginative use of the old story teaches us how hope may co-exist with trouble, sorrow, trial, affliction, or the like. Such co-existence is quite possible. "Oh!" you say, "a man's feelings cannot be cut up into two halves after that fashion." Well, it is not being cut up into two halves; but did you ever notice that often, up in the sky, there will be two layers of clouds going in directly opposite ways? The lower one is perhaps hurrying southwards, and the upper one passing to the north. Just so there may be these two layers of feeling in a man's soul, even when he is most harassed by outward difficulties. There may be a drift in the one direction, of the lower emotions and sensitivenesses of his spirit, and a clear carry in the other direction of the uppermost element of his consciousness. It is possible that we may feel on our aching shoulders and bent backs the heavy and galling weight of some sore burden either of troublesome duty or of crushing sorrow, and yet that side by side with that there should be the clear hope which makes it a "light affliction which is but for a moment." That magician Hope turns lead into feathers, and, as in an air-pump when you take out the atmospheric air, all things become of the same weight; that is, of no weight at all. If we keep near Jesus Christ, communion with Him will give an insight into His purposes, and a confidence in the love that moulds them, which will make it possible, even when most heavily "weighed upon with sore distress," to be light of heart, and like Paul and Silas in prison, to sing songs though our backs be bleeding from the rods, and our wrists be fettered with the chains. They tell us that the six months of the Arctic night are the occasion for the display in the heavens of such glories of the aurora as we do not know anything about in lower latitudes. As the darkness and the deadly frost increase, it is possible that our skies may glow with these flaming lights, until there is a great brightness as in the midday, and far more of mystery and glory and beauty than midday knows, though the rocks may remain just as they were, as grim and black as before; the valley of Achor may be changed, if we see yonder, coming down it to meet us, the fair form of Hope, led by the hand of Christ Himself. Further, there is a last point that I would suggest, and that is how Hosea here teaches us, not only the possible co-existence of hope and trouble, but the sure issue of rightly borne trouble in a brighter hope. Assuredly, if a man has accepted the providences there will follow on the darkest of them a brightening hope. There are a great many reasons why that is so. If I take, as they were meant, all the annoyances, the little irritations and the great ones, mosquito bites and serpents' stings, the troubles and trials that make up my life, then they will all refine my character. God uses the emery-paper of very rough circumstances to polish His instruments. Do your troubles and mine refine our character? That is what God is doing with us by all our troubles, and when we are, if I might so say, scraped thin enough, the light of heaven—that is, hope—will shine through us. The "valley of Achor" will be "a door of hope." Then there is another reason why the sure child of trouble patiently, Christianly borne, is a more joyful hope. And that reason is set out in full by a man that was an expert in trouble, namely, Paul, when he says "tribulation worketh patience." Does it, Paul? Sometimes it worketh *impatience*; sometimes it worketh desperation; sometimes it worketh almost the casting away of faith altogether; but if it does the right thing, it works patience. The ship has come through the hurricane, and has not started a leak or, as the sailors say, "turned turtle," and therefore we may trust the ship and its captain in any future storms. Thus tribulation, which borne in faith works patience, and patience which brings evidence of a Divine Helper, teach us to say, "Thou hast been my help; Thou wilt be my help." And so hope is the last blessed result of tribulation. (A. Maclaren, D.D.) *The valley of Achor*:—The Israelite past seems to Hosea a mirror in which to

read their future. The gloomy gorge through which at one time Israel journeyed proved a door of hope. In all our difficulties and sorrows it is within our power to turn them into occasions for a firmer grasp of God, and so to make them openings by which a happier hope may flow into our souls. But this promise, like all God's promises, has its well-defined conditions. All depends on how we use the trial. 1. The trouble which detaches us from earth gives us new hope. Sometimes the effect of our sorrows is to rivet us more firmly to earth. The loss of dear friends should stamp their image on our hearts, and set it as in a golden glory. But it sometimes does more than that: it makes us put the present with its duties impatiently away from us. The trouble that does not draw us away from the present will never be a door of hope, but rather a grim gate for despair to come in at. 2. The trouble which knits us to God gives us new hope. All the light of hope is the reflection on our hearts of the light of God. It is only when we by faith stand in His grace, and live in the conscious fellowship of peace with Him, that we rejoice in hope. Sorrow forsakes its own nature, and leads in its own opposite, when sorrow helps us to see God. Hope is but the brightness that goes before God's face, and if we would see it we must look at Him. 3. The trouble which we bear rightly, with God's good help, gives new hope. If we have made our sorrow an occasion of learning, by living experience, somewhat more of His exquisitely varied and ever ready power to aid and bless, then it will teach us firmer confidence in these inexhaustible resources which we have thus once more proved. "Tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope." That is the order. You cannot put patience and experience into a parenthesis, and omitting them, bring hope out of tribulation. I build upon two things—God's unchangeableness, and His help already received. Upon these strong foundations I may wisely and safely rear a palace of hope, which shall never prove a castle in the air. The past, when it is God's past, is the surest pledge for the future. Then let us set ourselves with our loins girt to the road. The slope of the valley of trouble is ever upwards. Never mind how dark the shadow of death which stretches athwart it is. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *A door of hope*.—This chapter is full of God's *I wills*. It is easy to enumerate between twenty and thirty. And as we read them over, we are lost in wonder at all that God is prepared to do for us, who have wandered from Him. It is only another illustration of the truth that God's love is inexhaustible, and that He will not fail nor be discouraged till He has executed His purpose in each of those whom He has taken to be His own. Let us imagine a narrow, rocky defile. A mountain torrent, rapid and muddy, hurries downward beside the path, strewn with rough slate and jagged stones, which climbs up to the head of the pass. On either side walls of rock rear themselves, steamy with moisture, and covered with festoons of hanging plants and ferns; above, a narrow chink of blue shows itself where the walls of rock almost meet; all is wild, and lonely, and terrible. And there, with bleeding feet, clothed in scanty rags, a female figure crouches in brokenness of heart and desperate straits. Such is the valley of Achor, or trouble; and that is Israel in the hour of her extreme distress. God has allured her from paths of vice and sin into the wilderness. Her way has been so hedged up that she could not find her paths. Corn and wine have failed; wool and flax have been withdrawn; ear-rings and jewels have been stripped off. Yet, as she is on the point of abandoning herself to the uttermost abyss of despair, the air seems to quiver with angel-wings, and to thrill with the repeated declarations of the Divine purposes of grace. And beneath their impulse the sinner is heard to say, "I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now." Ah, blessed resolve! It is the angel of Hope; and when she reaches the place where the penitent kneels, she touches with her wand the adjoining rock, and lo! it swings backward, and opens a way straight into a smiling landscape of luxuriant beauty, where the corn waves, and the juice reddens in the clustered grapes. It is the door of hope in the valley of Achor, through which the penitent passes from the wilderness into the garden of paradise, where the sun ever shines, and the breeze is heavy with perfume. Something like this happens still. At some time or other we shall have to pass through the valley of Achor. The road to our home lies that way. We cannot forget the incident which first gave its name to the valley of Achor, and which will throw light on one of the frequent causes of our coming thither. Flushed with their successful capture of Jericho, the tribes of Israel chose out a handful of their number to capture the little town of Ai, which stood at the

top of the defile leading from the Jordan plain into the heart of the country. The work seemed altogether inconsiderable, and any great effort needless. Ah! how little they expected that ere the night fell that little band of warriors would be fleeing in hot haste down the pass, pursued almost to the gates of the camp by the foe!—not because they were wanting in prowess, but because the forbidden thing was concealed in one of their tents, standing in apparent innocence amongst the rest, which glistened as lign-aloes beside the rivers. There are troubles which God sends us directly from His Fatherly chastening hand; these are not so hard to bear, because, if with one hand He uses the scourge, with the other He binds, and heals, and applies the leaves of the tree of life. There are other troubles which come to us from men; these, too, are bearable, because we can turn to Him for vindication, and count on Him for sympathy and fellowship. But there are other troubles for which we are ourselves accountable, because we have taken of the forbidden thing, and have hidden it in our hearts, smoothing over the earth that it appear not to men. It may be that some who read these words will find here a photograph of themselves, of the inner reason why their lives have been so full of defeat and failure. They are met in every direction by shut gates. The way is hedged up by thorns (Josh. vii. 10-13). Deliverance from the valley of Achor is impossible until a solemn convocation has been held in the heart, to which all the motives, and purposes, and intentions of the inner life have been summoned. The lot must be solemnly cast. Is it the inner life or the outer? And if the inner, is it soul or spirit? And if the soul, is it the past, present, or future; retrospective or prospective; memory or hope? And if it be neither of these, but some permitted evil in the present, is it in the emotions or the will? The cause of our defeat and failure must perish, that we may ourselves be saved. Maiming is, after all, not too dear a price to pay, if only we may enter into life. And if we be too tender-hearted to deal strongly and vigorously with the Achan who has caused us defeat and loss, let us go to our merciful and faithful High Priest, who carries in His hand the sharp, two-edged sword, which pierces the dividing asunder of soul and spirit; and let us implore Him to do for us what we cannot, or dare not, do for ourselves. He will not fail us in our extremity. He will do the work as tenderly and as thoroughly as the case requires. Only let us believe that in every valley of Achor there is a door of hope, if we will but dare to stone Achan to death. And when the cairn of stones beneath which he lies is reared in the valley, we shall ascend the long pass to victory. As sure as God is true, there is a way out of every trouble into assured and glorious victory, if only in the trouble we will do God's will on Achan. Time would fail to tell of all the advantages to which that door will lead. Some of them are enumerated here. "She shall sing" (ver. 15). There shall be a return of joy, which had fled from the heart. "Thou shalt call Me Ishi" (ver. 16). There shall be a deeper knowledge of God, so that He shall be rather the Husband than the Master. "I will make a covenant" (ver. 18). There shall be realised a blessed unity with all creation. "I will hear" (ver. 21). There shall be new power in prayer, and answers shall tread in each other's footsteps, as they hasten into the soul. Thus through trouble we shall pass into blessedness; through the grave into life; through the iron gate into freedom. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*)

A door of hope:—I. ACHOR, IN THE NATURAL BOUNTIFULNESS OF THE VALLEY, A SYMBOL OF THE JOYS OF LIFE,—OUR JOYS MAY BE OCCASIONS OF HOPE. 1. In the joys of natural scenery there is an inspiration of hope to poet spirits. 2. In temporal mercies there is an inspiration of hope to grateful hearts. 3. In religious privileges there is a door of hope to desert souls. **II. ACHOR, IN ITS GREAT HISTORIC EVENT, A SYMBOL OF THE SORROWS OF LIFE,—OUR SORROWS MAY BE OCCASIONS OF HOPE.** Septuagint renders the name "door of understanding." So it was to Israel. They came to know the evil and penalty of the sin of Achan there. The valley of trouble may become to all of us a door of hope whatever the trouble is. 1. The trouble of true penitence. 2. The trouble of agonising prayer. 3. The trouble of spiritual conflict. 4. The trouble of sanctified adversity. 5. The trouble of sacrificial compassion for others. 6. The trouble of the article of our own death. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

Hope, a gracious gift:—What is hope? The word is closely akin to "gap" or "gape." As little birds, when the mother-bird is away, open their mouths, gape for food, so the man of hope is the gaping man, the open man, with eyes, ears, mind, and heart open. If there is one thing more than another that Almighty God likes, it is openness. The Book is full of it. And if we be open ourselves, God will open heaven and

us. Perhaps God's grace and my hope are the two shuttles that are weaving for me the white robe of righteousness. There was a corner of Cornwall where the beauty of Devonshire overflowed into it. And through the windows of hope, some of the beauties and sweets of the heavenly life overflowed into the present. My soul was thrilled in reading an account of the fighting at Colesberg, where the correspondent wrote "when the boom of the cannon ceased, the birds began to sing." So when we have subdued sin, and hope for righteousness, glory, and eternal life, joy and peace will abide in our hearts. (*J. H. Jowett.*) *Songs of praise*:—Beethoven composed some of his great oratorios in the open air. He had his piano carried to the middle of a field, and there, while sunbeam and cloud-shadows played together, and birds performed their impromptu oratorios, he worked out his harmonies and wrote his score. So we would come out beneath the broad canopy of God's everlasting love, and, encompassed by innumerable mercies, make music more pleasing to God than the finest oratorios. The music of thanksgiving for tokens of Divine goodness abounding in our lives. (*Gates of Imagery.*) *Nothing like youth*:—In the memoirs of Lady Blessington, there is given a letter addressed to her by Sir Edward Lytton Bulwer, and containing these instructive words, "Do you know, I find Paris a melancholy place. If one has seen it in one's earliest youth, it reminds one of the vast interval of time that has elapsed. Say what we will, there is nothing like youth. All we gain in our manhood is dulness itself compared to the zest of novelty, and the worst of it is, the process of acquiring wisdom is but another word for the process of growing old." *And she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth*.—*Singing at work*:—Those who have sailed on the sea in sailing ships remember how the sailors accustom themselves to sing while they work. It is a happy memory to me to record an incident on a vessel on which I was a passenger. The mainyard came to some sort of grief, and then followed the tremendous task of raising it to its former position, for there was no steam gear on board. The passengers and crew all set to work to hoist the mainyard to its place. I think the tune the sailors set was the famous one of "John Brown's Body," but with it they sang as the chorus, "Glory, glory, hallelujah!" I am not sure they were impressed with the solemnity of these words, but I think some were who assisted to haul; and up went the mast twice as quickly as if the sailors had not sung their song. When you have a specially tough job on hand, let your heart go up to God in song, and you will find the difficulty go sooner than you expect. (*T. Spurgeon.*) *Songless*:—It came to my lot, while staying in far-off Tasmania, to be shown into a room at a house to await the arrival of a friend. I did what I ought not to have done—I began to investigate the pictures on the walls and the articles on the table. Amongst other things I observed a canary bird in a cage before the window. I looked at it, and hoped it would sing. As it would not do so I began to sing to it—to say, "Sweet! sweet!" "Pretty Dick!" If you want people to be kind to you, you should be kind to them. But this canary would not utter a note. I was disgusted, so I looked into the cage. Doubtless the bird was living, thought I, for there was the seed in the trough; then there was a vessel filled with water, and a piece of sugar was stuck between the bars. So I said, "Sweet! sweet!" But still it would not sing. Then my friend came into the room, and, after talking a little while, I said, "You have got a dumb canary; do what you will, it will not sing—at least to strangers." "Oh," said my friend, "it's stuffed—it's not a live bird." And I confess that I have been into churches and into Christian homes where there was bread enough and to spare, where there was seed in the trough, and water—aye, and the sugar too,—but they would not say, "Sweet! sweet!" or be glad in their songs. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 16. And it shall be at that day, saith the Lord, that thou shalt call Me Ishi; and shalt call Me no more Baal.—*Hosen's marriage figure*:—In looking at the allegory of Jehovah's marriage with mother Israel, or with the mother-land, we must begin by considering the current ideas which served to suggest such a conception. Alike in Israel, and among its heathen neighbours, the word Baal, that is Lord or Owner, was a common appellation of the national deity. Instead of the proper names compounded with Jehovah, which are common from the time of Elijah, we frequently find in Old Israel forms compounded with Baal which are certainly not heathenish. When we meet with a son of Saul named Ish-Baal, a grandson Meri-Baal, both names meaning "Baal's man," while David in like manner gives to one of his sons the name of

Beeliada. "Baal knoweth," we may be sure that Baal is here a title of the God of Israel. In Hosea's time the worshipping people still addressed Jehovah as Baali, "my Lord," and the Baalim of whom he often speaks (ii. 13, xiii. 1, 2) are no other than the golden calves, the recognised symbols of Jehovah. Now, among the Semites, the husband is regarded as the lord or owner of his wife (1 Pet. ii. 6), whom, in fact, according to early law, he purchases from her father for a price (Exod. xxi. 8, xxii. 17). The address Baali is used by the wife to her husband, as well as by the nation to its God, and so in an early stage of thought, when similarities of expression constantly form the basis of identifications of idea, it lay very near to think of the God as the husband of the worshipping nationality, or of the mother-land. It is not at all likely that this conception was in form original to Hosea, or even peculiar to Israel; such developed religious analogy as that which makes the national God not only father of the people, but husband of the land, their mother, has its familiar home in natural religions. In these religions we find similar conceptions, in which, however, as in the case of the fatherhood of the Deity, the idea is taken in a crass physical sense. Marriage of female worshippers with the godhead was a common notion among the Phenicians and Babylonians, and in the latter case was connected with immoral practices akin to those that defiled the sanctuaries of Israel in Hosea's days. It even seems possible to find some trace in Semitic heathenism of the idea of marriage of Baal with the land which he fertilises by sunshine and rain. Semitic deities are conceived as productive powers, and so form pairs of male and female principles. Heaven and earth are such a pair, as is well known from Greek mythology; and though Baal and Ashtoreth are more often represented as astral powers (Sun and Moon, Jupiter and Venus), it is certain that fertilising showers were one manifestation of Baal's life-giving power. Even the Mohammedan Arabs retained the name of Baal (*ba'li*) for land watered by the rains of heaven. The land that brings forth fruit under these influences could not fail to be thought of as his spouse; and, in fact, we have an Arabic word (*'athary*) which seems to show that the fertility produced by the rains of Baal was associated with the name of his wife Ashtoreth. If this is so, it follows that in point of form the marriage of Jehovah with Israel corresponded to a common Semitic conception, and we may well suppose that the corrupt mass of Israel interpreted it in reference to the fertility of the goodly land, watered by the dews of heaven (Deut. xi. 11), on principles that suggested no higher thoughts of God than were entertained by their heathen neighbours. (*W. Robertson Smith, LL.D.*)

*Husband or lord: God translated by love or by fear:—*Albeit the names Baali and Ishi both signify "my husband," though the first chiefly a husband under the notion of authority, and the second of love; and albeit Baali may be said of God, yet since it had been abused, and given to idols, He will have it no more used. Doctrine—1. When the Lord delivereth, and is kind to His people, it is their duty to prove their thankfulness by embracing of Christ, and cleaving to Him and His pure service. 2. The Lord will be unto His people what a faithful husband is to his wife, and they are allowed to expect it, and in the faith thereof, to profess and avow Him, in the exercise of true religion. "Thou shalt call Me Ishi," or avow Me for thy husband, as thou art warranted to do. 3. The Lord is so tender of the matter of His worship and service, that He will allow no mixture in it, nor halting between it and idolatry. (*George Hutcheson.*)

*Our name for God:—*When the relations of husband and wife are simply outward and formal, and maintained only upon necessity of law, words of endearment do not come into use, and can only be insincere when they are used. The formal "my lord" suits the conditions. And the same thing is true when sin has broken off relations. The fear that separates makes such a name as Baali suffice. But when love keeps up gracious relations, words of endearment come naturally into use. Love in loving, and in using loving names, finds employ. Our relation to God is revealed by our name for Him. (*R. Tuck, B.A.*)

Vers. 18, 19. **And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field.**—*The covenant of outward peace:—*God's favour and covenant shall secure them from hurt by any of the creatures, and shall give them peace and security from wars. Doctrine—1. All the creatures of God are justly at enmity with man, and armed against him, so long as he is not reconciled to God their Creator. 2. Reconciliation with God brings peace with all the creatures, so far as is for the reconciled man's good. 3. That which secureth

the godly man from trouble from the creatures, is God's dominion over all of them. 4. As peace and deliverance from war is a great blessing, so it is the Lord only who puts an end to war and giveth peace. 5. When a people study reconciliation with God, and are cordial in following a thorough reformation, they are in God's way for obtaining outward peace. 6. When the Lord hath given peace, it is He only who must maintain it, and can give quietness of mind to make people enjoy quietness and tranquillity by it. Unless He giveth peace, outward tranquillity will not afford it; and if He give that, we have no cause to complain, though we be in the midst of trouble. (*George Hutcheson.*) *The restored order of nature* :—We now perceive the intention of the prophet. He reminds the Israelites that all things were adverse to their safety as long as they were alienated from God; but that, when they returned into favour with Him, this disorder, which had for a time appeared, would be no longer; for the regular order of nature would prevail, and brute animals would suffer themselves to be brought into obedience. (*John Calvin.*) *The promise of peace* :—I. **PEACE WITH THE CREATURES.** 1. Sin has caused enmity between man and the creatures. 2. Peace with God brings peace with the creatures. 3. Covenant mercy is excellent mercy indeed. Two things observable in mercies coming by covenant. They are more sweet. They are more firm. 4. If it is such a blessed thing for God to make a covenant with the beasts for us, what a mercy is it then for God to make a covenant with our souls. 5. Is it a mercy for God to make a covenant with the beasts for His people? then what a mercy it is for Him to make a covenant with His Son for His people. II. **DELIVERANCE FROM THE HOSTILITY OF ADVERSARIES.** 1. It is a great mercy to have the bow and the sword broken. It is a part of the covenant that God makes with His people, to take away the instruments of hostility. 2. Peace is a most amiable thing, and lovely in all our eyes, every man desires it, and God promises it to His people in many places as a most special fruit of His love. The shining of God's face appears in the giving of peace to a nation. 3. Peace is a sweet mercy, therefore it is a pity that it should be abused, and not improved. 4. Peace is sweet, therefore not to be falsified. 5. Peace is a great blessing, therefore it is a pity not to endeavour by every means to attain it. Cursed be that war which has not peace for its end. 6. Peace is a great blessing from God, but we must take heed we buy it not too dear. And you buy peace too dear, if you sell truth for it: if you betray those who have been most active for the public good: if, through desire of peace, you subject yourselves to tyranny or slavery. 7. Peace is God's peculiar work; we may treat about peace, but until God is pleased to permit it, it will not ensue. 8. Thorough reformation is the way to procure peace. III. **THE EFFECTS OF THIS PEACE.** "I will make them to lie down safely." 1. God's peace alone brings safety. 2. "To lie down safely" is God's own gift to His people. It is an additional blessing to having the sword and bow broken. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *The sublime privileges of the good* :—I. **INFERIOR CREATURES MIGHT BE DIVINELY RESTRAINED FROM INJURING THEM.** Were man to possess and manifest the moral majesty of goodness, the wildest and most savage creatures would probably stand in awe of him. II. **HUMAN ENEMIES MIGHT BE MADE TO SUBMIT TO THEM.** Those who trust in the Lord need not be afraid of war. The spirit of the good man is to overcome evil with good. III. **THEY MIGHT ENJOY A PERFECT SECURITY.** The true safety is not the mere safety of the body. The body is not the man, it is his—not him. Soul-safety is the safety of the man—protection from all that is unholy in thought, impure in feeling, unrighteous in volition. IV. **THEY MIGHT ENJOY VITAL UNION WITH THE EVERLASTING FOUNTAIN OF GOODNESS.** Here is union indeed! Represented by that of husband and wife; a union formed of immutable ties. Righteousness, judgment, loving-kindness, faithfulness—who can break these bonds? Learn the supreme importance of moral goodness to man. (*Homilist.*) **And I will betroth thee unto Me for ever.**—*The everlasting espousals* :—Betrothing or espousing was the bridegroom's taking the bride into a marriage-covenant. It was done publicly before witnesses, under a canopy or tent set up for that purpose. Some competent time intervened betwixt the espousals and the solemnising and consummating of the marriage. Infidelity during espousals was reputed and punished as adultery. Whomsoever Christ espouseth to Himself, He espouseth for ever. I. **SINNERS MAY BE ESPOUSED TO CHRIST.** As to the nature of the espousals. The parties are pleased with one another. As Christ left His Father's house for her, she gives up her own people and her father's house for Him. The glorious Bride-

groom's consent to be her husband she finds in the word, which the Spirit applies to her, and which she by faith applies to herself. Sinners may be espoused to the Son of God. 1. This match was from eternity projected and concluded in the cabinet-council of the Trinity. 2. The Bridegroom and all His relations are well pleased with the match. 3. The lawful impediments of this match are all removed at the Bridegroom's expences and pains. 4. The marriage contract is drawn up already and signed by the Bridegroom. 5. The proxies for the Bridegroom are sent forth to make suit for sinners their consent to be espoused to Him. 6. The Bridegroom has already put on His marriage robes. 7. The wedding garment for the bride is ready, being purchased at the expence of the Bridegroom. 8. The tent for the espousals is set up, even the Church. 9. The feast and seal of the espousals, namely, the holy sacrament, is ready, that the espoused bride may feast and rejoice in her Lord and husband. 10. Here are witnesses now. Here are the friends of the Bridegroom to bear witness to the espousals. II. THE PERPETUITY AND EVERLASTINGNESS OF THIS MARRIAGE COVENANT. 1. The espousals are for ever in design. Among men espousals are only for term of life. Christ takes the sinner with a design to be that sinner's husband from the moment of the espousals for ever: and His designs are immovable as mountains of brass. He takes her with the fixed purpose never to put her away while she desires to abide with Him: never indeed to part with her, though she should desire to go away. The soul consenting to the espousals takes Christ with a design to be His spouse for ever. 2. The espousals are for ever, in fact. (1) It is everlasting without interruption. Espousals stand firm in the case of the adversity of either party; in the case of the advancement of either party; in the case of desertion on either side. (2) It is everlasting without expiring, either at death, or at the world's ending. (*T. Boston, D.D.*) *The spirit of the Lord's espousals*:—He declares by what means He would "betroth them to Him for ever"; even in righteousness and judgment, and then in kindness and mercies, and then in faithfulness. 1. God had indeed from the beginning covenanted with the Israelites in righteousness and judgment; there is nothing disguised or false in His covenant. As then God had in sincerity adopted the people, to what vices does He oppose righteousness and judgment? I answer, These words must be applied to both the contracting parties; then by righteousness God means not only His own, but that also which is, as they say, mutual and reciprocal; and by "righteousness and judgment" is meant rectitude, in which nothing is wanting. 2. "In kindness and mercies." By these words He intimates that though the people were unworthy, yet this would be no impediment in their way to prevent them to return into favour with God; for in this reconciliation God would regard His own goodness rather than the merits of His people. 3. "In faithfulness." This confirms the fixed and unchangeable duration of the marriage. By faithfulness is to be understood that stability of which I have spoken; for what some philosophise on this expression is too refined, who give this explanation, "I will espouse thee in faith," that is, by the Gospel. For we embrace God's free promises, and thus the covenant the Lord makes with us is ratified. I simply interpret the word as denoting stability. (*John Calvin.*) *The wooing and the wedding*:—That is a tenderly beautiful figure; surely one of the sweetest and most exquisite in God's Word! "I will betroth thee unto Me for ever!" The communion of ideal wedlock is used to express the ideal relationship between the soul and the Lord. We are to be married unto the Lord! Look into the heart of it, and see how much the gracious figure reveals. What do we find in consecrated wedlock even along the planes of common life? Let me lift out some of its contents. There is an affection which is creative of sweet and fruitful repose. There is a perfect trust which is the minister of mutual revelation. There is a sensitive sympathy in which all secrecy is destroyed. There is an intercourse which is like a "sea of glass mingled with fire," so crystalline is its purity, so warm and genial is its tone. There is a large companionship, whose commerce consists of the deepest and wealthiest treasures of the life. In ideal wedlock "deep calleth unto deep," and the primary springs of the beings are in confluence. All this I find in sanctified marriage: and now the figure is lifted up and sublimed and used to interpret my possible relationship to God: "Thy Maker is thine husband." "I will betroth thee unto Me for ever." Then there is to be a wedding! There is to be a wedding of the soul and its Saviour, of the nation and its King. That wedding constitutes the *summum bonum* both of personal and of corporate life. That wedding is the crown and consummation of human

blessedness. That wedding enshrines the secret of moral and spiritual growth. To bring that wedding about is the aim and purpose of every kind and type of Christian ministry. What is the kind of wooing that will lead to a wedding? Let me begin here. I. HE IS NOT A FAR-AWAY SAVIOUR; HIS HOME IS ON EARTH. I do not think we greatly help the cause of the Lover by proclaiming the remoteness of the Lover's home.

"There's a Friend for little children
Above the bright blue sky."

That is the only line I don't like in that greatly beloved and very beautiful hymn. In my childhood it helped to make my Saviour an absentee, and He was "above the bright blue sky" when I wanted Him on the near and common earth. Destroying all sense of remoteness, we must labour to bring the children into the immediate presence of the Lover Himself. All the three attributes must be regarded in indissoluble union. The quality of each depends upon the presence of all. Strike out one, and you maim and impoverish the rest. There is an imperfect love in which there is no admiration. There is an imperfect admiration in which there is no love. Perfect love admires; perfect admiration loves; and love and admiration are ever associated with the gracious spirit of hopeful aspiration. These three, I say, constitute the very marrow of life, the deep secret springs of character and conduct. "We live by admiration, hope, and love." If the great Lover can win these, the wooing will be followed by the wedding! How can we so represent Him that this triumph shall be won? 1. Present the approachable Jesus. But not only His simplicity must we reveal, but His sympathy too! 2. Present Jesus the Hero. "We live by love." By "admiration," too! "Thou art worthy, O Christ, to receive all honour and glory." 3. Loving! Admiring! These fair dispositions will be assuredly associated with the beautiful genius of hope. II. WOOING AND LIVING MUST GO TOGETHER. What more shall we say about ourselves? Let this be said: While we are employed in wooing do not let us be heedless as to the manner of our living. Those who woo for the Master must be careful how they live. Let us distinguish between a wedding and a funeral, and in our wooing let it be the wedding-bells which lend their music to our speech. III. WHEN SHALL WE BEGIN THE WOOING? John Ruskin said: "When do you suppose the education of a child begins? At six months old it can answer smile with smile, and impatience with impatience." Perhaps we have to begin the wooing even in the speechless years. In the life of the spirit I believe in early wooings because I believe in early weddings! As for the wedding itself, the betrothal to the Lord, I would have it a very decisive act. It must be a conscious, intelligent consecration. The vow must not be made in thoughtlessness; not in any bewildering and sensational transports. In the rapture there must be the moderating presence of serious and illumined thought. (*J. H. Jowett, M.A.*) *The betrothment of the Church*:—There is no real or substantial happiness for the soul unless it is really united to Jesus Christ our Lord by faith. Betrothing was considered exceedingly sacred; and parents supposed that what they did on earth God ratified in heaven. I. THE BETROTHING, OR ENGAGING, IS FOR EVER. There is no separation of the parties here, from any cause. No offence can possibly arise, be given or be taken, so as to separate the Church from its Head. No other lover can possibly steal away the affections of believers from Jesus Christ. There are many compacts made between man and man, but time breaks them all. Here is a covenant which time cannot break. God has entered into covenant with Jesus Christ on the part of the Church, and Christ has undertaken to preserve them during the existence of time. But is it not possible for sin to separate? No, not as touching eternity. II. THIS BETROTHING IS IN RIGHTEOUSNESS. Justice, or righteousness, is that perfection of God, whereby He is disposed to render every man his due. All His proceedings are in perfect equity. There is no part of our eternal salvation which is in opposition to the essential righteousness of God. III. THIS BETROTHING IS IN JUDGMENT. That is, with judgment, not with precipitancy. The Most High will not act in anything rashly, but in a judicious, proper, righteous way: He does not save our souls as a manifestation of His mercy, at the expense of His righteousness. It signifies also the satisfaction of God's justice, and it includes the exercise of His mercy. IV. THIS BETROTHAL IS IN FAITHFULNESS. Look at the faithfulness of Christ, or of God in Christ. Faithfulness to covenant

and promises. V. THIS BETROTHAL IS IN LOVING-KINDNESS AND IN MERCIES. Consider a few of them. 1. The revelation of God contained in the Bible. 2. The love of Jesus Christ our Lord. 3. The gift of the Holy Spirit. 4. The hope for the hereafter. VI. THE RESULTS. "Thou shalt know the Lord." Thou shalt know that God hath from eternity chosen thee as a vessel of mercy. Thou shalt know Him as thy great Creator, thy Preserver, thy Redeemer, &c. (*T. Bagnall-Baker, M.A.*) *The threefold betrothal*:—At three times especially did our Lord espouse the Church unto Himself. First, in His Incarnation, when He willed to unite His own Deity with our humanity. He will be for ever the Word and Flesh, that is, God and Man. Secondly, in His Passion, when He washed her with His blood, and bought her for His own by His death. Thirdly, in the day of Pentecost, when He poured out the Holy Spirit upon her, whereby He dwelleth in her and she in Him. "Knowing God" is to know by experience that God is good; and that God makes known to the soul which He loves, while it meditates on Him, reads of Him, speaks to Him, adores Him, obeys Him. The knowledge cometh from the revelation of the Father, and it is true bliss. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *The great betrothal*:—The Scripture often mentions espousals and marriage to express the great mystery of the grace of God to His people. The Holy Ghost seems to delight much in this allegory: there is none more frequent in Scripture, and it sheds very great honour on the married state. Married people should so live, that all who behold the sweetness, the happiness of their lives, may be reminded thereby of the sweetness and happiness which is in the Church's communion with Jesus Christ. Now, in a married condition there are these four things most remarkable. 1. There is the nearest possible union. "They twain shall be one flesh." 2. In nothing in the world is there so full a communication of one creature to another as in marriage; so in our spiritual marriage with Christ there is a most intimate communion. 3. In a married condition, there is a mutual, entire love. That is, loving the person more than the benefits received from him. True love can be satisfied with nothing else but love. Entire love is a love in all conditions. In love there is unspeakable delight. There are two soul-staying and soul-satisfying grounds to assure of Christ's betrothing Himself for ever. 1. When a soul is taken into Christ, it receives not only pardon for sins past, but there is forgiveness in store for all future transgressions. 2. Another argument for perseverance is, that it is a spiritual mercy purchased by Christ, as well as any other grace. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *God's love*:—Many a heart has been touched by that strange story of love of which Tennyson has written with so much tenderness. The Lord of Burleigh, disguised as a poor landscape painter, was captivated by the beauty of a humble village maiden, and determined to make her his bride. But introduced to a mansion instead of a cottage, borne down by the burden of an honour to which she was never born, the loved one pined away and died. The beauty of the bride explains this story of love; but no such explanation can be found for the choice of Him who says: "I will betroth thee unto Me for ever," &c. (*Hos. ii. 19, 20*). This betrothed one had nothing to commend her to the notice of such a Bridegroom but her helplessness, her deformity, her wretchedness. There was no beauty in her that He should desire her. She was a rebel, an alien, an outcast; yet, marvel of marvels, "the Prince of the kings of the earth" set His love upon her. He became poor that she might become rich. He bore her sin that she might bear His righteousness. He bore her reproach that she might bear His glory. He gave Himself for her because no less gift would suffice to lift her from sin and place her at His side. We search in vain for a story of love like this. It is unique, and we think of it till, with tear-filled eyes and trembling voice, we sing—

"Jesus, Thy boundless love to me
No thought can reach, no tongue declare."

(*J. Gregory Mantle.*)

Ver. 20. I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness; and thou shalt know the Lord.—*The husband of the Church*:—I. THE CONDESCENSION OF CHRIST IN CALLING HIMSELF THE HUSBAND OF HIS CHURCH. This appears if we consider that—1. She is a debtor. 2. Deformed (*Isa. i. 6*). 3. A prostitute (*Jer. iii. 1, 2*). 4. An enemy. II. THE PROPERTIES OF THIS RELATIONSHIP.

tion. 1. Righteousness. 2. Judgment. 3. Loving-kindness. 4. Mercies. 5. For ever. 6. Faithfulness. III. THE EXPERIENCE SHE HAS OF THIS RELATION. "Thou shalt know." "Know" signifies—1. To choose (Amos iii. 2). 2. To delight in (Psa. i. 6). 3. To be familiar with (2 Sam. iii. 25). (H. Foster.) **And thou shalt know the Lord.**—*Knowing Jehovah*.—We indeed see that we are in confusion as soon as we turn aside from the right and pure knowledge of God. Since then our salvation consists in the light of faith, our minds ought ever to be directed to God, that our union with Him, which He hath formed by the Gospel, may abide firm and permanent. But as this is not in the power or will of man, we draw this evident conclusion that God not only offers His grace in the outward preaching, but at the same time in the renewing of our hearts. It is necessary that God should work inwardly and efficaciously on our hearts, that His covenant may stand firm; nay, since the knowledge of Him is the special gift of the Spirit, we may with certainty conclude that what is said here refers not only to outward preaching, but that the grace of the Spirit is also joined, by which God renews us after His own image. The covenant of God can be strengthened and preserved only by the knowledge He conveys to us of Himself by the illumination of His Spirit. (John Calvin.) *Of the knowledge of God*.—There can be no cordial obedience to God by those who are ignorant of Him. Ignorance is not the mother of devotion, but the parent of superstition and idolatry. An unknown person cannot be truly and cordially loved. I. PERSONS IN A NATURAL AND UNREGENERATE STATE ARE DESTITUTE OF DIVINE KNOWLEDGE. (Acts xvii. 30.) 1. Sin has deprived us of communion with God, corrupted our nature, and darkened our understandings (Eph. iv. 18). 2. This ignorance is increased by a course of sinning. 3. There is many an affected ignorance which is very criminal. Men are unwilling to understand what they might. They love darkness rather than light. 4. Some are given up to judicial blindness and hardness of heart (Rom. i. 28). Whilst men are in this state of darkness, they are ignorant—(1) Of God, His nature, and perfections. (2) Of Christ, His person and offices, and the way of salvation by Him. (3) Of the Spirit of God. (4) Of themselves, and of their state and condition by nature. (5) Of sin, and the sad effects of it. (6) Of the sacred Scriptures, and the truths contained in them. II. IN EVERY REGENERATE PERSON THERE IS A KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AND OF DIVINE THINGS. Observe—1. The object of it—God. (1) There is a knowledge by the light of nature, through the works of creation, which show His eternal power and Godhead: and through the works of providence, by which He has not left Himself without a witness of His being and beneficence. (2) There is a knowledge of God by the moral law. It came by Moses, and it shows what is His good and perfect will. It is a transcript of His nature, His justice and holiness. (3) There is a knowledge of God which comes by the Gospel, the doctrine of grace and truth, that is, by Christ, who declares God's person, nature, grace, mind, and will to men. This knowledge of God may be considered as respecting the three Divine Persons in the Godhead. The knowledge of God is of Him as Father. The knowledge of Christ is affectionate, confidential, experimental, and appropriating. The knowledge of the Spirit is of Him as a Spirit of conviction and illumination; as the Comforter; as the Spirit of adoption; as a Spirit of grace and of supplication. III. THE NATURE AND PROPERTIES OF THIS KNOWLEDGE. 1. It is practical. The mere theory of any science is of little avail. 2. It is of a soul-humbling nature. Other knowledge puffs up. 3. It is pleasant, savoury, and satisfying. 4. It is super-excellent. 5. It is but imperfect in this life, yet it is progressive. (T. Hannam.) *A sanctified knowledge of God*.—This passage teaches—1. God is the undertaker for, and worker in His people of all that is required on their part for entering into, and keeping covenant with Him. 2. A right and sanctified knowledge of God is the root and companion of all sanctifying graces and covenant dispositions; therefore all are comprehended in this, to "know the Lord." Faith gets that name, not only because of the certitude and evidence it brings with it, but because it is begotten by His Word, and by the knowledge of Him in it, and is cherished and confirmed by taking Him up still more, as He is revealed there. (George Hutcheson.) "Thou shalt know the Lord": the best knowledge.—Luther described theology, the knowledge of God, as "the queen of the sciences." And in comparison with it, all other knowledge is vain. "We have lost," said Dr. Bennett, Bishop of Cloyne, to Dr. Parr, when announcing the death of John Cowper, brother of the poet, "the best classic and most liberal thinker in the

university." What said John Cowper himself in his dying hours? "I have laboured day and night to perfect myself in things of no profit. I have sacrificed myself to these pursuits, and am suffering the consequences of my mis-spent labour. I wanted to be highly applauded, and was flattered up to the height of my wishes. Now I must learn a new lesson."

Vers. 21, 22. **I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel.**—*The dependence of universal being upon a benignant providence.*—Jezreel (seed of God) was a city in the tribe of Issachar. The valley in which it stood was remarkable for its fertility. Jezreel, in the text, may be either the valley which bore the corn, wine, and oil, or the obedient part of the nation, restored to the country from which they had been carried away. One of the characteristics of the Book of Hosea is the frequent transition from the most distressful to the most delightful annunciations of futurity. Amid all that was adapted to alarm the disobedient many, there was a tender regard for the consolations and hopes of the pious few. The text is a passage of this description. It practically, yet philosophically, depicts the harmony of universal nature, operating under the benignant direction of Providence for the good of man. One seems to feel the piety of the sentiment more for this circuitous tracing of man's enjoyment to his Maker's bounty. We find that all second causes, tarry in them as long as we will, and multiply them as we may, yet must terminate in a great first cause. The Deity cannot be excluded from His own universe. The prophet's description is, in the true spirit of poetry, the selection of a particular instance which is adorned with all the beauty of imagery, and then put forward as the illustration of a principle. 1. It is the fact that there is such a connection as the prophet has intimated, not only in that particular case, but in all the regions of matter and mind, blending them together, and making them one. 2. The influence of this fact upon our feelings and conduct, its righteous tendency or unrighteous application, its gloom or gladness, must arise from the notions of the Divine character with which it is associated in our convictions. There is not merely a community of properties, but a reciprocity of influence, from the minutest to the mightiest substances, from the nearest to the most remote, from the grain to the mass, from the mass to the mountain, from the mountain to the island or continent, from that to the solid globe, from our globe to the solar system, from that system to other systems, having their relative positions and combined movements, until it expands beyond our sense or imagination in the multiplicity of worlds, and the boundlessness of space. This connection applies to time as well as to space. In the mind and life of man it will be seen that the thoughts of the one and the events of the other have a similar connection, and are under similar influences. No idea springs up in the mind spontaneously, without something to introduce it, something which stands to it in the relation of a cause, itself the effect of something which preceded. The universe may be regarded as a great machine, but everything depends on our believing, or not, that this machine has a Mover and Maker, and on the notions we entertain of His dispositions and designs. Some blend this fact with the denial of God. Others blend the fact with the admission of a God, an Almighty Creator, but not a God whose love is the same to all the rational beings whom the system brings into existence—a God who is partly benevolent and partly malignant. It is the glory of our faith to blend with this fact the deepest conviction of the universal love of the Creator. All things lead us back to God, the infinite goodness. Learn—1. A lesson of humility and of gratitude. 2. A lesson of caution. 3. Let our devotion be universal as the presence and influence of our God. Let it pervade our lives. (*J. R. Beard.*) *Second causes.*—1. God is wont to work good for His people by second causes. He sends not things immediately from heaven, but the heavens hear the earth, and the earth hears the corn and the wine. We must look to second causes, but take heed of resting on them. Though God sometimes works beyond means, and even contrary to them, ordinarily He uses second causes. 2. There is a concatenation in second causes, and not merely a use. Every one in their order ministers to the other. If we could see the comely order of the creatures, we should see them all linked together by a golden chain. 3. Nothing can be done by any link of the chain of second causes, but by God's being at the uppermost link. 4. It is most comely, and a great blessing, when the right order and chain of second causes hold; as in nature,

so in any society, when all preserve their due subordination. When they are out of order, it is a great misery to a city or kingdom. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *Family prayers*:—By this very elaborate and poetically ingenious figure the prophet appears to be giving a contrived representation of the fact, that when God brings in the promised day of His universal reign on the earth, there will be a grand convergency of causes to prepare it, and, like so many concurrent prayers, to make common suit for it before Him. Thus he figures the world as being the beautiful valley called Jezreel, which is the garden, so to speak, of the land. And it is to be as when the people of Jezreel get their harvest, by having everything in a train of concurrent agency to prepare it—they make petition by their careful tillage to the corn, the grapes, and olives, that they will grow apace; these in turn make suit to the earth to give them nutriment; this again hears them, and lifts its petition to the heavens, asking rain and dew; whereupon, last of all, the heavens hand up the prayers to God, to furnish them water, and let them shed it down; which petition He graciously hears, and the harvest follows. So he conceives it will be as the harvest of the world approaches. It will be as if all things were put striving together, and a prayer were going up for it through all the concurrent circles of providence. God's counsel and kingdom are constructing always a perfect harmony, by their convergence on His perfect end. Then, as the perfect end is neared, and the harmony with it grows complete, it will be as if more things were concurring in it, and asking for it, and prayer, falling in as a cause among causes, will have them all praying with it, or handing up its request. In which we may see what holds good of all prayer, and how or by what law it prevails. In one view the whole future is prayed in by the whole present, being such a future as the whole present demands. The more things therefore prayer can get into harmony with itself in its request, the more likely it is to prevail; and the more alone it is, and the more things it has opposite to it, in the field of causes, the less likely it is to prevail—even as Adam had less hope of success in praying for Cain, that the blood of Abel was crying to God against him from the ground. All prayer being under this general condition, family prayer will be, of course. I handle the subject in this form, in the conviction that the prayers of families are so often defeated by the want of any such concert in the aims, plans, tempers, works, and aspirations of the house, as are necessary to a common suit before God; in other words, because the prayers, commonly so called, are defeated by the suit of so many causes contrary to them. I drop out of notice family worship as observance, and speak of it only as the open state of prayer and communion with God in the house. I. THE MANNER IN WHICH PRAYERS OF ALL KINDS GET THEIR ANSWERS FROM GOD. Two things are wanted. 1. That the matter requested should agree with God's beneficent aims, or the ends of good to which His plans are built. 2. That the prayer should agree with as many other prayers and as many other circles of causes as possible: for God is working always towards the largest harmony, and will not favour therefore the prayer of words, when everything else in the life is demanding something else, but will rather have respect to what has the widest reach of things and persons making suit with it. See how it is in the great realm of nature. The Bible history, too, shows a grand convergency of all the matters included in it, and a mysterious concert weaves all its facts together, and keeps them working towards the same result. In the same way, descending to a lower field, every conversion to God takes place when some largest harmony demands it. If we come directly to the matter of prayer itself, we meet the promise, that "If we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us," and "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them." By the whole economy of prayer God is working toward the largest, most inclusive harmony, and prayer is to be successful just according to the amount of concurrency there is in it. First, there is to be the completest possible concurrency with God; then a concurrency of one or two hundred, or, if so it may be, two hundred millions of petitioners in a common suit; and then all these are to be total in the suit, bringing all their lustings, affections, works, plans, properties, and self-sacrifices into the petition: whereupon the prayer will grow strong, just in proportion to the amount of agreement or concurrence there is in it. II. CONDITIONS OF SUCCESSFUL FAMILY PRAYER. The great infirmity of family prayers, or of what is sometimes called family religion, is that it stands alone in the house, and has nothing put in agreement with it. It is a first point of religion itself, that by its very nature, it rules

presidingly over everything desired, done, thought, planned for, and prayed for in the life. The mere observance kind of piety, that which prays in the family to keep up a reverent show, or acknowledgment of religion, is not enough. It leaves everything else in the life to be an open space for covetousness and all the gay lustings of worldly vanity. What is prayed for in the house by the father, is sometimes not prayed for by the mother in her family tastes and tempers. It is necessary that the practical ends, tastes, plans, aspirations, and works of the house should all come into the same circle of concert, and join their petition to reinforce the suit of the prayers. Here is the great lesson of family religion; it is that religion, being the supreme end and law of life, is to have everything put in the largest possible harmony with it. (*Horace Bushnell, D.D.*) *The chain of blessing*.—The language of this text is poetical and highly figurative, but quite easy of comprehension. Jezreel, the seed of God, is the name used by this prophet to designate the people of God. We have, then, a picture of the whole process by which God answers His people when they pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." The passage is not only beautiful, but suggestive. Its range is very wide. It leads all along the chain of effect and cause, from man through nature up to God. Beginning at the lower extremity, we find ourselves first in the wide and busy domain of political economy, with its two branches of production and distribution. Stepping upwards, we reach the sphere of natural science, and the highest raises us to the lofty regions of theology. We begin, however, with the highest link. 1. However many links may seem to intervene in nature's chain, if followed up, it always leads to God at last. If the harvest came by some process of evolution, whence came the process of evolution? We may carry back the chain of second causes as far as we may, we shall always find the farthest link fastened to the throne of the Omnipotent. 2. It is God that hears, not only at the extremity of the chain, but through it all, between each separate link, however long it may be. Not only is God the First Cause, He is in all intermediate causes too. We speak of "laws," laws of nature. But who made the laws? And who enforces the laws? There must be power to do this. Where is it? What a remarkable thing is the regular proportion between what is produced and what is needed for consumption in a given year. The whole thing is left to individual choice, there must therefore be some power at work to preserve the necessary equilibrium. There is the law of supply and demand to regulate this. But this law, like all other laws, implies a lawgiver. It implies a power above ourselves. 3. Food is produced where population is scanty, it is wanted mainly where population is dense. Whatelley says, "Man's foresight often gets the credit for what is due to God's wisdom." All the foresight of man would fail for a work so stupendous as this. Many have the idea that the farmer is more dependent on the Divine power than the artisan and the manufacturer. It is a mistake. The chain along which we derive our manufactured goods from the Giver of all good may be longer than the other, but God is just as surely at the upper end of it, and in each intermediate link. No machine can produce power. All the force which is used in all our factories is ultimately traceable to the sun. It was the sun which, millions of years ago, poured its rays on the luxurious vegetation of the carboniferous era, and filled it full of a latent force, which, after the leaves and stems and roots containing it had been pressed and hardened and blackened underground, should be available to those who, in future ages, should dig it up as coal, and use it to heat their houses and drive their engines. Our manufactures as our agriculture are of God, and of Him only. (*J. Monro Gibson, D.D.*) *The promise of plenty*.—1. While the Lord's people are within time, they may read their own frailty in needing so many things to uphold even their outward man. 2. Outward mercies do so far follow on the covenant as the confederate may be free of fear and anxiety about them. Albeit the Lord do not always see it meet to heap plenty of corn and wine and oil upon His people, yet they have as much as, with godliness and contentment, may suffice. When they seek the best things, other things will certainly be added. 3. God is so tender a respecter of necessities that He hath an ear to hear the dumb cries of very insensible creatures in their need. 4. God's reconciled people are to read, not only God's love in their plenty, but that all the creation do, in their kind, with a good will, concur to serve him who is now at peace with his Maker. 5. The Lord sets a mark of excellency upon man, and especially upon His Church, in that so many things concur to serve them and provide for them. 6. Whatever it be that one creature affords unto

another, or may be in the course of nature expected from it, yet every creature in itself is empty, and must be supplied by God before it satisfy any. 7. As the Lord is not to be tempted, but waited on in His established order for anything, so we are not to rest on any such order or course of nature, but to see God's hand in it, who establisheth and blesseth it for such ends. 8. The Lord's former sad dispositions towards His people will not hinder Him to change His dealing; but He will make His kindness so much the sweeter. (*George Hutcheson.*) *God and His universe*.—I. THE OPERATIONS OF THE UNIVERSE ARE UNDER THE INTELLIGENT DIRECTION OF THE GREAT GOD. The universe is here represented as in action. There is nothing stationary; all things are full of labour. The universe is not a self-acting machine, left to itself to work out. The great Machinist is ever with it, observing and directing every motion. This fact serves several important purposes. 1. To account for the unbroken order of nature. 2. To impress us with the sanctity of nature. 3. To inspire us with reverence towards the greatness of God. II. THAT THE OPERATIONS OF THE UNIVERSE ARE GENERALLY CONDUCTED ON THE MEDIATORY PRINCIPLE. "I will hear the heavens," &c. Look at this mediatory principle in its relation to man—1. As a material being. How did we receive these corporeal frames: how are they sustained; how are they broken up? 2. As a spiritual being. How does knowledge come to man? He has teachers. III. THE OPERATIONS OF THE UNIVERSE ARE MERCIFULLY SUBORDINATED TO THE INTERESTS OF THE GOOD. Jezreel, or the children of God, receive from God three things. 1. The blessings they devoutly sought. 2. The multiplication of their number. 3. The heightening of the sympathy between them and God. "I will call them My people." (*Homilist.*) *And they shall hear Jezreel.*—*The audience of Jezreel*.—The prophet refers, under the symbolic title Jezreel, to God's own faithful people, the undefiled remnant of Israel; those who were brought back to their own land after the captivity in Babylon. In a larger sense we are to understand the passage as a prophecy of the blessings which such of the Jews as accept our Lord Christ, and those of the Gentiles who believe in Him, shall enjoy under the Gospel. I. THE WAY IN WHICH GOD PROMISES TO BE GRACIOUS TO HIS PEOPLE AT THE LAST. He will deal with them through a chain of intermediate agencies. 1. Superficially the text is but a poetic way of saying that all the universe shall unite to help the people of God. 2. The deeper thought is, that in this mode of due order and proportion, having respect to the fitness of all things which He has made, God rules the universe, albeit for the sake of His people. II. THE BROAD AND ALL-EMBRACING METHOD OF THE DIVINE OPERATION OUGHT TO BE A GREAT STRENGTH TO US IN TIMES OF DISCOURAGEMENT AND DOUBT. The tendency of modern life seems to be to make men pessimistic. It seems as if the enormous natural forces brought out into the light, and harnessed to work man's will for him, had somehow paralysed our human instincts. Human life seems to be becoming more and more but the life of a machine. God has promised to hear our prayers, but only on the condition that we approach Him in the way He has appointed. (*Catholic Champion.*)

Ver. 23. *And I will sow her unto Me in the earth.*—*God's sowing*.—I. THESE WORDS REFUTE PANTHEISM. God is not nature, nor is nature God. Pantheism teaches that there is no real and practical distinction between God and the universe. This form of infidelity ignores evil as evil, and all moral responsibility, for it declares that the soul is only a mode of the thought of God. II. THESE WORDS DECLARE THE DIVINE PERSONALITY. Only on belief in a personal God can any sound superstructure of religion be raised. III. THESE WORDS SHOW THE ABIDING CONNECTION BETWEEN GOD AND HIS WORKS. The Bible invariably attributes the operations of nature to the energy of God. IV. THESE WORDS SHOW THAT THE UNIVERSE IS THE FRIEND OF THE PRAYING SOUL. One part of the universe is here represented as related to and acting upon another on behalf of Jezreel. All the forces of nature are arrayed against the disturber of the harmony of God's kingdom. V. THESE WORDS TEACH THAT GOD WILL REALLY ANSWER PRAYER. The answers are, "I will sow her unto Me." "I will have mercy upon her." "Thou art My people." The infinite God gives Himself to the soul, and becomes its present and eternal portion. (*Christian Age.*) *God's people as seeds*.—1. God's people are the seed of the earth. 2. Every godly man should so live as, either in life or in death, to be as a seed from whence many should spring. 3. The saints are sown unto Christ, they

are seed for Christ, therefore all their fruit must be consecrated to Christ. (*Jeremiah Burroughs*.) *Hope for the forsaken*:—All the brighter side of the prophetic message is summed up in the most wonderful way in this verse, and there are few verses even in the Bible itself, so crowded with significance. Hosea sums up *all* that he himself had said, all that he had been teaching for some seven years. It is God whom he represents as speaking these weighty and matterful words:—"And I will sow (an allusion, of course, to the meaning of Jezreel—"God's sowing") her (the impersonated people of Israel) unto Me" (sow, and no longer scatter); and "I will have pity" upon, "not pitied"; and I will say unto "Not My people," "Thou art My people"; and she shall say to Me, "My God." Obviously, so soon as we can read the verse aright, we find in it the names of all Hosea's children, and the whole significance of his prophetic message. On the one hand, we are reminded of the time in which Israel was scattered for their guilt among the heathen, the time in which God refused to pity them, or to acknowledge them as His own; and on the other hand, we are reminded of the better time in which, instead of being God-scattered, unpitied, and not My people, they were called God-sown, pitied, and sons of the living God; when the heavens smiled upon them, and the earth gave them her increase, and all the forces of nature, once so hostile, were at peace with them. (*S. Cox, D.D.*) I will say to them who were not My people, Thou art My people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.—*Sinners owning a covenant God*:—Read in the light of the context, these words seem to refer to the nation of Israel only. But in the ninth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, Paul quotes them as having a more comprehensive reference. He there applies them to the "vessels of mercy," who are "called" in the Gospel day, "not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles." These words foretell the formation of a gracious relation between God and sinners, and the mutual acknowledgment of that relation. On His side He shall own the outcasts as His people. On their side they shall own Him as their God. What is implied in sinners saying to Jehovah, "Thou art my God"? I. THE GRACIOUS RELATION THUS ACKNOWLEDGED. 1. And first of all, it is a new covenant relation. Naturally, as is here intimated, we are "not" the people of God. When the covenant which He made with us in Adam, our representative, was broken, we ceased to be His people and He ceased to be our God. We, by wilful apostasy, have cast Him off; and He, in holy and righteous displeasure, has cast us off. Our carnal minds are enmity against Him, and His law has only condemnation and death for us. We are miserable outcasts from our Maker. We are "without God in the world." But He has made a covenant with His Chosen: and in that new and better covenant He has made provision that the gracious relation so fearfully ruptured shall be more than restored. He has covenanted with His only begotten Son, as the Head of an innumerable multitude of our outcast race, that on condition of His assuming their nature and doing all His will in their redemption He will, in a very special and gracious sense, be a God to Him, and in the same special and gracious sense be a God to them. 2. In this new covenant relation, as willing to be our God in Christ, God offers Himself to us unconditionally and individually in the Gospel. It was such an offer of Himself He made to the Israelites when, from the summit of the flaming mount, He proclaimed, "I am the Lord thy God, who have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." It was God in the person of Christ, as we learn from Stephen (Acts vii. 38), who there announced His willingness to be the God of Abraham's seed. And to these sinners, deeply infected as they were soon to show, with the idolatry and moral corruption of Egypt, that was a most free offer; and it is expressed in absolute and unconditional terms, clogged with no condition of any sort whatever. It was also an individual offer, made to every Israelite in the camp without exception, so that every soul in all that host, the vilest and most abject was warranted as much as Moses and Aaron, to close with it, and on the ground of it to take Jehovah as his own personal God. Now we are most earnest you should realise this day that God is making to each one of you, through Christ, the same absolutely free and gracious offer to be your God. Only with this great difference, that He is making it not from "the mount that might be touched and that burned with fire, and from blackness, and darkness, and tempest"—not from among that dark obscurity of type, and rigour of ordinance and law tending to bondage and fear, which beset the revelation of covenant mercy and love under the old economy, but in the clear sweet light of the risen Sun of Righteousness, and through the lips of

ambassadors whom He has sent to beseech you in Christ's stead to be reconciled to Him. "Incline your ear, and come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David" (Isa. lv. 3). 3. For, be it remarked further, that while God offers Himself in this relation to all, He actually gives Himself in this relation to those who are made willing by His Spirit to close with the offer by faith. This highest and holiest of covenant unions, like every other covenant union, is formed by mutual consent. Thus the sons of the stranger are said to "join themselves to the Lord," in the way of "taking hold of His covenant": in doing which they first take hold of Christ the Surety of the Covenant with the grasp of a living and entire faith when brought near them in the Gospel; and then, in and through Christ, they take hold of the God of the covenant, and enter into all the fulness of His covenanted love and grace (Rom. iii. 29, 30). And mark how faith avails to bring the guiltiest and vilest into all the good and blessedness of this endearing relation to Jehovah. Faith, laying hold of Christ, unites us to Him. It makes us so vitally one with Him that we participate in all the boundless merit of His righteousness. And, having Christ's righteousness as our own, there is no more any legal obstacle to keep us outcasts from God. 4. For observe yet again, that in this relation God gives Himself to believing sinners in all He is and all He has. "He is not ashamed to be called their God" (Heb. xi. 16). And why not ashamed to be called their God? It is because He acts toward them with a Divine munificence worthy of Himself, glorifying the exceeding riches of His grace in giving them not this or that kind and measure of good, but in giving them Himself, the Fountain and Centre of all good. Think of the ineffable dignity and privilege of being able to say of Him whom angels count it their supreme happiness to adore, He is my God; mine in all His essential perfections: His wisdom mine, to enlighten and guide me; His power mine, to uphold and protect me; His holiness mine, to raise me to walk in the light as He is in the light; His justice mine, to guard me as one of Christ's ransomed ones, and to guarantee to me all the inheritance He has purchased with His blood; His truth mine, to fulfil to me every word He has spoken and every expectation and longing His Spirit has awakened within me; His love mine, to delight in me and rejoice over me to do me good; His infinitude mine, to be the measure of the good and the blessedness which I have in Him; and His eternity mine, to be the duration through which it shall all be enjoyed. "All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. iii. 22, 23). Can you contemplate this, the inheritance of the saints in light, without exclaiming, "Happy is the people whose God is the Lord"? II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THIS RELATION WHICH OUR TEXT FORETELLS? It is, as we have hinted, a divinely wrought acknowledgment. Neither reason, nor conscience, nor moral suasion, though that were put forth with the tongue of an angel, will persuade the soul in its natural hatred and fear and distrust of God to make it. It is the response of the new-born nature to the call of the Spirit of God within. 1. It implies, first of all, the believing personal acceptance of the offer which God makes of Himself to sinners indefinitely and individually in the Gospel. Proud unbelief, putting on the deceitful guise of humility, may tell you that it is presumption for such as you to claim Jehovah as your God. You virtually say by that refusal that all His professed love and goodwill toward you is insincere, that His word is not faithful and worthy of all acceptance. 2. This acknowledgment implies, further, the taking of God as our only and all-sufficing portion. Naturally, our carnal hearts will not have God for their portion. They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh. But these earthly things can no more satisfy the nature and cravings of the spiritual essence within us than the husks that the swine did eat could satisfy the prodigal. Deeply and unfeignedly that sinner grooves that, in following lying vanities, he should so long have forsaken his own mercies. But in proportion to the shame and sorrow of his penitence is his satisfaction that in Christ, and God in Him, he has found at last the good, the rest, the home of his heart. 3. Again, this acknowledgment implies the surrender of ourselves to God as our Lawgiver and King and the great End of our being. If we naturally dislike God as our portion, we still more dislike the thought of entire subjection to Him as our King. Many, indeed, would wish to enjoy His favour and His benefits, provided that, free from His holy authority and control, they could get following their carnal inclinations and living as they list. But this will not do. It is an

eternal moral impossibility. God must change His nature and reverse all the laws of His moral government ere He can make you happy while you are unwilling to be holy, and ere you can enjoy Him as your portion while you will not know, obey, and submit to His will, in all things, as your Lawgiver and King. And most certainly on these terms you can never enter the bond of His covenant (Heb. viii. 10). The true-hearted covenanter is well pleased with God's covenant in all respects. He delights in the law of the Lord after the inward man (Psa. cxix. 140). He feels that God has infinite claims upon the love and loyalty of his heart and the perfect obedience of his life. As He who made him, and made him a rational and immortal being responsible to Himself; as He who has made goodness and mercy to follow him through all his sinful days when he would have been honoured in shutting him up in hell; as He who has redeemed his life from destruction with the blood of His Own Son, and hid his life with Christ in Himself forever—he feels that He has claims upon him which the love and never-ceasing service of eternity shall fail to discharge, but which shall rather ever grow in a still accumulating debt. 4. In a word, this acknowledgment implies the explicit and formal devotement of ourselves to God. They “shall say, Thou art my God.” Not merely think it or feel it, but say it. Say it explicitly, formally, solemnly. With the heart he believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth he makes confession unto salvation. Such an avowed devotement of ourselves to God is really made in all spiritual worship. In all true prayer there is an owning of God's sovereignty and of our dependence which says, “Thou art my God.” In all true praise there is an owning of God's goodness and of our obligations which says, “Thou art my God.” But the honour of God, the promptings of the new nature, and the necessity of binding our wayward hearts by the firmest and closest of bonds, demand that this avouching of the Lord to be our God should be made in the most explicit and public manner possible to man (Isa. xlv. 3-6). (*Original Secession Magazine.*)

CHAPTER III.

VER. 1. According to the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel. —*Love in chastisement*:—The substance of this chapter is, that it was God's purpose to keep in firm hope the minds of the faithful during the Exile, lest being overwhelmed with despair they should wholly faint. The prophet had before spoken of God's reconciliation with His people; and He magnificently extolled that favour when He said, “Ye shall be as in the valley of Achor, I will restore to you the abundance of all blessings; in a word, ye shall be in all respects happy.” But, in the meantime, the daily misery of the people continued. God had indeed determined to remove them into Babylon. They might therefore have despaired under that calamity, as though every hope of deliverance were wholly taken from them. Hence the prophet now shows that God would so restore the people to favour, as not immediately to blot out every remembrance of His wrath, but that His purpose was to continue for a time some measure of His severity. We hence see that this prediction occupies a middle place between the denunciation the prophet previously pronounced and the promise of pardon. It was a dreadful thing that God should divorce His people, and cast away the Israelites as spurious children; but a consolation was afterwards added. But lest the Israelites should think that God would immediately, as on the first day, be so propitious to them as to visit them with no chastisement, it was the prophet's design expressly to correct the mistake, as though he had said, “God will indeed receive you again, but in the meantime a chastisement is prepared for you, which by its intenseness would break down your spirits, were it not that this comfort will ease you, and that is, that God, though He punishes you for your sins, yet continues to provide for your salvation, and to be, as it were, your husband.” When God humbles us by adversities, when He shows to us some tokens of severity and wrath, we cannot but instantly fail, were not this thought to occur to us, that God loves us, even when He is severe towards us, and that though He seems to cast us away, we are not yet altogether aliens, for He retains some affection,

even in the midst of His wrath ; so that He is to us as a husband, though He admits us not immediately into conjugal honour, nor restores us to our former rank. So we see how the doctrine is to be applied to ourselves. (*John Calvin.*) *God's forgiving love.*—I once visited the ruins of a noble city on a desert oasis. Mighty columns of roofless temples stood in file. Gateways of 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, still swept on in undying music and freshness. The waters were just as sweet as when queens quaffed them two thousand years ago. And so God's forgiving love flows in over-renewed form through the wreck of the past. (*T. G. Selby.*) *The love of God.*—The dark sad story which Hosea pathetically shadows forth in his first three chapters taught him the chief lesson of his life. For he accepted God's dealings with him, and found that though the chastening was grievous, it brought forth the peaceable fruit of righteousness in his soul. By virtue of his holy submissiveness he became one of the greatest of the prophets, and in the fall, the punishment, and the amendment of an adulterous wife, he saw a symbol of God's ways with sinful men. For the lesson which he learnt was this. If the love of man can be so deep, how unfathomable, how eternal must be the love of God ! First of all the prophets he rises to the sublime height of calling the affection with which Jehovah regards His people "love." In Amos God is beneficent, and knows Israel; in Joel God is glorious and merciful; but Hosea introduces a new theological idea into Hebrew prophecy when he ventures to name the love of God. Hence, Prof. Davidson, referring to Duhm, says: "Amos is the prophet of morality, of human right, of the ethical order in human life; but Hosea is a prophet of religion." And to what unknown depths cannot God's love pierce ! Agonising experience had taught him that human love, so poor, so frail, so mixed with selfishness—human love, whose wings are torn and soiled so easily, and which droops before wrong like a flower at the breath of a sirocco,—even human love, though disgraced by faithlessness, though dragged through the mire of shame, can still survive. Must not this then be so with the unchangeable love of God ? If Hosea could still love the guilty and thankless woman, would not God still love the guilty and thankless nation, and by analogy the guilty and thankless soul ? That is why, again and again, the voice of menace breaks into sobs, and the funeral anthem is drowned, as it were, in angel melodies. He saw the decadence and doom of Ephraim; he saw king after king perish by war and murder; he heard the thundering march of the Assyrian shake the ground from far; he knew that the fate of Samaria should be the fate of Beth-arbel; and yet, in spite of all, in his last chapter his style ceases to be obscure, rugged, enigmatical, oppressed with heavy thoughts; and to this doomed people he still can say, as the message of Jehovah, "I will love them freely, for Mine anger is turned away." It is so intolerable to the prophet to regard God's alienation from His people as final, that from the first he intimates the belief that they would repent and be forgiven, and become numberless as the sands of the sea, and that Judah—of whom at first he thought more favourably than at a later time—shall be joined with them under a single king. (*Dean Farrar, D.D.*) *Who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine.*—*Idolatry and self-indulgence.*—The connection here pointed out between the idolatry of heart that seeks after other gods, and the self-indulgence in life that seeks after flagons—large quantities—of wine, is so truly universal, through all the ages it has been in evidence, and even now it constantly reappears, so that it may be regarded as necessary and essential. All nature religions, all pagan religions, all heathen religions are sensuous and sensual. All philosophical religions are, though in more subtle forms, sensuous, as may be illustrated in the personal history of Comte the positivist. It would be possible very widely to illustrate this fact. But when it is established, and the strongly marked contrast of the Jehovah and the Christian religions is pointed out, it remains to be considered why this connection between two apparently unrelated things should have become established. Two reasons may be suggested. I. ALL OTHER RELIGIONS SAVE THE JEHOVAH RELIGION ARE HUMAN INVENTIONS. They therefore tend to foster the pride of man, to strengthen his self-will, and encourage him in doing what he likes. Jehovah religion, being authoritative revelation, brings man's will into subjection and obedience. II. ALL OTHER RELIGIONS ARE, IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER, NATURE RELIGIONS. And the root idea of nature religions is the glorifying of sexual relations. The worship is virtual sensual indulgence, and thus all forms of sensual indulgence are

encouraged. The Jehovah religion alone requires righteousness and purity. (*Robert Tuck, B.A.*)

Ver. 2. And for an homer of barley.—*Barley a mean food*:—Why an "homer of barley"? Because it was a mean food, and in those times rather the food of beasts than of men. God promised to feed His people with the finest of the wheat. Feeding with barley signifies the mean condition in which the Ten Tribes, and afterwards the Jews, should be, till Christ came to marry them to Himself. 1. They should be in a contemptible condition, they should be valued at but half the price of a slave. 2. They should be fed but meanly and basely, even as slaves, or rather as beasts; this homer and a half of barley should be for their sustenance. This not only referred to the time of their captivity before Christ, but to all their captivity ever since, and that which they shall endure until their calling. Observe—1. A people who have been high in outward glory, when they depart from God, make themselves vile and contemptible. God casts contempt on the wicked who corrupt His worship. 2. Though a people be under contempt, yet God's heart may be towards them to do them good in the latter end. The love of God's election is still on this people; God remembers them, and yet intends good to them. If there be any of you whom God has so depressed as to render you contemptible, humble yourselves before God, but do not despair. Who knows but this was the only way that God had to bow your hearts? God puts His own people under contempt, and yet it is all from love to them, and with an intent to do them good at the last. 3. After many promises of God's mercy and of a glorious condition, which He intends for His people, He may yet hold a very hard hand over them for a great while. God takes supreme care that His people shall not grow wanton with His mercy. 4. Those who will delight their flesh to the full in a sensual use of the creature, it is just with God that they should be cut short, and made to live meanly and basely, made to feed on coarse fare. 5. If God will not utterly destroy a people, as He might, but reserve mercy for them at last, yet they have cause to bless God, though their subsistence for the present be most mean. It was wont to be a phrase, brown bread and the Gospel are good fare. 6. It is the way of God to humble those to whom He intends good, to prepare them for mercy by cutting them short of outward comforts. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) **God's dominion over Israel**:—The prophet's purchasing the adulteress for so much money is not to be strained to signify the Lord's redeeming of His Church, for the price is given to herself for maintenance and to purchase her goodwill, though she be His own, in order to a second marriage. But it teacheth that as a slave bought with money is at the buyer's disposal, so however Israel followed many idols, yet the Lord would prove that He alone had dominion over her, to set her in what condition He pleased. The price given for her, being but half a servant's worth, and half the estimation of a woman, may teach how little worth they are who despise the Lord and corrupt His worship. The small price, with the barley joined to it, being little and unfit food, may teach that sensuality provokes God to send pinching poverty, and that we must be stripped of all things before we become sensible, and are weaned from our idols. (*George Hutcheson.*)

Ver. 4. For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king.—*Present condition of the Jews*:—Into the state here described the Ten Tribes were brought upon their captivity, and (those only excepted who joined the Two Tribes, or have been converted to the Gospel) they have ever since remained in it. Into that same condition the two tribes were brought, after that, by "killing the Son," they had "filled up the measure of their father's" sins, and the second temple, which His presence had hallowed, was destroyed by the Romans. In that condition they have ever since remained; free from idolatry, and in a state of waiting for God, yet looking in vain for a Messiah, since they had not and would not receive Him who came unto them. Praying to God, yet without sacrifice for sin. Not owned by God, yet kept distinct and apart by His providence for a future yet to be revealed. "No one of their own nation has been able to gather them together, or to become their king." Julian the apostate attempted in vain to rebuild their temple. God interposed by miracles to hinder the effort which challenged His omnipotence. David's temporal kingdom has perished, and his line is lost, because Shiloh, the Peacemaker, is come. The typical priesthood ceased, in presence of the true "Priest after the order of Melchizedek."

The line of Aaron is forgotten, unknown, and cannot be recovered. Sacrifice, the centre of their religion, has ceased and become unlawful. Still their characteristic has been to wait. Their prayer as to the Christ has been, "May He soon be revealed." Eighteen centuries have flowed by. Their eyes have failed with looking for God's promise, whence it is not to be found. Nothing has changed this character in the mass of the people. Oppressed, released, favoured, despised, or aggrandised; in East or West; hating Christians, loving to blaspheme Christ, forced (as they would remain Jews) to explain away the prophecies which speak of Him, deprived of the sacrifices which, to their forefathers, spoke of Him and His atonement;—still, as a mass, they blindly wait for Him, the true knowledge of whom, His offices, His priesthood, and His kingdom, they have laid aside. And God has been towards them. He has preserved them from mingling with idolaters or Mahomedans. Oppression has not extinguished them, favour has not bribed them. He has kept them from abandoning their mangled worship, or the Scripture which they understand not, and whose true meaning they believe not; they have fed on the raisin-husks of a barren ritual and unspiritual legalism, since the Holy Spirit they have grieved away. Yet they exist still, a monument to us, of God's abiding wrath on sin, as Lot's wife was to them, encrusted, stiff, lifeless, only that we know "the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live." (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*)

Ver. 5. **And shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days.**—*Goodness producing fear*:—There are three points here peculiarly worthy of our notice. The designation which is given to the Gospel dispensation—the "goodness of the Lord." The first stage of its development—"in the latter days." The peculiar effect which this development was to produce on the feelings and passions of men—"They shall fear the Lord." The Gospel dispensation is in itself the essence, the consummation, the perfection of excellence. It deserves that appellation because it is the supreme gift, the supreme evidence, and the supreme instrument of Divine love. Goodness generally excites admiration and gratitude and obedience, but here it is said that the exhibition of goodness produces fear. In the first establishment of the Christian dispensation there was everything calculated to produce fear. The astonishing fall of the Jews. A most splendid exhibition of Divine power. Expectation that the end of the world was at hand. The general principle which we consider is—that the goodness of God in the Gospel is calculated to produce fear. Why? I. BECAUSE THIS GOODNESS THROWS FRESH LIGHT ON THE TERRORS OF SIN. Fear, philosophically defined, is this, a painful sensation produced by the apprehension of imminent danger, and that danger may be the loss of present enjoyment, the fear of future disappointment, or the infliction of positive injury. But this is not the fear of our text. There is in it a holy, reverential, and even pleasing awe, produced in the mind by the sight of those visions which the goodness of God in the Gospels unfolds to the mind. When Divine light pierces the darkness of the soul, the mind sees its guilt, feels its pollution, apprehends its terrific and awful doom. I much question whether any man has ever been converted without, first of all, feeling the sensation of fear. It is impossible for any man to be impressed with the depravity of his own mind unless he is impressed with the excellence of the Gospel. II. BY THE EXHIBITION OF THE GOODNESS OF THE GOSPEL WE SEE THE TERRORS OF SIN IN THE WORLD. Who is the man that detects, mourns over, and attempts by God's help to remove the sin that is in the world? Surely it is the man who has received this light. Let us be alive to the real state of things in the world. III. THE GOODNESS OF GOD IN THE GOSPEL PRODUCES FEAR BECAUSE IT IS AN EXTRAORDINARY ACT OF JEHOVAH, AND ARISES FROM ABSOLUTE SOVEREIGNTY. If our salvation were in our own hands why should we fear? If we had a power superior to any power hostile to our salvation, why should we fear? Or if our salvation depended upon the absolute justice of God—if God could not have been just without saving us, why should we fear? But the fact is that God saves us purely and exclusively because He wishes to do it. The very perfections of the Deity qualify Him to act as a sovereign. He acts from His own spontaneousness. God might not have exercised any sovereignty in the way of mercy. The sovereignty of God does real and positive good. But while it does this good, it leaves the sinner just where he was. There is a real exercise of the sovereignty in the salvation of man. Let us fear, then, because our responsibility is awfully augmented. Our

gratitude to God ought to correspond to the character of the blessings which we have received. And our exertions for the good of others ought to correspond to the value of the blessings that we enjoy. (*Caleb Morris.*) *True and worthy fear* :—It is not a servile fear, not even, as elsewhere, a fear which makes them shrink back from His awful majesty. It is a fear most opposed to this; a fear whereby “they shall flee to Him for help, from all that is to be feared”; a reverent holy awe, which should even impel them to Him; a fear of losing Him, which should make them hasten to Him. “They shall fear, and wonder exceedingly, astonished at the greatness of God’s dealing, or of their now joy.” Yet they should “hasten tremblingly,” as bearing in memory their past unfaithfulness and ill deserts, and fearing to approach but for the greater fear of turning away. Nor do they hasten with this reverent awe and awful joy to God only, but to His goodness also. His goodness draws them, and to it they betake themselves, away from all cause of fear, their sins, themselves, the evil One. Yet even His goodness is a source of awe. How much it contains! All whereby God is good in Himself, all whereby He is good to us. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *Fear to the Lord* :—I shall speak of the fear of God here only as it concerns this place. It is introduced here to show that when this glorious Church shall be formed, when God shall call home His own people the Jews, and bring in the fulness of the Gentiles, then shall the fear of God mightily prevail upon the hearts of the people; and the greater God’s goodness shall be, the more shall the fear of God be on their hearts. It is remarkable that almost all the prophecies which speak of the glorious condition of the Church ever make mention of the fear of God that should rest then on the hearts of the people. One would rather think that there should be a reference to the joy they would have. But why fear the Lord in these times? 1. Because of the glory of Christ their King. They shall behold their King in glory that shall cause fear. 2. Because of the great works of God that shall then take place. 3. Because the holiness and purity of the worship of God and of His ordinances shall cause fear. 4. Because the holiness of the saints, appearing brightly in their very faces and conversations, shall strike great fear. Surely when the saints shall be exalted in their holiness, when every one of them shall have their souls filled with God, it will cause abundance of fear in the hearts of all those who shall even converse with them. But the wicked shall fear too, as well as the saints. “Men’s hearts shall fail them for fear,” shall be verified in these days, as it was in the destruction of Jerusalem. The saints shall fear the Lord and His goodness. The goodness of God which in that day they shall fear, shall be this—(1) That ever He should regard such a wretched people as this, and pardon all their sins. (2) Because God shall then make the difference between him that feareth God, and him that feareth Him not. Then shall God take away all the reproach of His saints. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *Israel’s conversion* :—1. Albeit that Israel as a nation hath been, and yet is, rejected and lost, yet they will certainly return to God. This we should long and pray for. 2. As true repentance and conversion will appear in men’s being sensible of their great distance from God, and in their seeking to make up this distance, so all this is a sweet and blessed fruit of affliction. 3. The covenant standeth still to be forthcoming for apostates, when they repent and turn to God, renouncing false ways and worship. 4. There is no right seeking of God, nor finding Him, or the comforts of the Covenant, but through Christ, whom converted Israel shall acknowledge and embrace. 5. The conversion will appear in its constancy and perseverance, and particularly in the converts entertaining a holy fear and awe of God. 6. As God is always good to His own people, whatever they may think to the contrary, so much of His goodness will be manifested in the time of that life from the dead, when all Israel shall be saved. 7. The goodness of God will not make a true convert presumptuous, but will be unto him matter of reverence and holy fear and trembling. 8. Albeit Israel be long in gathering and converting, yet we are firmly to believe that, before time end, it will certainly come to pass; for all this shall be in the latter days. (*George Hutcheson.*) *Fearing the Lord’s goodness* :—“Not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.” I. THERE IS MUCH THAT MEN DO NOT KNOW. II. ONE THING THAT MEN DO NOT KNOW IS THE GOODNESS OF GOD. Goodness is a comprehensive term. God saw creation, and pronounced it “good.” Goodness includes beneficence, forbearance, patience. It may be likened to a rich flowing river, or to the sun shedding light and warmth all around. But goodness is not the thing that most strikes men in God. But it should be. It

may be soon everywhere. 1. Trace it in Scripture story. Life of Jacob. Tale of the wanderings. Time of captivity. Life of Jesus. 2. See it in gracious providences. Winter snows. Summer storms. Autumn harvests. 3. See it in individual experiences. If we read the story of our lives aright, we shall be able to trace everywhere upon us the "good hand of our God for good." But is this man's chief thought of God? Is it not rather the Gospel which has to be declared? Is not this the surprising, melting, persuading Gospel, whose chief rays fall from Christ crucified? III. IF MEN DID BUT KNOW THE GOODNESS OF GOD THEY WOULD FEEL THE HOLY FEAR AND HEAR THE CALL TO REPENTANCE. Men either find a sort of excuse in persisting that God is a God of wrath and judgment, or they presume on His goodness, and say that He will take no notice of sin. Spite of this, the mightiest of all moral forces is goodness. It is mother's power. It is Christ's power. It melts, draws, wins. But it is goodness not in the abstract. It is goodness brought home to us. "Who loved me, and gave Himself for me," Goodness says, "Repent." Is that hard? Nay, it is but the first step on the way to trust, love, and life eternal. God's new goodness seems to freshen the sense of His lifelong goodness, and of His saving goodness, until the cords of God seem to be all about us, and it becomes evident that He is graciously leading us to Himself. (*Robert Truick, B.A.*)

CHAPTER IV.

VER. 1. Hear the Word of the Lord, ye children of Israel: for the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land.—*A corrupt people and an expostulating God.*—In the previous chapters the prophet's language had been highly and somewhat perplexingly symbolical. In this chapter he begins to speak more plainly and in sententious utterances. I. A CORRUPT PEOPLE. The depravity of Israel is represented—1. Negatively. "There is no truth," &c. These are the great fountal virtues in the universe; and where they are not, there is a moral abjectness of the most terrible description. A people without reality, their very life a lie. No acts of beneficence performed, and the very spirit of kindness extinct. The greatest, the holiest Being in the universe utterly ignored. 2. Positively. The absence of these great virtues gives rise to tremendous crimes. (1) Profanity. Reverence is gone. (2) Falsehood. (3) Killing. (4) Dishonesty. (5) Incontinence. (6) Murder. II. AN EXPOSTULATING GOD. "The Lord hath controversy." Of all controversies this is the most awful. 1. It is a just controversy. Has not the great Ruler of the universe a right to contend against such evils? 2. It is a continuous controversy. 3. It is an unequal controversy. What are all human intellects to His? Sparks to the sun. The sinner has no argument to put before Him. He cannot deny his sins. He cannot plead accidents. He cannot plead compulsion. He cannot plead some merit as a set-off, for he has none. This controversy is still going on. It is held in the court of conscience, and you must know of its existence and character. (*Homilist.*) *Jehovah's controversy with Israel.*—In this chapter Israel is cited to appear at God's tribunal. There the Lord makes the following accusations—1. Gross violation of both Tables of the Law, both by omission and by commission. God threatens, because of this, to send extreme desolation. 2. Desperate incorrigibility. He threatens to destroy such, and the false prophets, and the body of the people and Church. 3. God accuseth the priests in Israel, that, through their fault, the people were kept in ignorance. He threatens to cast them and their posterity off. He further accuses the priests of ingratitude towards Him, for which He threatens to turn their glory into ignominy. And He even accuses them of sensuality and covetousness, rendering them unfaithful to their calling. 4. He accuses the whole people of gross idolatry, and threatens not to restrain their sin by corrections. 5. He accuses them of the idolatry of the calves, from which He dissuades Judah, as being an evidence of Israel's wantonness, and the cause of their ensuing exile. 6. He accuses Ephraim, the kingly tribe, of their incorrigibility in idolatry, their intemperance, filthiness, and corruption of justice through covetousness. For this He threatens sudden and violent destruction and captivity, where they should be ashamed of their corrupt worship.

(George Hutcheson.) *The Divine suit with Israel*.—I. THE SUIT COMMENCED. 1. The knowledge that any truth is the Word of the Lord is a special means to prepare the heart to receive it with reverence and all due respect, even though it be hard and grievous to flesh and blood. 2. The nearness of a people to God does not exempt them from God's contending with them for sin. 3. The nearer the relationship the more grievous the controversy. II. THE PLEADING OF GOD. A suit first is entered against a man; when the court day comes, there is calling for a declaration. 1. God contends not with a people without a cause. 2. God contends not against a people for little things. These are not little things—"No truth, no mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land." 3. It is in vain for any man to talk of his religion, if he make no conscience of the second table as well as the first. III. JUDGMENT PRONOUNCED (ver. 3, &c.). "Therefore shall the land mourn." 1. All the glory and pomp of the men of the world is but as a flower. 2. Times of affliction take down the jollity and bravery of men's spirits, and make them fade, wither, and pine away. 3. The good or evil of the creature depends on man. 4. God, when in a way of wrath, can cause His wrath to reach to those things that seem to be most remote. 5. No creature can help man in the time of God's wrath, for every creature suffers as well as man. IV. EXHORTATION TO JUDAH TO BEWARE THAT SHE COME NOT INTO THE SAME CONDITION (ver. 15). The prophet Hosea was sent especially to Israel, to the Ten Tribes, but here we see he turns his speech to Judah. 1. Ministers should especially look to those whom they are bound unto by office, but yet so as to labour to benefit others when occasion offers. 2. When we see our labour lost on those we most desire to benefit, we should try what we can do with others. There were many arguments why Judah should not do as Israel did. V. EXECUTION, GOD IN HIS WRATH GIVING UP EPHRAIM TO HIMSELF (ver. 17). 1. Ephraim engaging himself in false worship is now so invrapped in that sin and guilt that he cannot tell how to extricate himself. 2. The Lord has given him up to his idols. (1) It is a heavy judgment upon a people when the saints withdraw from them. (2) The Lord here virtually says to Hosea, "You can do no good to them, it is in vain for you to meddle with Ephraim." God has a time to give men over to themselves, to say that His Spirit shall no longer strive with them. It is the most woeful judgment of God upon any people, or person, when He saith in His wrath, "Let him alone." It is a testimony of very great disregard in God for His creatures. Those thus let alone are going apace to misery. God intends by this to make way for some fearful wrath that is to come upon them. It is a dreadful sign of reprobation. (Jeremiah Burroughs.) *The Lord's controversy*.—The court is set, and both attendance and attention are demanded. Whom may God expect to give Him a fair hearing, and take from Him a fair warning, but the children of Israel, His own professing people? Sin is the great mischief-maker; it sows discord between God and Israel. God sees sin in His own people, and a good action He has against them for it. He has a controversy with them for breaking covenant with Him, for bringing a reproach upon Him, and for an ungrateful return to Him for His favours. God's controversies will be pleaded, pleaded by the judgments of His mouth before they are pleaded by the judgments of His hand, that He may be justified in all He does, and may make it appear that He desires not the death of sinners; and God's pleadings ought to be attended to, for, sooner or later, they shall have a hearing. (Matthew Henry.) *There is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land.*—Things that go with the knowledge of God:—Truth and mercy are often spoken of as to Almighty God. Truth takes in all which is right, and to which God has bound Himself; mercy all beyond which God does out of His boundless love. When God says of Israel there is no truth nor mercy, He says that there is absolutely none of those two great qualities under which He comprises all His own goodness. "There is no truth," none whatever, "no regard for known truth; no conscience, no sincerity, no uprightness; no truth of words; no truth of promises; no truth in witnessing; no making good in deeds what they said in words." "Nor mercy." This word has a wide meaning; it includes all love to one another, a love issuing in acts. It includes loving-kindness, piety to parents, natural affection, forgiveness, tenderness, beneficence, mercy, goodness. The prophet, in declaring the absence of this grace, declares the absence of all included under it. Whatever could be comprised under love, whatever feelings are influenced by love, of that there was nothing. "Nor knowledge of God." The union of right knowledge and wrong practice

is hideous in itself; and it must be especially offensive to Almighty God that His creatures should know whom they offend, how they offend Him, and yet, amid and against their knowledge, choose that which displeases Him. And on that ground, perhaps, He has so created us, that when our acts are wrong, our knowledge becomes darkened. The knowledge of God is not merely to know some things of God, as that He is the Creator and Preserver of the world and of ourselves. To know things of God is not to know God Himself. We cannot know God in any respect unless we are so far made like unto Him. Knowledge of God being the gift of the Holy Ghost, he who hath not grace, cannot have that knowledge. A certain degree of speculative knowledge of God a bad man may have. But even this knowledge is not retained without love. Those who "held the truth in unrighteousness" ended (St. Paul says) by corrupting it. Certainly, the speculative and practical knowledge are bound up together through the oneness of the relation of the soul to God, whether in its thoughts of Him, or its acts towards Him. Wrong practice corrupts belief, as misbelief corrupts practice. The prophet then probably denies that there was any true knowledge of God, of any sort, whether of life or faith, or understanding or love. Ignorance of God, then, is a great evil, a source of all other sins. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *A national duty*:—No one can fail to acknowledge in this terrible picture a representation of every people which habitually breaks the laws of God; and who, having set themselves free from the restraints of religion, or, through ignorance, being unconscious of their obligation, are delivered up to the working of their own heart's lusts, and to follow their own imaginations. This consummation of depravity is even found in the chosen people of God. There was no truth where the great Source of all truth had announced the laws of moral perfection: there was no mercy where the prodigies of Divine compassion had been manifested from one generation to another: there was no knowledge of God where alone God could be known, and in the only place in which the principles of His government, and the attributes of His person, had been revealed to man. What rendered the case of Israel desperate, and remedy impossible, was this, that those who had been set apart as the depositaries of Divine knowledge, and who, by their life and doctrine, had been intended by the Almighty to act constantly, as a conservative power, against the corruptions of the mass, had yielded themselves to the popular torrent, and turned rank and station, the dignity of a holy vocation, and the talents of knowledge and intellect to the promotion of those vices which God had given them a solemn commission to withstand. They were weary of resisting the tendencies of the age and the godless spirit which found too complete an echo in their own hearts. So the princes and priests of Israel deserted their post, sealed up the records of God's Word, and by ceasing to inculcate the awful sanctions of His law, and concealing from the people those oracles in which alone knowledge and wisdom are to be found, filled up to the brim the measure of their iniquity. That measure was filled up because they who had knowledge and had the guardianship of God's heritage had turned traitors and withheld the Bread of Life from the famishing people. To whatever privileges a people may have been elected, no outward marks of distinction, apart from a corresponding holiness, will avail in the sight of Him who is no respecter of persons, and who trieth the very reins and hearts. The history of Israel is nothing but the annals of those judgments with which He has visited their abuse of mercies, and their never-ending neglect or perversion of that most awful of all deposits, spiritual knowledge. If men in all times have been made accountable to God for the fate of their fellow-creatures, and most assuredly they have, it behoves us to look well to our own case, and beware how we involve ourselves in the participation of such guilt. Let us not deceive ourselves by supposing that the sins and the sanctions, the moral actions and the moral dealings of the elder covenant are inapplicable to ourselves. Considerable differences there may be, but they are all against us, and an increase of our responsibility. It is known to few of us how vast are the masses of ignorance and vice which undermine the surface of this favoured land. (*J. Garbett.*)

Ver. 3. **Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish.**—*The social causes of human misery*:—It is a principle illustrated by the holy records, that when immorality has thoroughly infected a state, in defiance of all warning and ordinary discipline, it is given up to destruc-

tion, as was Sodom, and also many of the most renowned empires of ancient times. Nothing is more certain and calculable in action and result than are social evils and social virtues. To inquire into their nature and operation is the way to discover a remedy for a most serious evil, and to furnish the most powerful motives for its rigorous and incessant application. There is much misery in the world. A primary cause of it is to be found in man himself. We are not to blame society, or social relations in any of their forms, for all the evils that exist in, and seem to be developed by them. Man, by his very constitution, is a social creature. The depravity of man, both as the judicial result of his sin, and as aggravated by his habits both of thought and sensual indulgence, insinuates itself into all that he does, and corrupts every relation into which he enters. Each relation, therefore, however fitted to produce and increase his happiness, is found to contribute something to his misery, and presents to the observer some new form and modification of human suffering. Consider the common relations of human society. I. THE POLITICAL. If justice were enthroned in every heart there would be no necessity for any political economy. The authority of God in every man's conscience would render all human government totally unnecessary. Government as a human institution can be traced no higher than to the necessities that spring from the fall. So long as government is the administration of justice—the agency by which wrong and outrage are repressed and punished—it must contribute in a most effectual manner to the good of a community. It is not because of this relation between the governor and governed that political evils exist. When the governor ceases to be the administrator of justice at all, and when the abettors of wrong obtain power and influence, then righteousness is hurled from her throne, and law trampled in the mire under the feet of a lawless and licentious mob. The ruin of a state has generally commenced with the corruption of its government. The amount of calamity and woe inflicted on our species by corrupt and despotic governments forms too serious an item to be passed over in silence. II. THE CAUSES OF HUMAN MISERY OPERATING THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF THE RELATIONS OF COMMERCE. These we take in their most extensive sense, including the intercourse and the arrangements, agreed upon generally, for conducting the manufacturing and mercantile departments of trade. The morals of trade, it is to be feared, are but indefinite at the best. Gain is the object pursued; but the means of acquiring it are as various as the dispositions and amount of principle felt by the candidates will admit. There are certainly parts of the economy of trade that require attention and no slight measure of reform. There is much of suffering and unhappiness observable in the commercial relations of life; and these may be clearly traced either to causes originating in something defective in the moral principles on which the economy of trade is based, or in the dispositions of those who take a part in conducting its several departments. Illustrate from the relation of master and servant, of the employer and the employed. Late hours; time for payment of wages; speculation; getting out of temporary difficulties by giving accommodation bills, &c. III. THE CAUSES OF HUMAN MISERY IN THE RELATIONS OF FRIENDSHIP AND PRIVATE SOCIETY. 1. Society has its temptations, and these, if not carefully watched, may lead us into much evil. One of the first consequences of a fondness for society is the diminished fervour of the domestic affections. Another temptation is a love of display. A certain indolence too is generally induced by the kind of social intercourse to which we are now referring. 2. Society has its actual vices. What so pernicious as envy? Consider the conventional estimate formed of the character of vices, such as gambling. There never was a day in which the debauching indulgence of the appetites was so inexcusable as the present. The cure of all the evil and misery is the adoption of the principle and rule,—“Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” (*J. Robinson.*) A terrible deprivation:—A deprivation that comes upon the people in consequence of their heinous iniquities. L. A DEPRIVATION OF BOTH MATERIAL AND SPIRITUAL GOOD. 1. Of material good. (1) Health. Sin is inimical to the bodily health and vigour of men and nations; it insidiously saps the constitution. (2) Means of subsistence. Reference is to one of those droughts that occasionally occur in the East, and is ever one of the greatest calamities. How soon the Eternal can destroy our means of subsistence! 2. Of spiritual good. Their presumptuous guilt was as great as that of one who refused to obey the priest when giving judgment in the name of Jehovah (*Deut. xvii. 12*). One of the greatest spiritual blessings of mankind is the strife and reproof of godly men. What a deprivation for

these to be taken away! II. A DEPRIVATION LEADING TO A TERRIBLE DOOM. 1. The destruction of both priests and people. The meaning is that no time, night or day, shall be free from the slaughter both of the priests and of the people. This was literally true of the Ten Tribes at this time. 2. The destruction of the social state. "And I will destroy thy mother." Who was the mother? The Israelitish state. And it was destroyed. (*Homilist.*) With the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven.—*The sharers in Divine judgment*:—The Lord's sentence or threatening for these sins is that extreme desolation shall come, not only on the people, but on the land, and on all the creatures for their sakes, even on the fishes which were in lakes and ponds in the land. Doctrine—1. The judgments of God upon the visible Church will be very sad and grievous, when they are inflicted, and as universal as sin hath been. 2. Albeit the Lord's judgments on sinful and impenitent people do at first utterly consume them, yet that will be only that they may live awhile to feel their own miseries, and then be consumed by them, if they repent not. 3. Sinful man is a great enemy to all the creatures, as well as to himself; he makes both himself and them to mourn and pine away, because he will not mourn indeed. 4. As the glory of all the creatures is but a flower, which God will soon make to wither and languish when He pursueth for sin, so the creatures will not help man when God is angry at him; but as these draw him from God, so God is provoked to cut him short in them, as here they are consumed with him. (*George Hutcheson.*) *All creatures share the calamities of sin*:—As beasts, birds, and fishes, and in a word, all other things, have been created for the use of men, it is no wonder that God should extend the tokens of His curse to all creatures, above and below, when His purpose is to punish men. When God curses innocent animals for our sake, we then dread the more, except, indeed, we be under the influence of extreme stupor. (*John Calvin.*)

Ver. 4. Yet let no man strive, nor reprove another.—*Restraint of converting agencies*.—Here is given an order of court that no pains should be taken with the condemned criminal to bring him to repentance, and the reason for that order. I. THE ORDER ITSELF. "Let no man strive, nor reprove another." Let no means be used to reduce or reclaim them; let their physicians give them up as desperate and past cure. It intimates that as long as there is any hope we ought to reprove sinners for their sins. It is a duty we owe to one another to give and take reproof. Sometimes there is need to rebuke sharply, not only to reprove but to strive, so loth are men to part with their sins. But it is a sign that persons and people are abandoned to ruin when God says, "Let them not be reprov'd." They are so hardened in sin, and so ripened for ruin, that it will be to little purpose either to deal with them, or to deal with God for them. It bodes ill to a people when reprovers are silenced. II. THE REASONS OF THIS ORDER. 1. They are determined to go on in sin, and no reproofs will cure them of that. "Thy people are as those that strive with the priests"; they have grown so very impudent in sin that they will fly in the face even of a priest himself if he should but give them the least check. Those sinners have their hearts wickedly hardened who quarrel with their ministers for dealing faithfully with them. 2. God also is determined to proceed in their ruin. "Therefore shalt thou fall." The ruin of those who have helped to ruin others will, in a special manner, be intolerable. When all are involved in guilt nothing less can be expected than that all should be involved in ruin. (*Matthew Henry.*)

Ver. 5. Therefore shalt thou fall in the day, and the prophet also shall fall with thee in the night, and I will destroy thy mother.—*Common destruction*.—The threatening is that destruction should come upon such sinners and on the false prophets who flattered and soothed them up in this course. Learn—1. Men's opposing of the Word, their rejecting of reproof, and blessing themselves when they are rid of it, will not avail them, nor hold off wrath, but rather hasten it. 2. How high soever men exalt themselves in their opposition to God and His truth, yet that guilt will bring them down, and when God begins to reckon, He will teach every sinner particularly. 3. Vengeance can reach sinners in the height of their prosperity, and can ruin them suddenly and unavoidably. 4. It is a plague upon sinners that when they go farthest wrong, and oppose the faithful servants of God, yet they will never want corrupt men pretending to come in God's name to bolster them up in their evil way, and God hath a sad contro-

versy against such seducers. 5. However sinners shelter themselves under the privileges of a visible Church or state, yet the Lord may let them find that their sin doth not only undo themselves, but bring utter desolation also on the Church and nation whereof they are. Therefore it is subjoined, "And I will destroy thy mother." (*George Hutcheson.*)

Ver. 6. **My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.**—*The perils of ignorance.*—If there is a knowledge on which not only the improvements and the refinements but the very being of society depends, the state of this must be in its nature most deeply awful and interesting. It was the language of pagan philosophy that such a knowledge did exist. The heathen wisdom was enabled to discern that all science, as exercised in its inferior provinces, required some principle of a sublimer nature, which might afford cement, consistence, and basis to every subordinate effort and exertion of the human intellect. In exploring this principle they however failed—and instead of substantial truth, were lost in the delusive twilight of a magnificent though ineffectual and perpetually baffled metaphysical speculation. Those on whom the day-star of revelation arose, found in the distinct discovery of a moral Governor of the universe, and the full and unequivocal display of His attributes, that knowledge which marks the origin, the limits, and the destination of every faculty, talent, and acquisition. When God tells us there is a knowledge "for the lack of which a people is destroyed," we must infer that it is the knowledge of Himself, His nature, His providence, and His power. If it be true that "knowledge and wisdom are the stability of prosperous times," the converse will equally claim our attention. Inquire into the moral causes of both these propositions. It is not my intention to institute a regular comparison between the various acquisitions and exertions of ourselves and our predecessors. I mark those intellectual habits which interfere with the cultivation of that knowledge which directs, superintends, and sanctifies every portion of wisdom we can acquire. Whatever was the region of science which our predecessors explored, they steadily kept in view the great Source of every good and perfect gift. And this not only in theology proper, but also in history, moral science, and natural philosophy. Every work was in some measure a school of Divine knowledge. Now it is rarely indeed that, except in works directly treating of theology, any pious reference, even when the subject most points to it, is made to the dispensation and moral government of Almighty God. To a variety of causes this may be traced; to none more than to pride, or to its abortion, vanity. This engenders a fondness for paradox, than which nothing can be a greater obstruction to all knowledge, and particularly to the knowledge of God and His dispensations. All paradox, even in its most ingenious forms, is mere debility, and in no instance a mark of energy or strength of mind. It is observable that, in proportion to the love for this, the intellectual appetite is palled and vitiated for the perception and investigation of genuine truth. Hence those mischievous abstractions, which when introduced into religion, morals, and politics have, from causes comparatively mean, produced the most extended and tremendous effects. In a short time there will (we have reason to fear) remain but two kinds of persons among us, either those who think not at all, or those whose imaginations are active indeed, but continually evil. Of these latter it may be said, "Their foolish heart was darkened." Of the principles, I do not say of the detail, of political science, a sound theology is the only sure and steady basis. Now we trace the operations by which a destruction so extended in its consequences has been effected. The master-spring of every principle which can permanently secure the stability of a people is the fear and knowledge of Almighty God. The first operation of a principle of atheism, and perhaps one of the most formidable in its consequences, is that which leads political men to conceive of Christianity as a mere auxiliary to the State. Religion was not instituted (in the Divine council I mean) for the purpose of society and government, but society and government for the purposes of religion. As atheism presumptuously attempts to discard a moral government, in order to open a fearless unrestrained indulgence for the impetuosity of passion, so superstition administers, upon a principle of commutation, to those same indulgences. It is utterly subversive of the two grand pillars of the Divine administration, His justice and His mercy. Thus both atheism and superstition are instruments of the general adversary of mankind. Their origin is in the wilful ignorance of God, and their operation in the merci-

less destruction of His creatures. The present disastrous state of human affairs can only be ascribed to one source, a corruption of morals, produced by a previous depravation of the opinions of mankind. If the events we deplore and deprecate arise from ignorance, error, and false opinion; and this ignorance is specifically the ignorance of Almighty God and His dispensations, to revive and disseminate with activity the principles of a sound, Christian, and orthodox theology will be our best interest, as it is our bounden duty. (*T. Rennell, D.D.*)

The sin of public teachers:—Here made responsible for the ignorance of the people.

1. As ignorance is a very rife and destroying sin in the visible Church, so the guilt thereof doth oftentimes lie in great part at preachers' doors. 2. Such as would be able to teach others, ought to take much pains that they may be instructed themselves from God in His Word. 3. The more familiar occasion of converse men have with holy things, wanting holiness, their contempt and dislike of them will be the greater, and their opposition to light have the more perversity and the less infirmity in it. 4. Such as do for a time reject and resist means of knowledge, may at last come to lose the light they had. 5. The more relation any pretend to God, by virtue of their general or particular calling, the Lord will make use thereof to aggravate their sin and unanswerable walking. 6. Unfaithfulness in offices will cast men out of the Church, as unsavoury salt is cast out, which is a sad judgment. 7. It is a righteous judgment on unfaithful ministers that God suffers their posterity to be neglected. (*George Hutcheson.*)

Lack of knowledge:—As if he had said, If they had the knowledge of God, they might have prevented all this, but they were ignorant and sottish people, and this was the forerunner of misery and destruction. The heathens were wont to say that if their god Jupiter would destroy one, he would first besot him; so these people were first besotted and then destroyed. Ignorance is not the mother of devotion, but rather the father and mother too of destruction. In the beginning of this chapter we have the sin of ignorance set forth, here we have its danger. There we had the charge, that they had "no knowledge in the land"; here we have the judgment, that they "are destroyed for want of knowledge." Ignorance is not only the deformity of the soul as blindness is the deformity of the face; though a man or woman have never such a comely face otherwise, yet if they be blind, or have but one eye, it mars their beauty; so ignorance takes away the beauty of the soul; and not only so, but is dangerous and destructive, and that in these respects—1. The rational creature is very active of itself, and will always be in motion, always working. Then, wanting knowledge, and surrounded by pits and snares, how dangerous is his situation! 2. Man's way is for eternity, and there is but one way that leads to an eternity of happiness, and that lies in the midst of a hundred crossways and bypaths. If he have not light, if he want knowledge, what is to become of him? 3. Man is not only going onward through dangers and byways, but he must go on with his own light. The soul that is ignorant no angel in heaven can help, except as an instrument of God to bring sight into his eyes. 4. The work we are to do about our souls and eternal estates is the most curious and most difficult piece of work, and we must do it by our own light. 5. Blindness in this world makes men objects of pity and compassion, but this ignorance and blindness make men to be the objects of the hatred and curse of God. God gave us light at first, we have brought ignorance upon ourselves. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*)

Lack of knowledge the destruction of a people:—The tide of human affairs is ever throwing up upon the surface of society some one particular subject of special and engrossing interest. One of the prominent subjects of our time is education. It has been forced on the minds of thoughtful men by the lamentable results of allowing an exuberant population to outgrow the means of their moral and religious training, bequeathed by the wisdom and piety of their forefathers. Hosea the prophet was commissioned to denounce God's just displeasure, and His determination to inflict punishment upon a people that refused to be reformed. God had a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there was no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. It is a serious question how far such language may befit ourselves. It is certain that there is a fearful lack of "knowledge of God" in our times. I. WHAT IS THE KNOWLEDGE, THE LACK OF WHICH DESTROYS A PEOPLE? The question is analogous to another, What is education? Are we agreed among ourselves as to what is to be understood by this expression? There is a class of men whose ideas of knowledge and education are almost confined to the acquisition and communication of the facts and principles of physical and general science. Educa-

tion, in their estimation, is training up the young to be in mature life well-informed and philosophical men: men who can keep pace with and help on the forward movements of an inquiring and intellectual age. But this is not knowledge, in the true and full sense of the term, neither is this education. We are still short of the truth if we define knowledge to be acquaintance with duties as well as facts, with the world within a man, as well as the world without him; and education to be a process of training for the moral as well as the intellectual part of man, the discipline of the will as well as that of the mind. This is well as far as it goes; but it is not the whole truth. It is indeed based upon a false principle, that the inculcation of moral truths, and cultivation of moral habits will suffice to regulate and control the heart and will of man. It dreams of a moral regeneration without an adequate regenerating principle, of moral obedience without a sufficiently constraining motive. It assumes that a man may be lifted up above the influence of evil by presenting to his mind the cold abstraction of goodness. The advocates of these moral systems are ignorant of the materials upon which they would work. They do not know the nature of man. They forget that he is corrupt and depraved. The moral sense of man is so beclouded by sin that to behold the beauty of virtue is neither to love nor to embrace it. Education, in its primary idea, is the knowledge of God in His relation to man: the communication of this knowledge to the heart, through the medium of the understanding. Education is training as well as teaching. It teaches moral duties based upon the knowledge of God as a reconciled Father in Christ Jesus. Education is worthless when severed from religion. Lay the foundation deeply in the principles of true religion, and you may then proceed to build up a goodly superstructure of all that is worthy of the name of useful knowledge.

II. THE ANXIOUS CONDITIONS OF SOCIETY ARE EXPLAINED BY THE LACK OF THIS KNOWLEDGE. Reflecting minds have serious thoughts upon the present aspect of our domestic national affairs. We have been appalled by the frightful statistics of ignorance and vice, of the mass of corruption fermenting amidst our overgrown population. While the prodigious multiplication of human beings has been advancing, there has been no corresponding multiplication of appliances for the moral and religious training of their souls, either as children or adults. Can it be wondered at that irreligion and infidelity, and principles of anarchy and insubordination, and vice in some of its most revolting forms have overspread these densely peopled districts? We cannot shut our eyes to what is going on around us. A population has grown up unlearned in true knowledge. The demoralising process is going on. It is a self-propagating evil. One uneducated generation begets another, and probably a worse. Our fathers did much for national education, according to the exigencies of their own times. We must follow along their line in this, that religion entered, as a component element, into all their foundations. (*W. Nicholson, M.A.*) *The danger of a lack of knowledge*.—I. THE PERSONS. "My people." A frequent designation of the Israelitish people. Jehovah was emphatically to them a God, and they were emphatically to Him a people. But is God's greatest goodness to Israel to be compared with the civil and religious privileges with which He has distinguished this favoured country? There is a tendency in nations as well as in individuals to be rendered careless and secure by the long possession of privileges and advantages. And the history of Israel is intended to teach a lesson of national warning.

II. THEIR CONDITION. "My people are destroyed." Notwithstanding all God's favour towards them, yet He abandoned them to desolation, He gave them over to destruction. And what ground of security has Britain any more than Israel, except in the favour and protection of God? It is impossible for any reflecting person to consider the internal state of our country without feeling that we have within ourselves the elements of destruction, the materials for a wide-wasting desolation.

III. THE CAUSE OF THAT CONDITION. "For lack of knowledge." Lack of the knowledge of God and religion. This was God's ground of complaint, and for this He entered into judgment with them. This lack of knowledge was accompanied and followed by a general corruption of morals, as the next words to our text show. When the corruption became general, and the fruits of this religious ignorance were ripe, God thrust in the sharp sickle of His judgments, and reaped the harvest in His wrath. Observe then the bearing which the state of the collective body of the people as to religious knowledge must have upon the question of national safety and national ruin. If there be a lack of the knowledge of God and His truth in the bulk of the people, the destruction of the nation will be inevitable. And if ruin come upon any land,

who are the sufferers? If the body be crushed by a fall, which of the members will escape the anguish? Hence the state of the people is the concern of all. God has bound all classes in one common bond of interest: all must rejoice, or all must suffer together. What then is the state of our population with respect to religious knowledge? And what must be the end of these things? (*Thomas Best, M.A.*) *Neglect of teaching*:—God here attacks the priests, but includes the whole people. For teaching prevailed not among them, as it ought to have done. The Lord reproaches the Israelites for their ingratitude, seeing He had kindled among them the light of celestial wisdom. How did the Israelites perish through ignorance? They closed their eyes against the celestial light, because they deigned not to become teachable, so as to learn the wisdom of the eternal Father. We see the guilt of the people in that they had malignantly suppressed the teaching of the law. The people perished without knowledge, because they would perish. (*John Calvin.*) *The lack of knowledge*:—I. THE STATEMENT OF THE TEXT IS NO EXAGGERATION. Look at the Jewish nation. The whole nation was a school, and the law was their schoolmaster to bring them to Christ. But it failed—utterly failed—to accomplish this. The enmity of the human heart came out amongst the Jewish people. II. SOME OF THE ENDEAVOURS MEN MAKE TO RECTIFY EXISTING EVILS. Emphatically this is an age of progress; of progress in many things that have rendered man wiser, and the world happier. Philosophy takes a higher range of thought. Literature is nobler and healthier in its tone. Art is purer than Grecian art. Science is not atheistic. Many run to and fro, and knowledge is multiplied. We recognise this progress thankfully; it is all good, though not the highest good. It is all capable of being turned to spiritual advantage. But by it society is not regenerated: there are social questions of the deepest importance that are not yet settled. There are forms of ignorance most appalling, developments of ignorance most deplorable, and a general spirit of scepticism widely spread. Man has done, and is doing, his very utmost to set the world right, and yet the world continues wrong. III. THE GOSPEL ANNOUNCES ITSELF AS SUFFICIENT TO MEET AND TO REMOVE ALL THE MISERIES OF HUMANITY. 1. It is this which distinguishes the Gospel from all other schemes. Many things are palliatives, but you can find nothing that pretends to do all the work that man requires to have done for him but the Gospel. Then indifference to the Gospel is the most fearful proof that could be presented to the mind of my voluntary ignorance and sin. 2. We may with confidence say that the Gospel not only professes to do this but has done all this. It has proved itself the great salvation. (*W. G. Barrett.*) *Religious ignorance*:—I. It is DESTRUCTIVE. It is not the mother of devotion, it is the mother of destruction. 1. What does it destroy? The growth of the soul in power, beauty, and fruitfulness. 2. How does it destroy? How can the lack of a thing destroy? The lack of heat and moisture will kill the vegetable kingdom; the lack of air will cause the extinction of all animal life. The soul without knowledge of God is like a plant without heat or moisture, an animal without the salubrious breeze. II. It is WILFUL. No culpability in a man being ignorant of some things. The knowledge of God comes to him whether he will or not. In nature, in reason, in intuitions of his moral being. Ignorance of God is a criminal ignorance. III. It is GOD-OFFENDING. He deals out retribution—1. To themselves. 2. To their children. It is a Divine law springing from the constitution of society, that the iniquities of the fathers shall be visited on their children. (*Homilist.*) *Ignorance destructive*:—Ignorance disqualifies a man for those situations in life that require the exercise of wisdom and discretion: it degrades him in society below the rank of those who would otherwise be deemed his equals or inferiors; and it not unfrequently leads to idleness, dissipation, and vice. But ignorance of religion is of infinitely worse consequence, because it ensures the everlasting destruction of the soul. I. THE IGNORANCE OF THE CHRISTIAN WORLD. Among nominal Christians there is a great lack of knowledge: an ignorance—1. Of themselves. Of their blindness, guilt, depravity, helplessness. 2. Of God. Of His holiness, justice, truth. 3. Of Christ. They may confess His Godhead, and acknowledge Him as a Saviour. But what do they know of Him as He is in Himself, or as He is to us? II. THE FATAL CONSEQUENCES OF THIS IGNORANCE. Lack of spiritual knowledge—1. Tends to men's destruction. 2. Will issue in their destruction. Infer—1. How carefully should we improve the means of grace? 2. How earnestly should we pray for the teachings of God's Spirit. 3. How thankful we should be for any measure of Divine knowledge. (*Skeletons of*

Sermons.) True knowledge for the people.—Neither wealth nor political forms of government give knowledge to a people. They may give them, or obtain for them, technical information in most things, but they do not give that knowledge which is the height of wisdom—that knowledge which will guide a man aright in his intercourse with the world. On the contrary, a continuously changing government and an accumulation of wealth have a great tendency to demoralise a nation, and to retard, rather than to foster, the knowledge of that which is righteous and true. As it was in the early ages, so it has continued through the various nations which have existed upon the earth down to the present time; and the Jewish nation fell under the ordinary laws of social progress when they departed from the directions which were given, and the advice which was offered by God Himself. Even the chosen people of the Almighty fell under the power of the tyrant custom; and notwithstanding their advance in civilisation and wealth, they erred and were “destroyed for lack of knowledge.” Why was this? Because the technical information which they obtained from their teachers was not that which would support the actions of their daily life, was not that which would assist in guiding them through the devious windings of the world in which they lived, but had relation merely to the subject which was then in hand, and was of no further avail when once that subject was laid on one side. As a natural consequence of this narrow and superficial training, the minds of the people generally became contracted until they could not see any political or religious question in its proper bearings, or to its whole extent. They saw what related to the question of the hour, and being content with this, they ultimately sank under a despotism of body and mind; for the mind sank and was debased long before the body felt any evil effects from the narrowing of views which had been going on for some time amongst the people. In the time of Hosea the people were wandering to and fro from lack of knowledge, and the prejudices of the age were being stirred up for the services of party, instead of being laid aside in the desire to teach the people only that which was true. Prejudice is one of the most difficult things which men have to encounter in their desire to obtain a knowledge of the truth. When once the mind has taken up any opinion it lays hold of it as its own, and follows it out regardless of what may be said by others to the contrary. It considers that which it holds to be the truth; and, as a natural consequence, looks upon the sayings of those who oppose it as absolutely false, and without any legitimate foundation upon which to stand. Nor is it in the ordinary course of events worth while to try and disabuse people of their prejudices. And not only do our prejudices impel us to hold with tenacity that which we have taken up as the truth, but they impel us to dislike and to hate those who may differ from us. A man is truly orthodox when he thinks as we think; but let him differ from us only in one jot or tittle, and then his opinions are at once pronounced to be heterodox, and he himself adjudged as an enemy. There are some conclusions which must be admitted by every reflecting mind as soon as they are presented to it, and they must also be acknowledged as truths the moment they are offered for consideration. When we reflect upon the matter for a moment, it is evident that each one ought “to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the world,” because it is clearly an offence against the well-being of society that men should live otherwise. Then let us not be the servants of men, for there is One greater than they. Let us not be the followers of a party, for there is One wiser than it. But let us seek honestly after the truth wherever it may be found; and whilst we hold Augustine as a friend, and Luther and Calvin as friends,—whilst we respect men of every party—let us ever bear in mind that we have a duty to perform far higher than that of clansmen: we have to teach the truth as it is in Jesus, to proclaim His name above that of every other name, and to endeavour above all things to strive manfully to learn and to do that which is right. (*F. T. Swinbourne.*)

The importance of religious knowledge.—Both philosophers and divines agree that the first step to true knowledge is a discovery of our own ignorance; all wise men will confess that the more they know the more a modest sense of the narrow limits of their understanding increases. The recovery of true knowledge, with a constant improvement therein ourselves, and the using our utmost endeavours to propagate it among mankind, are some of the most noble and rational ends of our existence. Notwithstanding His severe reproachings and threatenings of Ephraim, how tenderly the Lord expostulates with them! A wilful neglect of true knowledge is represented as the spring of all their provocations and their danger. Ignorance is

represented as the occasion of their ruin. I. THE TITLE GIVEN TO THE PEOPLE WHO ARE EXPOSED TO THIS DESTRUCTION. Still, spite of their sin, they are called "My people." This title may be applied to mankind in general, and in a strict manner to those who are known as the "elect." Here it is applied to the kingdom of the Ten Tribes, under the name Ephraim. Though they had revolted from Him, God still condescends to own His relation to them. And this relation materially aggravates their crimes. II. WHAT IS THIS KNOWLEDGE WHICH IS OF SUCH IMPORTANCE? Men may be great strangers to philosophy, to human arts, and carnal wisdom, and yet not be involved in that destruction which is certainly connected with the ignorance mentioned in the text. As true religion is the only effectual security of private persons from this ruin, so it is with respect to society. Religious knowledge must be intended in this text. 1. Men might learn much by seriously observing what is presented to their view all round about them; and much more if they would examine their own frame, and reflect on the various warnings of that monitor which is in every breast. 2. It is the knowledge which God has been pleased to reveal, which is chiefly intended here. This was, in Hosea's time, to be found in the books of Moses and the prophets. This is, for us, the knowledge that is conveyed by the Gospel. III. THE SAD OCCASIONS OF THE WANT OF THIS KNOWLEDGE, ESPECIALLY IN WHAT IS CALLED A LAND OF LIGHT. 1. A thoughtless neglect of those sober reflections to which we are led even by that measure of natural light, which, in the midst of all our depravity, is mercifully continued to us. Observation teaches us what effect negligence will have on our temporal affairs. When men come to divide precious time principally between the cares about the enlargement of their worldly substance, and the various methods their own corruptions will dictate, very little will be left for nobler improvements. 2. The want of the written revelation must needs be attended with the most deplorable ignorance. As may be seen in the history of those nations which have wanted this glorious advantage. 3. Ignorance of religion must needs prevail where there is the want of a skilful, faithful, and laborious ministry. 4. A pious education of our youth is another method of cultivating religious knowledge. This foundation must be chiefly laid in family instruction. We have lived to see the day when the impression of religious sentiments on young minds is not only by many laid aside, but such a neglect is defended. It is said to prevent any bar being put to what is called "free thinking." The great neglect of family religion, and the pious example which superiors by the laws of reason are indispensably obliged to set before those under their care, as it has long been complained of, if not soon reformed must bring peril on our Churches and on our land. 5. The growth of ignorance among the poorer sort is a matter of peculiar consequence. 6. Among good men there is too great a neglect of application to Heaven for a blessing on such attempts as are made to promote useful knowledge, and of a dependence on the Spirit of God, who is only able to make them successful. IV. THE DESTRUCTION WHICH IS THE NATURAL AND SAD CONSEQUENCE OF THIS IGNORANCE. Reference is first to those temporal calamities which befall these people for their sins; or it relates to future temporal calamities which Hosea predicted. But ignorance persisted in exposes public communities to almost every criminal and dangerous disorder, and in the end brings on national ruin; and it is big with every spiritual as well as temporal mischief to private persons where it prevails. Ignorance of Divine things keeps the conscience under a fatal stupidity, it exposes men to the devices of the old serpent, and to the crafty attempts of every seducer; it exposes us to every kind of error in conduct, and obstructs our usefulness both in public and in private life. V. THE REMEDIES WHICH SHOULD BE APPLIED TO SO DANGEROUS A DISEASE. 1. We should cheerfully and constantly attend on those advantages Heaven has bestowed on us, that we read and hear, that we inquire and meditate, and watch and pray, as those who are convinced that ignorance has been their ruin, and that happiness in this life is absolutely connected with religious knowledge, and that the lives of our souls depend upon it. 2. We should do all we can to promote the influence of religious knowledge on the minds of others, by the careful instruction of our families, and the support of a well-qualified ministry. VI. SOME APPLICATIONS OF WHAT HAS BEEN SAID. 1. How deplorable is the state of multitudes among us, who lie under the grossest ignorance. 2. We ought to rejoice in our civil constitution, and to encourage and defend our religious advantages. (*Joseph Stennett, D.D.*) *Ignorance of God among professing Christians*:—The ungodliness of Israel in Hosea's time was in a great measure to be traced to ignorance of the true God; an ignor-

ance for which they were responsible, because there was the light of God's truth in their land. It was peculiarly sinful, inasmuch as it was ignorance in God's professing people. And the ignorance involved their ruin. I. THE PRESENT AND FUTURE MISERY OF IGNORANCE OF GOD. No real earthly happiness can be enjoyed where there is ignorance of God. The pleasures of sin are not happiness, though they often pass for it. Nor is the pursuit of happiness, or the acquisition of wealth. Happiness must be sought in a knowledge of, and obedience to, the will and ways of God. Where there is the true knowledge of God, there is no real wretchedness, though there may be much tribulation. II. THAT WHICH AGGRAVATES THE MISERY IS OUR RELATION TO GOD AS HIS PEOPLE. 1. It aggravates their sin, because it is the bounden duty of every man to seek the knowledge of God as the "one thing needful." We are not to wait to have this knowledge forced upon us, we are bound to seek it. If the guilt of God's people who remain in ignorance of Him be aggravated by their relation to Him, so likewise is the guilt of those aggravated who are bound to teach God's people. Civil government stands upon religious grounds, and has religious obligations. The Church is the bulwark of every Christian State. (*W. J. Brodrick, M.A.*) *The necessity of a union between religion and education.* :—I. THE NECESSARY CONNECTION BETWEEN RELIGION AND EDUCATION. The word "education" suggests the idea of preparing the young for the great duties incumbent on them in the various relations of life; and with a view to this object, includes the communication of knowledge, the inculcation of right principles, and the formation of corresponding habits in those who are thus to be the subjects of it. But what are we to understand by the great duties incumbent upon us in the different relations of life? Some think that the end and purpose of their existence have been met when they have fairly performed their present duties, and honourably met their obligations. But these are practical atheists, for they completely exclude God from any right to the homage of His rational creatures, and reduce man to the degradation and wretchedness of a being who, whatever other heights he may attain, is incapable of rising to the knowledge, the love, the service, and the everlasting enjoyment of his Maker. In opposition to such views, we say, that even reason and conscience, above all the Word of God, declare that man is endowed with a nature that renders him capable of communion with the great, eternal, glorious God; nay, that the advancement of the praise of this God is the very end of his existence; and in pursuing this end he secures present and everlasting happiness. This duty may, however, be acknowledged, and yet the proper principles and conduct attending it may be repudiated. If the former view was practical atheism, this is practical infidelity. Milton says: "The end of learning is to repair the ruins of our first parents, by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love Him, to imitate Him, to be like Him as we may the nearest, by possessing our souls of true virtue, which, being united to the heavenly grace of faith, makes up the highest perfection." Can Christian training be efficiently, and ought it to be exclusively discharged by parents? II. THE IMPORTANCE AND ADVANTAGES OF A UNION BETWEEN RELIGION AND EDUCATION. Man was originally framed so as to derive happiness from the knowledge, love, and service of God. It is when the love of God is shed abroad on the heart of fallen man that the different parts of his moral constitution will resume, as it were, their proper place and connection, and that he himself will be enabled to act as he was designed for the glory of God, in all the varied relations in which he stands. When religious knowledge is communicated and made effectual for the conversion of the soul to God, man is under the influence of that principle which will most certainly and with increasing strength constrain him to the discharge of every obligation in regard to God, to himself, and to his fellow-creatures, and thus fit him for the attainment of the great end of his being. Put forth this knowledge in all its bearings, and you will do that which, with the Divine blessing, will enable him to discharge with consistency and perseverance, with honour, comfort, and usefulness, the great duties of life. But how sad, and morally helpless, is the condition of those who are allowed to grow up, not only without a religious education, but without an education of any kind! (*Abercromby L. Gordon.*) *Hindrances to knowledge.* :—Very different and almost opposite things are said of knowledge in the Holy Scriptures. Such may be found in the writings of St. Paul. Following the sound rather than the sense of some of St. Paul's expressions, it has been the fashion with some to decry altogether the value of knowledge, whether on religious or common subjects. What is knowledge? The old definition is,

"Knowledge is the firm belief of something true, on sufficient grounds." Belief is necessary, but belief is not enough. Fully testing our knowledge, it may be said that we know almost nothing. In later life we become aware of this, and very painfully. But the charge of ignorance (in the true meaning of that word) may be brought as justly against the so-called enlightenment of this age, as against the less showy pretensions of that which is now gone by. Two or three causes for the lack of real knowledge may be given. 1. The multiplication of outward helps and facilities for learning has a direct tendency to counteract true knowledge. It seems to be a condition of knowledge that it shall not come too easily. Knowledge must be fetched by exertions of our own. 2. A misuse of stimulus in the pursuit of knowledge is an impediment. One reason why many of us do not know more is that we have made knowledge a means instead of an end—a means of getting distinction. The use of emulation as a stimulus to knowledge is a perilous, though it may be a necessary expedient. Be on your guard, too, against a misuse of a temporary stimulus acting upon parts of your nature which are, by comparison, the lower rather than the higher. Emulation is higher than appetite, but it is lower than that to which manly principle and Christian motive appeal. 3. The effect of light reading upon the acquisition of knowledge truly so called. In the days of our fathers, any one who could read at all would scarcely fail to read with a view to knowledge. The supply of amusement by literature, the command of books as a mere pastime, was then scarcely thought of. Now young people greedily devour fictitious tales till indulgence produces a surfeit. Sometimes an absolute vacancy follows upon excess of such reading. Fiction has two legitimate provinces. It is a salutary relaxation for an overwrought brain. And it may be employed as a study of life. But the knowledge, the lack of which destroys, is the knowledge not of things but of persons. It is the acquaintance of soul with soul, and spirit with spirit; the contact of the unseen inmost self of man with the unseen inmost essence of another, even of Him in whom man lives, and whom truly to know is eternal life. What we need is to know God. It is no metaphysical, scarcely even a theological, knowledge you need. It is the knowledge as of a friend. (*C. J. Vaughan, D.D.*) *The evils of ignorance.*—

I. IGNORANCE IS DESTRUCTIVE. 1. Destructive of the dignity of man. The faculties of knowledge, reason, judgment, and voluntary determination distinguish us from the beasts that perish, and constitute the true dignity of our nature. But faculties and powers are of little value until they are brought into exercise and directed to their proper objects. Instruction is to man what culture is to the plant. Without it, life is spent in a vacant stupidity, or distracted by irregular imagination and heated passions. 2. Destructive of the usefulness of man. Knowledge constitutes the whole difference betwixt savage and civilised society. To the improvement of the mind all nations have owed the improvement of their condition. Ignorance is the negative of everything good and useful. It not only renders the members of a community useless to each other, it opposes, and frequently triumphs over, all the endeavours of humane and enlightened individuals. The despotism of ignorance is of the most imperious nature. Minds wholly uncultivated are averse to serious thought, and are only conversant with sensible objects. From this springs their aversion to the Gospel; for whoever receives it must become serious and thoughtful. 3. Destructive of virtue. Virtue can no more exist without knowledge, than an animal can exist without life. In proportion as ignorance prevails in society, virtue is destroyed. Ignorant men may possibly be made enthusiasts; they may be made superstitious; but before they can be made rational, steady, and consistent Christians, they must be enlightened. That ignorance is destructive of virtue is proved by facts as well as arguments. Illustration may be taken from the records of heathen nations, and from the history of the Christian Church. 4. Destructive of happiness. There is pleasure in knowledge of a kind more pure and elevated than can possibly be found in any of the gratifications of sense, and for which the latter are but unworthy substitutes. Of the pleasures which spring from knowledge, and especially sacred knowledge, we cannot conceive too highly. To know God, to contemplate the perfections of His nature and the wonders of His hand, to observe His providential regard, to behold the mystery of redemption, the character and undertaking of Jesus,—such subjects, when opened to the mind, not only give pleasure as speculative discoveries and the solutions of distressing doubts, but by awakening virtuous sentiments, kindling an ardent and elevated devotion, producing the present possession of the peace of the Gospel, and the prospect of

fulness of joy. II. To COUNTERACT THE DESTRUCTIVE EFFECTS OF IGNORANCE IS THE WORK OF HUMANITY. None oppose the communication of knowledge to the lower ranks of society save those who are altogether unreasonable. Special importance attaches to Sunday school. The dissemination of knowledge may be treated as—1. A work of humanity; 2. Of patriotism; 3. Of virtue. Christianity exhibits a Founder who went about doing good; and His disciples in every age have devoted their time, their talents, their property, their influence to the instruction and blessing of mankind. (*R. Watson.*)

Ignorance destructive:—Ignorance disqualifies a man for those situations in life that require the exercise of wisdom and discretion: it degrades him in society below the rank of those who would otherwise be deemed his equals or inferiors; and it not unfrequently leads to idleness, dissipation, and vice. Ignorance of religion ensures the everlasting destruction of the soul. I. THE IGNORANCE OF THE CHRISTIAN WORLD.

1. An ignorance of themselves. They know little of their blindness, guilt, depravity, helplessness. 2. Ignorance of God. His holiness, justice, truth. 3. Ignorance of Christ. As He is in Himself. As He is to us. II. THE FATAL CONSEQUENCES OF IT. The degrees of criminality attached to ignorance vary according to the opportunities men have enjoyed of obtaining knowledge. A lack of spiritual knowledge—1. Tends to destruction. 2. Will issue in destruction. Then—(1) How carefully should we improve the means of grace! (2) How earnestly should we pray for the teachings of God's Spirit! (3) How thankful should we be for any measure of Divine knowledge! (*C. Simcon, M.A.*)

Rejecting knowledge:—The word used signifies to reject with despute and contempt. Knowledge is rejected in two ways. 1. When the means of knowledge are rejected, then knowledge is rejected. 2. When the directions of our knowledge are rejected, when we refuse to be guided by it, upon this our knowledge decays, and eventually is contemned. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*)

Lack of knowledge:—The lack of this knowledge causes people to perish. Knowing God as a Father, Saviour, Sanctifier, gives the soul the consciousness of pardon, life, purity, power—the power of love—that is almost irresistible. Knowledge is power to the inventor, civil engineer, teacher and lawyer. But the knowledge of God is the greatest power. It enables all, even the weakest, to do great things. Oh, for a knowledge and baptism of power from God! Then everywhere “the people that do know God shall do exploits.” (*H. W. Bailey.*)

Ignorance impoverishes:—Among the Scotch lairds, there is one whose father died in a poorhouse, like a beggar, notwithstanding his possession of the very same riches his heir at present has at his disposal; but he simply did not know how rich he was. Shortly after his decease, rich metallic ore was discovered on the estate; the mines, which were worked at once, gave such returns, that very soon all mortgages and debts could be paid off, and, moreover, put the present owner in possession of a nobleman's fortune. His father possessed no less, but he knew it not. Alas, for how many the blessed Word of God is worth no more than waste paper! Therein are contained the richest promises of fulness of grace, of victory over every enemy, of exceeding glory; but because they do not explore these mines, they live like beggars, who can hardly manage to obtain a morsel of bread. (*A. J. Gordon, D.D.*)

I will also forget thy children.—*Getting at parents through their children:*—The Lord must in some way find our life that He may either reward or chastise it. In this case He will get at the parents through their children. He would not have done this if there had been any other way into their rebellious and obdurate hearts. We must leave Him to explain Himself in reference to the children; He will do that which is right and merciful; we need not plague ourselves about that aspect of mystery; rather let us fasten attention upon the fact that God means for our good to get at our souls somehow. He will try all the gates, and even if He has to break down the child-gate He will come in. That is the point upon which we are to fix our devout attention. We can of course be tempted in another direction: why attack the children, why conduct Himself towards the innocent as if they were guilty? Why punish the innocent for those who have transgressed? So we metaphysically fritter away God's meaning; we endeavour to solve the insoluble, when we might be accepting with grace and gratitude the inevitable, the disciplinary, and the high administration of Divine righteousness. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 7. As they were increased, so they sinned against Me.—*Secular*

prosperity :—The “increase” is in the number of the population ; but it may refer to increase of wealth. I. SECULAR PROSPERITY ATTAINED BY THE WICKED.

1. That is a common fact. Wicked men in all ages have, as a rule, been more prosperous than their contemporaries. Two things account for this fact—(1) Their secular earnestness. Material good is the one thing with them. (2) Their moral unscrupulousness. They have no high sense of honour, no inviolable rules of right, no swaying sense of moral responsibilities. Hence they will not reject the fraudulent and false if they will serve them in their course. 2. That is a trying fact. Men of incorruptible truth, honesty, and high devotion have in all ages been baffled and distressed by this fact. II. SECULAR PROSPERITY ABUSED. In the hands of the wicked wealth can—1. Promote injustice. It fattens the despotic in human nature. 2. It promotes sensuality. It provides means to inflame the low passions of human nature, and to pamper the brutal appetites. 3. It promotes practical atheism. The man with wealth, and without God in his heart, sinks into an utter forgetfulness of the Author of all good. III. SECULAR PROSPERITY IS RUINOUS TO THE WICKED. God will strip them of all they now glory in, all their worldly prosperity, and give them shame instead. “Therefore will I change their glory into shame.” I will quench all the lights which they have kindled. I will bring them into wretchedness and contempt. (*Homilist.*)

Prosperity encouraging sin :—The Lord accuses them of ingratitude, that the more they prospered, or increased in number or glory, they were the more bold on sin ; therefore He threatens them with ignominy to come in place of that glory which made them miscarry so far. Learn—1. Such as do provoke God highly, may yet, in His long-suffering patience, not only continue as they are, but increase in prosperity, issue, and glory for a time. 2. As there is no outward mercy conferred on wicked or unrenewed men, but they do make it a snare to draw them into sin, and harden them in it, so this abuse of God’s goodness doth aggravate sin exceedingly, for it is a challenge that “as they were increased, so they sinned against Me.” 3. Any glory or splendour which men abuse to harden themselves in sin, neglecting that which is their true honour, will certainly end in ignominy ; and especially when ministers glory of worldly state or riches as their chief excellency, neglecting that true honour of being faithful in their station. (*George Hutcheson.*)

Worldly prosperity an insidious danger :—Once an English friend found Jenny Lind sitting on the steps of a bathing-machine, on the sands, with a Lutheran Bible open on her knee, and looking out into the glory of a sunset that was shining over the waters. They talked, and the talk drew near to the inevitable question : “Oh, Madame Goldschmidt, how was it that you ever came to abandon the stage, at the very height of your success ?” “When, every day,” was the quiet answer, “it made me think less of this” (laying a finger on the Bible) “and nothing at all of that” (pointing to the sunset), “what else could I do ?” (*“Life of Jenny Lind,” by Canon Scott Holland.*)

Spiritual ruin through temporal prosperity :—It is not an unmixed blessing to be born with a silver spoon in one’s mouth, for we all need the benefit of the struggle. I knew a man who commenced business on a small scale, and at that time he attended the chapel twice every Sunday. The business increased rapidly, and he attended chapel once a Sunday, and then once a month, and now he spends his Sundays in a house-boat on the river, and has lost all taste for sacred things ! He is the miserable slave of his gold—he worships it by day and dreams of it by night—and one would not be surprised to hear of his seeking his euthanasia in suicide ! A man alone with his money is a sorry sight, for his heart is petrified, his spirit materialised, and his life poisoned. The gold mines of Peru helped to wreck the fortunes of Spain, for men abandoned honest work, and became avaricious adventurers. Excessive luxury and avarice are the sure forerunners of national decadence, and we Britons must be on our guard against it, or the fate of Spain will be ours. Life is qualitative rather than quantitative, and our prosperity will spoil us unless we give to soul-culture the first and highest place. As Seneca says : “One of the most serious calamities which can befall any man is not to know something of adversity.” (*J. Ossian Davies.*)

Therefore will I turn their glory into shame.—*Perverted gifts* :—God bestows on man gifts, which may be to him matter of praise and glory, if only ordered aright to their highest and only true end, the glory of God. Man perverts them to vainglory, and therefore to sin ; God turns the gifts, so abused, to shame. He not only gives them shame instead of their glory ; He makes the glory itself the means and occasion of their shame. Beauty becomes the occasion of degradation ; pride is proverbially

near a fall; "vaulting ambition overleaps itself and falls on the other side." (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *Man's glory changed into shame*:—The very blessings which God had bestowed on these priests for their glory, in order to their good, were to be converted into their shame, and be made instrumental to their injury.

I. THE THREATENING IN ITS RELATION TO THE JEWS. There never was a nation upon which were poured with such profusion things which should have been for their good and for their glory. But in a very wonderful manner the Jews perverted all their privileges, and thus turned their glory into shame. Their national mercies only strengthened the national apostasy, and then the threatening took literal effect, though only through their own misuse of their many advantages.

II. THE THREATENING IN ITS RELATION TO OURSELVES. Constantly things which should have turned to our glory have been instrumental to our shame. But this cannot occur without fatal injury. 1. How may our temporal blessings be turned into shame? Nothing tries a man more than prosperity. There are many tempers and dispositions which are comparatively repressed by straitness of condition, but which walk abroad in full liberty when that condition is enlarged. Nevertheless, riches are designed of God to be for man's glory. Alas! there too often occurs the reverse of this, and riches are turned into shame. This is also true of intellectual riches. Genius has often been the ruin of its possessor; the powers which ought to have been for their glory, needing nothing but righteous employment in order to the rendering their possessors happy in themselves, and benefactors to the world, have been given to the cause of vice and infidelity. But illustrations had better be taken from commonplace than from rare instances. 2. How may our spiritual advantages be turned into shame? Every doctrine of religion, every leading of providence may clearly be for our own glory if rightly employed, and as clearly for our shame if misused and perverted. Illustrate by the doctrine of human helplessness, or of the forbearance God manifests to sinners. In dealing with the dispensations of providence, illustrate by affections. They are our glory, but, unsanctified, they become our shame. The prophet Malachi has this threatening in the name of God, "I will curse your blessings." (*Henry Melvill, B.D.*)

Shame for glory:—God loves to stain the pride and haughtiness of men. **I. HE WOULD BRING SHAME INSTEAD OF GLORY.** So God is wont to do. Women that glory in their beauty and splendour should mark well (*Isa. iii. 16-24*). If any will glory in parts, the Lord justly brings shame on them, blasting their gifts. It is reported of Albertus Magnus, that great scholar, that for five years before his death, he lost his faculties so completely that he could not read. If any glory in riches, God can soon turn that into shame. If any glory in honour, God can soon turn that into shame, as in the case of Herod. According to the glory of men in external things, so is their shame when God takes them away. Here is the difference between the saints and the wicked when they lose these outward things. **II. GOD MAKES THE VERY THINGS THEY GLORY IN TURN TO THEIR SHAME.** He makes their very gifts to be their undoing. When men glory in this, that they had such success, and such a victory at such a time, and thence infer, "Surely God is with us, and blesses and owns us," God will turn this glorying into shame when He blasts their success, and makes it manifest to all that though they have all outward means, yet they avail nothing. When the saints suffer any shame for God, they can glory. What the world accounts their shame is their glory; and that which the world judges to be their glory is their shame. The prophet is speaking here more especially of the priests. God casts shame upon wicked priests. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*)

Ver. 8. They eat up the sin of My people.—*Feeding on sin*:—Dr. Henderson renders these words, "They devour the sin-offering of My people." The priests lived upon the sacrificial meat (*Lev. vi. 26*), and the more they had of this the more they were pleased. But this increased with the increase of the sins of the people. The more the people sinned, the more sin-offerings, and the more sin-offerings, the more priestly banquets. So in truth, without a figure, they "feed upon the sin of the people." Such men can be found now—**I. IN THE ECCLESIASTICAL WORLD.** **II. IN THE COMMERCIAL WORLD.** 1. Men who have vested interest in the sin of intemperance. 2. Men who have vested interest in the sin of war. **III. IN THE PROFESSIONAL WORLD.** What could lawyers do without chicaneries, breach of contracts, and all kinds of social immoralities and crimes? What would popular journalists do were there no scandals, no

tragedies, no crimes, no fraudulent advertisements? What would become of the sensational novelist, if there were no sinful love in the people for the horrible and the prurient? Herein is the great obstruction to moral reformations. Destroy a popular sin, and you destroy the livelihood of hundreds, and the pomp and splendour of many. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 9. **And there shall be, like people, like priest.**—*Hosea's proverb*:—"Like princes, like people"; but also, alas! "like people, like priests,"—a proverb which has acquired currency from its fatal truth, but which Hosea originated. The causes for the widespread immorality were twofold, as Hosea, resident perhaps in Samaria, saw more clearly, and pointed out more definitely than Amos. They were—1. The detestable vileness and hypocrisy of the priests, with whom, as usual, the false prophets were in league. From Hosea, the earliest of the northern prophets whose works are extant, to Malachi the latest prophet of the returned exiles, the priests had very little right to be proud of their title. Their pretensions were, for the most part, in inverse proportion to their merits. The neutrality, or the direct wickedness, of the religious teachers of a country, torpid in callous indifference and stereotyped in false traditions, is always the worst sign of a nation's decadence. Hosea was no exception to the rule that the true teacher must be prepared to bear the beatitude of malediction, and not least from those who ought to share his responsibilities. Amos had found by experience that for any man who desired a reputation for worldly prudence, the wisest rule was to hold his tongue; but for Hosea, for whom there was no escape from his native land, nothing remained but to bear the reproach that "the prophet is a fool, and the spiritual man is mad," uttered by men full of iniquity and hatred. A fowler's snare was laid for him in all his ways, and he found nothing but enmity in the house of his God. The priests suffered the people to perish for lack of knowledge. They set their hearts on their iniquity, and contentedly connived at, if they did not directly foster, the sinfulness of the people, which at any rate secured them an abundance of sin-offerings. So far had they apostatised from their functions as moral teachers. And there was worse behind. They were active fomenters of evil. But the second cause of the national apostasy lay deeper still. 2. The corruption of worship and religion at its source. The "calf-worship" was now beginning to produce its natural fruit. It would have indignantly disclaimed the stigma of idolatry. It was represented as "image-worship," the adoration of cherubic symbols, which were in themselves regarded as being so little a violation of the second commandment that they were consecrated even in the temple at Jerusalem. The centralisation of worship, it must be borne in mind, was a new thing. Local sanctuaries and local altars had been sanctioned by kings and used by prophets from time immemorial. The worship at Dan and Bethel could have claimed to be, in the fullest sense of the word, a worship of Jehovah, as national and as ancient as that at Jerusalem. For the ox was the most distinctive emblem of the cherub, and even in the wilderness, cherubs—possibly winged oxen—had bent over the mercy-seat and been woven on the curtains, and in the temple of Solomon had been embossed upon the walls, and formed the support of the great brazen laver. We read of no protest against this symbolism either by Elijah, Elisha, or Jonah. Hosea could more truly estimate its effects, and he judged it by its fruits. He saw the fatal facility with which the title Baal, "Lord," might be transferred from the Lord of lords to the heathen Baalim. He saw how readily the emblem of Jehovah might be identified with the idol of Phœnicia. Jehovah-worship was perverted into nature-worship, and the coarse emblems of Asherah and Ashtoreth smoothed the way for a cultus of which the basis was open sensuality. The festal dances of Israel, in honour of God, which were as old as the days of the Judges, became polluted with all the abominations of Phœnician worship. The "adultery" and "whoredom," which are denounced so incessantly on the page of Hosea, are not only the metaphors for idolatry, but the literal description of the lives which that idolatry corrupted. (*Dean Farrar, D.D.*) *Priests become time-servers*.—No greater calamity can come upon a people, because—1. Such priests cannot exert the influence which they should exert. They should be men of God, supremely loyal to God, and witnessing for the supreme claim of spiritual and eternal things. 2. Their example is positively mischievous. Men need no aid from their leaders in living selfish, self-indulgent, covetous lives. 3. Time-serving utterly ruins personal character. Nobility, heroism, devotion can only

be nourished by living outside ourselves, for God and our fellows. Time-servers are self-servers. (*Robert Tuck, B.A.*) *The degradation of holy office*:—The people may have what they like, and the priest will say, "You could not help it." The priest will reproduce what the people are doing, and the people will take encouragement from the priest to go out and do double wickedness, and thus they shall keep the action even. To this degree of corruption may holiest institutions be dragged. The priest—meaning by that word teacher, preacher, minister, apostle—should always be strong enough to condemn; he can condemn generally, but not particularly; he can damn the distant, he must pet and flatter and gratify the near. He will outgrow this—when he knows Christ better; when he is enabled to complete his faith by feeling that it is not necessary for him to live, but it is necessary for him to speak the truth; when he comes to the point of feeling, that it is not at all needful he should have a roof over his head, but it is necessary that he should have an approving conscience; when he completes his theology by this Divinest morality, he will be a rare man in the earth, with a great voice thundering its judgments, and with a tender voice uttering its benedictions and solaces where hearts are broken with real contrition. Priests should lead; priests should not neglect denunciation, even where they are unable to follow their denunciations with examples to the contrary. The Word should be spoken boldly, roundly, grandly, in all its simplicity, purity, rigour, tenderness. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *The reciprocal influence of priesthood and people*:—I. THERE IS SOMETIMES A DISGRACEFUL RECIPROCAL INFLUENCE. 1. It is a disgrace to a true priest to become like the people. One who is not above the average man is no priest, he is out of his place. A priest is a man to mould, not to be moulded; to control, not to cringe; to lead, not to be led. His thoughts should sway the thoughts of the people, and his character should command their reverence. Sometimes you see priests become like the people, mean, sordid, grovelling. 2. It is a disgrace to a people to become like a bad priest. There are priests whose natures are lean, whose capacities are feeble, whose religion is sensuous, whose sympathies are exclusive, whose opinions are stereotyped, whose spirit is intolerant. Shame on the people who allow themselves to become like such a priest! II. THERE IS SOMETIMES AN HONOURABLE RECIPROCAL INFLUENCE. 1. It is honourable when people become like a true priest; when they feel one with him in spiritual interests and Christly pursuits. 2. It is honourable to the true priest when he has succeeded in making the people like him. He may well feel a devout exultation as he moves amongst them that their moral hearts beat in unison with his, that their lives are set to the same keynote, that they are of one mind and one heart in relation to the grand purpose of life. (*Homilist.*) *Naughty ministers*:—1. Evil ministers are a great cause of sin and misery upon the people they have charge of. It is an addition to the priests' judgment that they drag so many with them into it. 2. Albeit naughty ministers be great plagues and snares to people, yet that will not excuse a people's sin, nor exempt them from judgment, and therefore the people are threatened also. The sending of evil ministers may be so much the fruit of people's former sins, and they may be so well satisfied with it as may justly ripen them for a stroke. 3. As pastors and people are ordinarily like each other in sin, and mutual plagues to each other, so will they be joined together in judgments, for "there shall be, like people, like priest," that is, both shall be involved in judgment (though possibly in different measure, according to the degree of their sin), and none of them able to help or comfort another. 4. Albeit the Lord may spare for a time, and seem to let things lie in confusion, yet He hath a day of visitation, wherein He will call men to an account, and recompense them, not according to their pretences, but their real deeds and practices. 5. When men have made no conscience of sin, so they might compass these delights, which they think will make them up, yet it is easy for God to prove that the blessing of these delights is only in His hand. 6. As no means can prosper where God deserts and withdraws His blessing, so what a man prosecutes unlawfully, he cannot look it should be blessed. (*George Hutcheson.*) *A courageous ministerial reproof*:—The great northern apostle, Bernard Gilpin, who refused a bishopric, did not confine his Christian labours to the church of Houghton, of which he was minister, but at his own expense visited the then desolate churches of Northumberland once every year to preach the Gospel. The Bishop of Durham commanded him to preach before the clergy. Gilpin then went into the pulpit, and selected for his subject the important charge of a Christian bishop. Having

exposed the corruption of the clergy, he boldly addressed himself to his lordship, who was present. "Let not your lordship," said he, "say these crimes have been committed without your knowledge; for whatever you yourself do in person, or suffer through your connivance to be done by others, is wholly your own; therefore in the presence of God, angels, and men, I pronounce your fatherhood to be the author of all these evils; and I, and this whole congregation, will be a witness in the day of judgment that these things have come to your ears." The bishop thanked Mr. Gilpin for his faithful words, and gave him permission to preach throughout his diocese.

Ver. 12. *Their staff declareth unto them.* — *Rhabdomania, or divining by the stick or staff* :—There was a kind of idolatry which the Jews had, a way to ask counsel by the staff, and with this the prophet here charges them. The Romans practised the same, calling it divination by rods, sticks, arrows, or staves. There were four ways in which they divined with these things. The first was to put arrows or staves into a closed case, having the names written on them of what they divined about; and then, drawing out one or two, they determined their business according to what they found written; thus their staff declared unto them either good or bad. A second was by casting up staves or arrows into the air, and according as they fell, on the right hand or on the left, before or behind, so they divined their good or ill luck, as they called it. A third way was this, they used to peel off the bark of some part of a stick, and then cast it up, and divined according to which part of the pith, either black or white, appeared first. A fourth was, as we find in the Roman antiquities, that their augurs or sooth-sayers used to sit upon the top of a tower or castle, in clear and fair weather, with a crooked staff in their hand, which the Latins call *Lituus*, and having quartered out the regions of heaven, so far as to answer their purpose, and offered sacrifices and prayers, they stretched it forth upon the head of the person or thing they would divine for, and so foreboded good or ill luck, according to what at that time they observed in the heavens, the birds flying, &c. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*)

Ver. 13. *They sacrifice upon the tops of the mountains, and burn incense upon the hills.* — *Blustering sinners* :—That is the bold aspect, that is the public phase; instead of doing all these things, as Ezekiel would say, in a chamber of imagery far down, at which you get through a hole in the wall, they go up to high places, and invite the sun to look upon them; they kiss the calf in public. Some credit should be due to audacity, but there is another sin which cannot be done on the tops of the mountains, so the charge continues,—“under oaks and poplars and elms, because the shadow thereof is good.” Here is the secret aspect of rebellion. Do not believe that the blusterer lives only in public as fool and criminal; do not say, There is a fine frankness about this man anyhow; when he sins, he sins in high places; he goes upon the mountains, and stamps his foot upon the high hills, and the great hill throbs and vibrates under his sturdy step. That is not the whole man; he will seek the oak, the poplar, and the elm, because the shadow thereof is good. It is a broad shadow; it makes night in daytime; it casts such a shadow upon the earth which it covers that it amounts to practical darkness. So the blustering sinner is upon the mountain, trying to perpetrate some trick that shall deserve the commendation of being frank, and when he has achieved that commendation he will seek the shadow that is good, the shadow at daytime, the darkness underneath the noontide sun. How the Lord searches us, and tries our life, and puts His fingers through and through us, that nothing may be hidden from Him! He touches us at every point, and looks through us, and understands us altogether. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 16. *Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer.* — *The evil and danger of backsliding* :—I. WHEN WE MAY BE SAID TO RESEMBLE A BACKSLIDING HEIFER. 1. When we will not draw in God's yoke at all. 2. When we draw in it only by fits and starts. 3. When we grow weary of the yoke. Weary of performing our duties, exercising our graces, mortifying our lusts. II. THE EVIL AND DANGER OF SUCH A STATE. 1. The evil of it. It is a contemning of God. It is a justifying of the wicked. It is a discouraging of the weak. 2. The danger of it. This is an iniquity which God marks with peculiar indignation. The first symptoms of declension lead, if not speedily mourned over and resisted,

to utter apostasy. The misery that will be incurred by means of it will far exceed all that had been endured if no profession of religion had been ever made. Let these consequences be duly weighed, and nothing need be added to show the importance of "holding fast our profession without wavering." Improve the subject. 1. Assist you in ascertaining your state before God. Examine diligently the cause, the duration, and the effects of your backslidings. 2. Give a word of counsel to those in different states. Are you altogether backslidden from God? He invites you to return. Are you drawing in His yoke? Bless and adore your God, who has inclined and enabled you to do so. (*O. Simeon, M.A.*) *A backslider* :—It is a striking fact to which careful observers of the feathered tribe will bear witness, that no birds are able to fly backward. A bird may allow itself to fall backward by slowing its wings, until its weight overcomes their sustaining power, as a swallow will do from the eaves of a house. But the bird can do no other than fly forward, and but few with the rarest skill can stand still in the air. Now if mankind would only "consider the birds of the air" in the way in which Christ enjoined, there would be considerably less backsliding than there is. Like the wings of the soaring eagle, the wings of faith were never intended for flying backward. A minister's little girl and her playmate were talking about serious things. "Do you know what a backslider is?" she questioned. "Yes; it's a person that used to be a Christian and isn't," said the playmate promptly. "But what do you s'pose makes them call them backsliders?" "Oh, that's easy. You see, when people are good they go to church and sit up in front. When they get a little tired of being good they slide back a seat, and keep on sliding till they get clear back to the door. After awhile they slide clear out and never come to church at all." *The stubborn heifer* :—What is a backsliding heifer? We do not know; there is no such creature. But read: "Israel acts stubbornly, like a heifer," and the meaning is clear. The heifer will not go as its owner wants it to go. The heifer stands back when it ought to go forward; turns aside when it ought to move straight on; wriggles and twists, and, as it were, protests; and only by greater strength, or by the infliction of suffering, can the heifer be made to go to its destined place. The prophet, looking upon that heifer, now on the right, now on the left, now stooping, now throwing up its head in defiance, says, Such is Israel, such is Ephraim. The metaphor is full of suggestion, and full of high philosophy. Israel complained of limitation; Israel was chafed by the yoke; Israel resented the puncture of the goad. Israel said, "I want liberty, I do not want this moral bondage any longer; I do not want to be surrounded by commandments, I do not want to live in a cage of ten bars called the ten commandments of God; I want liberty; let me follow my reason, my instincts; let me obey myself." The Lord said, "So be it. Thou shalt have liberty enough, but it shall be the liberty of a wilderness." You can have liberty, but you will find no garden in it; if you want the garden, you must have the law. Let us take care how we trifle with law, obligation, responsibility, limitation. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 17. *Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.*—*Beware of unholy companionships* :—These words do not mean that nothing was to be done for Ephraim. The prophets again and again pleaded with that people. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thy help." Our text is addressed to Judah. "Let Ephraim alone." The best thing to do is not to associate with that people, keep clear of them, let them alone. I. THIS APPLIES TO COMPANIONSHIP. If you want to keep your own life pure, be careful with whom you associate. Ephraim was more prosperous and wealthy, and consequently Judah might be allured and led to offend (ver. 15). We are influenced by those with whom we keep company. You may think you are strong enough to stand against the insidious influence of the world, but it touches you before you are aware. If Judah associates with Ephraim, the contact must prove baneful, and Judah will become corrupt. "Come out from among them, and be ye separate." II. IT APPLIES ALSO TO PLACES WE VISIT AND FREQUENT. "Come not ye unto Gilgal, neither go ye up to Beth-aven." There sacrifices were offered to Baal, and the golden calf adored. Are there not Beth-avens (house of vanity) which we had better avoid? (*J. Hampden Lee.*) *Influence of companions* :—When visiting a gentleman in England, Mr. Moody observed a fine canary. Admiring his beauty, the gentleman replied, "Yes, he is beautiful, but he has lost his voice. He used to be a fine singer, but I was in the habit of hanging his cage out of the

window ; the sparrows came round him with their incessant chirping ; gradually he ceased to sing and learned their twitter." Oh, how truly does this represent many Christians ! They used to delight in the songs of Zion, but they came into close association with those whose notes never rise so high, until at last, like the canary, they can do nothing but twitter, twitter. *Dangers of carnal security* :—Jeroboam made Israel to sin. From one sin they passed into another, and each succeeding year plunged them deeper in the mire of sensuality, idolatry, and corruption. At last Divine judgment came. It is expressed in the text. Because Ephraim repaid all the offers of God to receive him back to Himself with anger, therefore henceforth he was to be left to his own devices—alone, without God, to ward off or to alleviate the coming destruction. From the fate of Ephraim we draw a lesson for ourselves. God's dealings with nations and with individuals are the same in principle, though differing necessarily in form and extent ; and therefore there are the same fearful signs of God's wrath to be traced when we are let alone in a course of known sin, without troubles, without warnings to stay us, as when a nation is suffered to run its course of accustomed riot unrestrained. In both cases this state of unnatural quiet is but the calm before the thunderstorm—the cessation of pain in some mortal disease, which marks that nature is exhausted and death at hand. He who is accepted in Jesus, the child of God, is never let alone, but, forgetting those things that are behind, he is constantly pressing forward to those things which are before. We can never be forced into sin. Our danger is that we be deceived into supposing that we have no enemies, that there is peace when there is no peace ; lest we imagine that all is well with us when, it may be, God is in fact letting us alone in bitter indignation and overhanging vengeance. Anything is better than that God should leave us—let us alone in our sin. The grave is a remedy for all earthly woe, but there is no remedy for this either in time or in eternity. Consider then, all you who are living in any known sin—who are quenching the Spirit of life by not acting or striving to act up to what you know well is required from Christians—the horrible danger of settling upon your lees ; of thinking no evil shall come nigh you, that your sin shall not find you out, that God will always strive with you. But the words of the text whisper strong consolation to the man of a broken spirit and contrite heart. Grant that he be afflicted and mourn, that he is in heaviness through manifold temptations, that he go mourning all the day long by reason of his sin, that he is heart-broken ; yet, God be thanked, these very feelings show that he is not let alone. He is not considered as joined unto idols ; and therefore, if he persevere, and be not weary in well-doing, he may rightly expect his God will turn, and leave a blessing behind Him. (*H. I. Swale, M.A.*) *The sin of Ephraim* :—As in the days before the flood, God's Spirit does "not always strive with man" : even long-suffering itself has been exhausted, and the despisers and mockers have been either suddenly destroyed, or given over to impenitence and insensibility. The precise period, or closing of what has been called "the day of grace," being mercifully concealed from man, its existence can form no rule or guide for his procedure. I. THE SIN OF EPHRAIM. "Joined to idols." Idolatry is represented in Scripture as being twofold ; it is both outward and inward, public and retired. It does not consist chiefly in acts of religious homage. There are idols in the heart, the family, the Church. Loving and serving the creature more than the Creator is idolatry. It is a present and existing evil, and a prevailing, constitutional, besetting, and most abhorrent sin. It falls in easily with our inbred and corrupt propensities. II. THE JUDGMENT UPON EPHRAIM. The punishment of his crime. The text is an admonition to Judah not to hold any familiar intercourse with idolatrous and backsliding Israel. We, however, regard it as a sentence of dereliction. "Let him alone." The phrase is elliptical. It is addressed to some one, but we do not know to whom. May be angels, providences, ministers of the sanctuary, conscience, ordinances. We may therefore wisely pray, "Say anything of or to Thy servant, rather than let him alone." (*W. B. Williams, M.A.*) *God abandons the incorrigible* :—While anything detains the heart from God, the man is in a state of perdition. "He is joined to his idols." There is something very dreadful in this declaration—I. IF YOU DISTINGUISH THIS DESERTION FROM ANOTHER, WHICH MAY BEFALL EVEN THE SUBJECTS OF DIVINE GRACE. God sometimes leaves His people when they are becoming high-minded, to convince them of their dependence upon Him. He leaves them to their own strength to show them their weakness, and to their

own wisdom to make them sensible of their ignorance. But this differs exceedingly from the abandoning of the incorrigible. II. THIS LEAVING OF THE SINNER IS A WITHDRAWING FROM HIM EVERYTHING THAT HAS A TENDENCY TO DO HIM GOOD. Ministers, saints, conscience, providence—"let him alone." Ye afflictions, say nothing to him of the vanity of the world. Let all his schemes be completely successful. Let his grounds bring forth plentifully. Let him have more than heart can wish. III. CONSIDER THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BEING WHO THUS ABANDONS. It would be much better if all your friends and neighbours, if all your fellow-creatures on whom you depend for assistance in a thousand ways, were to league together and resolve to have nothing to do with you, than for God to leave you. While God is with us we can spare other things. But what is everything else without God? IV. WHAT WILL BE THE CONSEQUENCES OF THIS DETERMINATION? It will be a freedom to sin; it will be the removal of every hindrance in the way to perdition. When God dismisses a man, and resolves he shall have no more assistance from Him—he is sure of being ensnared by error, enslaved by lust, and "led captive by the devil at his will." It is as if we had taken poison, and all that is necessary to its killing us is not to counteract its malignity. Such is the judgment here denounced. Notice—1. The justice of this doom. All the punishments God inflicts are deserved, and He never inflicts without reluctance. Your condemnation turns upon a principle that will at once justify Him and silence you. "Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life." 2. Let me call on you to fear this judgment. And surely some of you have reason to be alarmed. With some of you the Spirit of God has long been striving, and you have "done despite unto the Spirit of grace." Now you know what He has said, and you know what He has done. If you say you have no forebodings, the symptoms are so much the worse. Spiritual judgments are the most awful, because they are insensibly executed. 3. Perhaps some of you say, "I am afraid this is my doom already. My convictions seem to have been stifled." Perhaps this is true. Perhaps it is a groundless apprehension. Remember, it is a blessed proof that God does not let you alone, if you cannot let Him alone. (*William Jay.*) *Ephraim abandoned to idols:*—One of the consequences and proofs of our depravity is that we are prone to turn every blessing into a curse. We are too apt to despise the forbearance of God, and to draw encouragement from it to continue in sin. Because God is slow to punish, we conclude that He never will punish. The consequence is, we become more fearless and hardened. No conduct can be more base than this, none more dangerous, and yet there is none more common. There is a propensity to it in our very nature. But God's time of patience will have an end. I. *EPHRAIM'S SIN.* The tendency of the Israelites in the early ages of their history to idol-worship almost surpasses belief. It is seen in their making a calf at Horeb, and in Solomon's licence to surrounding idolaters. The evil became ruinous in the kingdom of the Ten Tribes. So it is said of Ephraim, "they were joined to idols." They sinned against light and knowledge, they transgressed the plainest and most unequivocal declaration of the Divine will; and this they did in the face of the most peremptory threatenings, the most solemn warnings, and the most affectionate entreaties. It is painful and humiliating to reflect that human beings possessed of reason and understanding should have been capable of acting in a manner so unworthy of their high origin and their exalted privileges. We are not liable to the charge of gross outward idolatry, but are there no idols set up within the temple of our hearts? Are we free from the guilt of spiritual idolatry? What is idolatry? The rendering to any creature whatever that worship, honour, and love which belong to God alone. 1. Covetousness is declared in Scripture to be idolatry. The intemperate and lovers of pleasure are idolaters. Pride is only another form of idolatry. Those are idolaters who are inordinately attached to any earthly comforts. On what things then are our affections placed? Few of us are there who have not yielded that love, fear, and confidence to the creature, which are due to God alone. II. *EPHRAIM'S PUNISHMENT.* "Let him alone." Some regard this as the language of caution addressed to others, rather than as a threatening against Ephraim. We regard it in the latter sense. It is expressive of the severest judgment that could be inflicted on any nation or individual. It imports God's final abandonment of them, and delivering them up to final impenitence, never more to be visited with salutary compunction or regret. The awful state in which Ephraim was thus left resembles that of incorrigible sinners in every age, especially those who

appear to be given up to final impenitence and unbelief. Instances in which this threatening is carried into effect may be given. 1. When the usual means of instruction and reproof are no longer employed or afforded. 2. When the conscience becomes seared, and the Spirit of God ceases to strive with the sinner. 3. When afflictions are withheld, and providence no longer frowns upon the sinner, but suffers him to take his course unrepented. Whom the Lord loves He rebukes and chastens; but He manifests His displeasure against the impenitent by letting them alone. (*R. Davies, M.A.*) *A call to separation*:—These words are not intended as a threatening of the cessation of the Divine pleadings with an obstinate transgressor—there are no people about whom God says that they are so wedded to their sin that it is useless to try to do anything with them—and they are not a commandment to God's servants to fling up in despair or in impatience the effort to benefit obstinate and stiff-necked evil-doers. This Book of Hosea is one long pleading with this very Ephraim, just because he is "joined to idols." Hosea was a prophet of the northern nation, but it is the southern nation, Judah, that is here addressed. What is meant by letting alone is plainly enough expressed in a previous verse,—“Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, let not Judah offend.” The calf-worship of Israel is held up as a warning to Judah, which is commanded to keep clear of all complicity with it, and to avoid all entangling alliances with backsliding Israel. The prophet with his “Let him alone” is saying the very same thing as the apostle with his “Come out from among them, and be ye separate.” Ephraim is wedded to his idols, as parasite to elm-tree, and so if you are joined to it you will be joined to its idols. Translate this into plain simple English, and it means this—It is a very bad sign of a Christian man when his chosen companions are people that have no sympathy with him in his religion. A great many of us will have to plead guilty to this indictment. There are many things—such as differences of position, culture, and temperament which cannot but modify the association of Christian people with one another, and may sometimes make them feel more near to un-Christian associates who are like themselves in these respects than to Christians who are not. What deadens so much of our Christianity to-day, and makes it fail as an aggressive power, is that Christian people get mixed up in utterly irreligious association with irreligious men and women, and sink their own Christianity, or at all events hide it. The sad thing is that their religion is so defective that it takes no trouble to hide it. The other sad thing is that so many Christians, so called, have so little Christianity that they never feel they are out of their element in such associations. We cannot be too intimately associated with irreligious people, if only we take our religion with us. A lesson may be learned from the separate existence of the Jews since their dispersion. They mix in the occupations of common life, and yet are as absolutely distinct as oil from the water on which it floats. So should the Church be in the world; mixing in all outward affairs, and exercising a Christianising influence on all with whom its members come in contact; and yet, by manifest diversity of sympathies and desires and affections, keeping itself absolutely distinct from the world with which it is to blend. The primitive and fundamental meaning of “holy” is “set apart.” You Christian people are set apart for the Master's use. Let it be every man to his own company. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The disturbing effects of Divine discipline*:—Sin essentially consists in a determination to have our own way—a determination planted behind the movements of thought and action, and directing them steadily to its own ends. To live, no matter what special turn our course may take, without having the main current of our life controlled by anything superior to itself, to push it all on before the energy of our own will—this is the very essence of sin. Accordingly, the action of the Divine Spirit upon the human heart is almost always, in the first instance, one of disturbance. You can detect His presence by the discomfort it creates. He awakens new thoughts, begets the suspicion that all is not within as it ought to be, and that our own way, if followed to the end, will terminate in bitterness. Because our own way is wrong, and will, if persisted in, lead to loss, God's first endeavour is to make us uneasy in it, and, if possible, turn us out of it. With this view all His dealings are planned, and planned so wisely as to suit each successive stage of our growth and progress. In childhood we are surrounded by God's gentle ministries. It would not be strange if God should use rougher means when His gentle ministry fails. He has recourse to the more potent voice of conscience which He seeks to rouse and to make articulate. As life advances

He throws into the heart the light of His revelation. He alarms us, too, with the guilt of past sin till our heart is troubled and its peace is gone. Or He stirs up a longing for a nobler life. Unutterably sad it is when all this notwithstanding, a man moves on unchanged, still following his own way, still disobedient to the heavenly vision. It seems as if one other means of discipline, and only one, were left. An avenue to conscience must be opened by some resistance stroke. So in middle age God oftentimes in mercy sends judgments. He breaks suddenly into the midst of life and snatches away the idol of your heart. He visits you with reverses in trade, and disappointment after disappointment, till your bewilderment grows into agony. Strange it is there should be those who have been thus emptied from vessel to vessel, still ignorant of what it means, still cleaving with a dull or desperate blindness to their own way. There is a point at which His discipline ends, just because it is useless to continue it farther. He never squanders the means of grace. He always looks for a return. It is a terrible thing that we should possess such a power of resistance as to be able to withstand God; that after He has done His best He should be obliged to leave us alone. But so it is. I. THE POINT AT WHICH THE WITHDRAWAL OF DIVINE DISCIPLINE TAKES PLACE. It is a point which is gradually reached, and not by the casual commission of a single sin, even of unusual gravity or guilt. "Being joined to idols" is a state of sin in which some wickedness is deliberately adhered to. It describes not an isolated act, but a habit which has grown easy, natural, fixed. Now a habit is not formed at once. It is the result of the repetition of an act which has become so ingrafted into a man it has grown to be part of himself. "Being joined to idols" describes a state or habit of sin that constitutes pre-eminent danger. One may be hurried into some trespass; but no one was ever hurried into a habit. Whatever excuse a man may have for a solitary evil act, he can have next to none for an evil habit. It is of such sins as those of the Pharisees we have most need to beware. They moved and breathed in an atmosphere of insincerity and self-righteousness. And this being joined to idols also describes a condition which we refuse to renounce. A man may have contracted a habit which he would willingly surrender if he could. But its grasp may have become too strong to be shaken off, his will too weak to rouse itself to the effort. But the desire for deliverance is the only door of escape. Let that depart, and there is no avenue open to your heart. II. THE MANNER IN WHICH THE WITHDRAWAL OF DIVINE DISCIPLINE IS HERE DESCRIBED. It is represented as a "letting alone." This is marked by the cessation of all those disturbing effects which had hitherto appeared. Restraints are removed. The remonstrances of friends are given up. Truth relaxes its hold. Conscience is silent. Hence outward prosperity and ease are not by any means always a sign of God's favour. Sometimes they may be quite the reverse. When outward prosperity co-exists with an utter indifference to Divine things, and a resolute pursuit of selfish ends, there can be no state more hazardous. But the terrible thing about this letting alone is that it may go on so silently. Even religious duties may be scrupulously maintained, though the heart will long since have ceased to enter into them. So God may even let a man alone when to all seeming He has as fast a hold of him as ever, or faster. There is only one preventive against our reaching this terrible condition, but it always proves effectual. Be loyal to the light within you, and obey the truth. Shun every compromise with evil. Make no tarrying on debatable ground. Our supreme aim as Christians is not comfort, but holiness; not to make things easy all round for ourselves, but to grow in clearness of spiritual vision, and readiness to hear the voice Divine. And to be let alone, even though it may not be to be joined to an idol, is to become drowsy and heavy-hearted, and when the Bridegroom comes, to be found slumbering and asleep. (*C. Moinet, M.A.*) *Warning to Judah*.—The Lord has given Ephraim up to his idols. The curse of God rests on him, and says, "Let him alone." O Judah, take heed then what you do. These words are introduced as an argument to persuade Judah not to do as Israel had done. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *Can man sin himself out of all saving possibilities?*—The words of the text are a dire spectre to some. 1. The view of it taken by the alarmed sinner. Ephraim is understood by him to represent the sinner at a supposed point in his career, at which he has exhausted all the resources of Gospel grace, and sinned himself out of hope into doom. He is still a living man, and enveloped in the showers of spiritual influence; but only seemingly, so far as he is concerned. The Spirit has abandoned him for ever. All saving agencies and influences are commanded to do the same.

This view still lamentably prevails. It is often preached, in austere terms, from the pulpit, and found grimly enshrined in our popular commentaries. There are indeed some awful truths which God forbid that we should blink. A sinner may harden himself into insensibility till he is "twice dead," past feeling, defiant of God, and even regardless of man. And his is a very hopeless case. Moreover, if we misuse privileges and opportunities, God may withdraw some of them in His judicial wisdom,—as, in the contrary case, He may enlarge them. But the vicious view so often taken of the prophet's words is quite another thing. That view is rooted in certain dogmas of absolute predestination and partial grace, which agree as ill with the Gospel as fire does with water. 2. Look at the common view critically. Scripture contradicts it. The Gospel contradicts it. Hosea himself, throughout this book, emphatically contradicts it. (1) Scripture contradicts it. Where is it taught? Give and criticise the passages relied on (Gen. vi. 3; 1 Pet. iii. 18-20; 1 Sam. xxviii. 15; Luke xix. 42). (2) The Gospel contradicts it. The Bible is one thing, the Gospel is another. The Bible is the collection of inspired records: the Gospel is the good news therein contained of salvation through Christ crucified for every creature under heaven. But good news to every man this Gospel cannot be, if some living men are already sealed up for perdition. A limited atonement is absolutely irreconcilable with a universal Gospel, and no less so is a limited provision of the Spirit. The section we are examining is one way of limiting the Spirit, and it is one which takes the great living heart out of the Gospel. But as God is true, the Gospel is good news, and brings salvation to every living man. (3) Hosea himself contradicts it. Ephraim means, not an individual, but a nation. Desolation is to befall Israel, but the "valley of Achor" is to be to her "a door of hope" (chaps. ii. 14-23, v. 15, vi. 1-3, x. 12, xi. 1-9, xii. 1-16). 3. What is the true view to be taken of the text? The key to it is to be found in the context. While Ephraim had become hopelessly wedded to idolatry, Judah, the adjoining kingdom of the two tribes, had not yet plunged into that foul and ruinous abyss (chap. xi. 12). Judah was, however, in imminent danger of drifting after Ephraim into that terrible vortex. Hence the twofold warning in the passage now before us—the formal warning to Judah, and the yet more awful undertone of warning to Ephraim. "Ephraim is joined to idols." "Let not Judah offend"; that is, "Judah, hold aloof; let Ephraim alone." Ephraim is the consociate of idolatries; Judah, be not Ephraim's associate. Partake not Ephraim's sins, lest ye partake Ephraim's plagues. The very expression, "Let him alone," is used by our Lord in this same sense, when warning His disciples against the Pharisees—"They be blind leaders of the blind; let them alone." The meaning is—beware of their companionship. Have nothing to do with them. Gilgal and Bethel, which Judah was warned not to visit, were on the very border between the rival kingdoms. This continuous position, and the sacred associations of the places made them specially perilous. The moral is obvious. 1. Beware of freedom, falsely so called. There is a liberty which means libertinism, and which always "genders to bondage." 2. Beware of evil company. It has been the ruin of myriads (1 John ii. 15-17; 2 Cor. vi. 14-18). Faithful Judah, however strong in purpose, ran a terrible risk if he associated with treacherous Ephraim. 3. Let us beware of doubting the fulness and freeness of God's pardoning mercy, as revealed in the Gospel, to all men everywhere. Nothing but a desperate bent in this direction can account for the perversion of such simple texts as the one we have been investigating. (*T. Guthrie, D.D.*) *Ephraim let alone*.—These words give us this important instruction, that God may be so provoked, and become finally so full of wrath, as to leave the guilty creature to himself, and remonstrate with him no more. I. **EPHRAIM'S CONDITION.** "Joined to idols." That is, as having withdrawn and transferred his allegiance; as having resisted the means used with him for his recovery; and as having come into close affinity with that which was antagonistic to God. It was the curse of Israel that it loved strange gods, and was ever ready to leave the Lord and join itself to them. And what is Ephraim but a counterpart of many a one in the present day? The sin which seemed so terrible in him is common enough if men's eyes were only opened wide enough to see. Worldly men will repudiate the idea of being under the same circumstances as Ephraim. Because the outward symbols are not the same, men argue that the main principles are distinct; but in the eyes of God covetousness is idolatry, and a man can be an idolater without worshipping a god of wood or stone. A wife or child may be the finely sculptured idol; or gain anticipated or acquired

may be the great image, like Nebuchadnezzar's, all overlaid with gold. Remember that a practical withdrawal from Christ is abundantly enough to prove the ruin of a soul. The transfer of allegiance may be a silent reality. The position of an idolater may be assumed without one's attracting even the attention of his fellows. But Ephraim had added sin to sin, by resisting all the means which were used to bring him back. God did not lightly part with Israel. The hand of justice long lingered on the hilt before it drew the sword. The hand of mercy long trembled before it let go its grasp. A dull, inactive, heavy resistance to the means of grace is a fearful proof of the state of practical idolatry in which some men are. The work of a soul's ruin is carried on quietly. Many a gracious influence has been resisted. Many a teaching providence has been thrown away. The heart has become, by the very order of nature, harder and harder; the conscience has become less impressible; the soul has become more habituated to being away from God. Then the sentence may go forth, "Let him alone." II. **EPHRAIM'S CURSE.** The words are as fearful as any which ever passed from the lips of God. To secure their ruin, and to bring down full vengeance upon them, all that was required was that they should be left to themselves. It involved—1. A withdrawal of enlightening influence. This may occur gradually or suddenly. It is possible for this curse to be in operation, and yet for no outward change of any kind to be detected in the man upon whom it is laid. 2. Disturbing influences are also purposely withheld. The cutting dispensations under which some of us now smart so much, are perhaps the only means to keep us away from that fatal ease whose end is death. When God's work is done in us, all trial will be taken away, but woe betide the man who gains freedom from trial by being let alone. Beware, then, how you trifle with the present, how you continue unmoved beneath the gracious influences which are now being brought to bear on your soul. (*P. B. Power, M.A.*) *Let him alone*.—"In a sense, all men are idolaters." Since man by nature is, in spirit although not in fact, as much an idolater as the pagans of any heathen land, it may be justly said of all who have been converted by the grace of God, that He has "taken them from among the heathen." Whatever comes between the soul and God, whatever supplants His love in the heart is an "idol." It may be the love of what is unlawful to be loved, or it may be the unlawful love of what in itself is allowed. I. **THE SINFUL ALLIANCE.** "Joined to idols." There are several particulars characterising this union. 1. It is illegal. All the inhibitions of God are but the voice of perfect love and wisdom enforcing the perfect laws of parental government. In a properly regulated family there are laws, and these have a threefold purpose—(1) The good of each individual member. (2) The preservation of one member from the injuries of another. (3) The good, or honour, of the parental head. The Divine laws are illustrated by the human. To be "joined to idols" is to be allied with claims which are foreign to the nature and opposed to the claims of God, and such an alliance is illegal. 2. It is unnatural. Redeemed and justified man is among the sublime confederacy of loyal subjects of the Creator. But the sinner has allied himself with the dark forces of hell—he is an alienated being. 3. It is degrading. For a member of a large and noble family to become united with guilt and ignominy would be to entail upon himself utter disgrace, to cast a shade over the honour of his family name, and to forfeit all claims to the love of kindred or respect of friends. And every sinner, in the eye of purity, is a walking plague, a moral Cain. 4. It is irrational. Sin is a disease producing madness. II. **THE RUINOUS ALLIANCE.** 1. The soul may be said to be "let alone" when it seeks satisfaction apart from God. 2. When the blood of the atonement is set at naught. 3. When the truth of God loses its wonted power to "convince of sin, righteousness," &c. The Bible speaks, ministers speak, providence speaks, as usual, but conscience hears not. 4. The sentence, "let him alone," will have a future application to the sinner's state. "Let him alone" is the burning inscription on the walls of hell's prison-house. (*G. Hunt Jackson.*) *Spiritual abandonment*.—I. **THE SIN OF EPHRAIM—IDOLATRY.** We are apt to be surprised at the proneness of the Israelites to the sin of idolatry. Yet it may be doubted whether we have not a great deal in common with idolaters. The same vice is apt to show itself in different forms—forms produced by circumstances of age and country. There is the same heart in the man and the boy; but the result of the same passions is different at the two different periods of life. And so we may not worship idols, and yet we may be partakers of the iniquity of those who did. The fountain-head and origin of Israel's sin was their own wilfulness,

Wilfulness and impatience of old took the shape of idolatry; they now wear the form of heresy, and separation, and divisions. It was a zeal for religion which prostrated Israel at the footstool of idols; it is zeal without knowledge which makes men forsake the Catholic faith for crude theories of their own. II. THE PUNISHMENT OF EPHRAIM—LET ALONE. God did not, in so speaking, design to let idolatry go unpunished. "Let him alone" proclaims that idolatry would prove its own punishment; so sure, so inevitable, so miserable would be the consequences of forsaking the true God, that it would need no further outbreak of wrath to vindicate the honour of the Almighty. To forsake God is to forsake our own mercies. You cannot drop a single doctrine of the Catholic faith, without that doctrine, sooner or later, avenging itself. Truth neglected will make itself felt. God lets matters take their course, saying of those who follow their own devices, "He is joined to idols: let him alone." III. WHAT IS IT FOR AN INDIVIDUAL TO BE LET ALONE OF THE ALMIGHTY? God has implanted in the heart of every man something which chides him whenever he rejects the right and chooses what is wrong. Very wonderful is our mental organisation. More sublime seems conscience on her judgment seat, weighing and balancing every idea which memory or invention suggests; and if her judgment be not adopted, if we will not act by her verdict, chastising with a whip of scorpions. If, although remonstrated with as we are by our natural consciences and by the Eternal Spirit, we still fall into presumptuous sin,—what should we become? The judgment threatened in the text is one which would reduce us to the position of Satan himself. For what will follow God letting a man alone? That man will experience no further promptings and warnings, but be left unrestrained by any secret reluctance to work all manner of iniquity. Assure me that a man is troubled when he has done wrong, that he feels disquieted and restless, that after indulging his passions, he is sensible of disgust and loathing, and I have hope that the day will come when he will throw off the bondage of his lusts. But assure me that he is happy in his iniquity, that he can rob and cheat, and lie and be drunken without being miserable afterwards, and I shudder lest indeed he has come to such a point as to be left alone of God. (*J. R. Woodford, M.A.*) *A sin and its punishment*.—This passage exhibits against this people a charge and a threatening. I. A CHARGE. "He is joined to idols." 1. All true believers are said to be "joined to the Lord." Faith not only forms an union, but, as it were, an identity with the Saviour, so that they are no longer twain, but one, one mystical person, one spirit. 2. The prodigal son is said to have "joined himself to a citizen in a far country." He fastened himself to him. 3. Of Israel it is said, he has "joined himself unto Baal-peor," an impure idol of the Ammonites. Christianity has abolished idolatry from the nations of Europe: yet the world is still full of mental idolatry, not less sinful or less dangerous, though not equally degrading in the eye of reason. To trust in an arm of flesh, to love the creature more than the Creator, is to be joined to idols. The sin of idolatry appears in such variety of forms that perhaps no one in the present life is entirely free from it. It exists in every inordinate affection, in every undue attachment to created good. II. A THREATENING. This may be the language of caution—Do not enter into any friendship with such an idolatrous people. It may, however, be regarded as a warning and threatening against Ephraim. The sinner is delivered up to final impenitence, never more to be visited with compunction or regret. God suffers the sinner unchecked to pursue his own way, and take the consequences. The instances in which this awful threatening may be indicted are the following.—1. When the usual means of instruction and reproof are no longer employed or afforded. 2. When conscience becomes seared, and the Spirit of God ceases to strive with the sinner, then also may he be said to be given up. 3. This fearful state may be apprehended when afflictions are withheld, and providence no longer frowns upon the sinner's way, but suffers him to take his course unreprieved. When a physician ceases to administer his bitter potions, or a surgeon to search the wound, it is a sign that they look upon the case as desperate. (1) If God let us alone, we shall be sure to let Him alone, and become prayerless, unfeeling, and incorrigible. We then cast off fear, and restrain prayer before God. (2) Though God should let us alone, Satan will not. (3) If God let us alone it is the prelude of our destruction. We are left in our sins, surrounded with enemies and dangers. (4) Should God let us alone now, He will not do so hereafter. Learn.—1. The wretched state into which sin may have brought us. 2. The necessity of constant watchfulness and prayer, that none of these evils

come upon us. It is better to endure the deepest distress than to enjoy a false and delusive peace. Let us dread nothing so much as a state of insensibility; a being "past feeling" is the certain sign of perdition. (*B. Beddome, M.A.*)

The derelict.—I. THE MEANING OF THE VERSE AND THE KERNEL-TRUTH CONTAINED IN IT. Under the seductive influence and example of Ahab and his queen Jezebel, the revolt of Israel had become complete. From the false worship of the true God they had turned further aside to the worship of false gods, and were as really idolaters as the heathen nations around them. But it was not all at once, or without many measures aimed at their reformation, that God finally abandoned them. The spirit of His dealings with them, for a long period, was expressed in those tender words, as if spoken by a father over a prodigal son, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?" A succession of prophets, like Elijah and Elisha, was sent to remonstrate with them; severe chastisements, such as famine and other national calamities, were commissioned to "hedge up their way with thorns," to bring their sins to their remembrance, and to lead them to a penitent return to God. But while individuals were thereby recovered, any good effects upon the nation were temporary and partial. And then, at length, the patience of a long-suffering God becoming exhausted, He declares His holy purpose to suspend all further measures for their recovery. This unfolds the meaning and presents the remarkable central doctrine of the verse. Some have indeed understood it to bear a different sense, and to convey a seasonable warning to the neighbouring kingdom of Judah, rather than to announce the final rejection of Israel. As if it were said: "He is joined to idols; beware of following his evil example; keep aloof, yea, at a far distance from him. You cannot touch pitch and not be defiled. When the dove associates with the raven, it soon begins to smell of carrion. Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." And this is a most seasonable thought in itself, which has been anticipated in a previous verse; but it is not the immediate truth expressed in these solemn words. Their general meaning is, that when individuals or a nation continue and obstinately persist in sin, especially in the face of providential chastisement and means of grace, it is not an uncommon thing with God at length to give up His gracious dealings with them, and to abandon them to ruin. The same doctrine, declaring one of the laws of the Divine procedure, comes out with startling distinctness in other passages of Scripture. Thus in Ezekiel: "As for you, O house of Israel, thus saith the Lord God, Go ye, serve ye every one his idols." And in the Book of Psalms: "My people would not hearken to My voice, and Israel would none of Me: so I gave them to their own hearts' lusts, and they walked in their own counsels." II. AND THIS DOCTRINE OR LAW OF GOD'S MORAL GOVERNMENT HAS WRITTEN ITSELF IN MANY RETRIBUTIVE FACTS ON THE HISTORY OF NOT A FEW OF THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH. Thus, when a people have shown a disposition, in the mass of their population, to reject and persecute the religion of Christ, and they have persisted in this even when lengthened opportunities for repentance have been given them and they have been tried by various agencies to bring them to a right state of mind, they have at length been abandoned and given over to the error and darkness which they preferred. It would be easy to name more than one nation in Europe which, at the great Protestant reformation three centuries ago, drove away the Gospel from their gates, and turned its messengers into martyrs, and which have been sinking lower and lower in the scale of nations ever since. The same thing holds true of individuals, only with a depth of meaning which, from the nature of the case, is not applicable in its full extent to organised communities. When men persist in indifference and unbelief, and in following after their hearts' idols, and all this in the face of measures to break them off from their forbidden attachments, God at length withdraws every means of recovering them, and gives them over to their merited doom. This terrible experience is not indeed to be confounded with that temporary withdrawal of the light of His countenance with which the Father sometimes punishes those children who have partially wandered from Him. This form of Divine dealing is wise, merciful, and paternal, and is referred to in a subsequent verse: "I will go," says Jehovah, "and return to My place, till they acknowledge their offence and seek My face: in their affliction they will seek Me early." But the dealing of which this verse speaks is judicial and punitive. And so it also was with the miserable, blighted, heaven-deserted Saul, like his own mountain of Gilboa, with no dew resting on it. It is a melancholy thing to see a physician leaving the sick-chamber, and declaring that he can do no more for

his patient. It is sad to hear of a crew leaving a wrecked ship, escaping from the doomed thing, and making no more efforts to keep it from sinking. But what is this to God's abandoning an incorrigible human spirit! Lord, afflict me with chastisements, bereave me with strokes, do anything to me rather than say, "He is joined to idols: let him alone." (*A. Thomson, D.D.*)

VER. 19. *The wind hath bound her up in her wings.—Retributive justice:—*The simple meaning is that Israel shall be borne away from her land, suddenly and violently, as by the winds of heaven. There is retributive justice in the universe. I. ITS EMBLEM. The wind. It is like wind—1. In its agitation. Wind is a disturbance or agitation of the atmosphere. The average condition of the air is silence and serenity. The normal condition of Divine government is quiet. It has no tempest where there is no wickedness. 2. In its violence. Power is in the wind. Cambyes being once in the wilderness with the soldiers, a strong and violent wind broke forth and buried thousands of them in the sand. Who can stand before retributive justice when it comes forth in its power? II. ITS EFFECT. "Ashamed because of the sacrifices." 1. The shame of disappointment. All plans broken, all purposes thwarted, all hopes destroyed. 2. The shame of exposure. The wicked always live in masquerade, they always appear to be what they are not. Retributive justice takes off the mask. 3. The shame of remorse. This is the most burning shame of all. It sends its fires down into the very centre of man's being, and sets all the moral nerves aflame. Let the wicked take warning. Let not the present stillness of their atmosphere deceive them. Their sins are generating a heat that must, sooner or later, so disturb the elements about them as to bring on ruin. (*Homilist.*)

CHAPTER V.

VER. 1. *Hear ye this, O priests; and hearken, ye house of Israel; and give ye ear, O house of the king; for judgment is toward you.—God in ways of judgment:—*Here is a summons to all sorts of judgment. Three classes are named, "priests, people, house of the king." All sorts are cited to judgment, for corruption was gone over all. 1. When God comes in ways of judgment, He expects we should seriously incline our minds to what He is doing. We should not only "hear," but "hearken," and "give ear." We are bound to hearken and to give ear to God's commanding word; but if we refuse it, He will have us to hear and give ear to His threatening word; and if that be refused, He will force us to hear and give ear to His condemning word. 2. Generality in sins is no means to escape God's judgments. With men "one and all" is a word of security. Men think, I do but as others do, and I shall escape as well as they. With men this is somewhat, with God it is nothing; though all sorts offend, yet there is never a whit the more security thereby unto any. 3. The priests have usually been the causes of all the wickedness in, and judgments on, a nation. 4. The people will usually go the way the king and priests go. But they are not to be excused on this ground. 5. Kings and princes must have sin charged upon them, and be made to know that they are under the threats of God, as well as others. The charge is not on evil counsellors, but on the house of the king itself. Evil princes may be as great a cause why there are evil counsellors, as evil counsellors why there are evil princes. Evil counsellors usually see what the design of a prince is, and what is suitable to his disposition, and they cherish that with their wicked counsels. 6. Though kings are to be reprov'd for sin, some due respect ought to be shown to them. 7. When God pleads against us, let us not disregard. If we do so when He begins to plead His cause with us, if we neglect it because judgment is not upon us, it will proceed to a sentence. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *Ye have been a snare on Mizpah, and a net spread upon Tabor.—Nets to catch souls:—*How cunningly have men laid such nets! They say it is but yielding a little to a thing enjoined by authority; besides, it is really unimportant, and is countenanced by the example of many learned and godly men; yea, and why should you hinder yourself of the good you may do? It is after all a mere matter of circumstance

connected with decency and order, and consistent with much devotion, and by yielding as far as we can, we may gain papists; none but a company of simple people oppose these ancient customs, which can plead the precedent of the fathers of the Church, yea, of many martyrs who have shed their blood. Thus many souls have been caught, as a bird in a snare, with these lines and twigs thus cunningly twisted together; and so caught that they could not tell how to get out, but being once involved in the meshes were ensnared more and more: as a bird once caught in the net, by its very flutterings is the more entangled; so men, when they yielded a little, could not tell where to stop, but at last have gone so far, and been so completely ensnared as to be wholly unable to extricate themselves, but by their very efforts have become more deeply involved. And the truth is, at length even their consciences have ceased to disquiet them: as a bird, that is perhaps at first alarmed when the net is but stirred, after a while loses its fear. (*Ibid.*) *Mizpah and Tabor*:—Mizpah, the scene of the solemn covenant of Jacob with Laban, and of his signal protection by God, lay in the mountainous part of Gilead on the east of Jordan. Tabor was the well-known (traditional) mountain of the Transfiguration, which rises out of the midst of the plain of Jezreel or Esdraelon, about a thousand feet high, and in the form of a sugar loaf. Of Mount Tabor it is related by St. Jerome that birds were still snared upon it. But something more seems intended than the mere likeness of birds taken in the snare of the fowler. This was to be seen everywhere. The prophet has selected places on both sides of Jordan, which were probably centres of corruption, or special scenes of wickedness. Mizpah, being a sacred place in the history of the patriarch Jacob, was probably, like Gilgal, and other sacred places, desecrated by idolatry. Tabor was the scene of God's deliverance by Barak. There, by encouraging idolatries, they became hunters, not pastors, of souls. There is an old Jewish tradition that liars in wait were set in these two places to intercept and murder those Israelites who persisted in going up to worship at Jerusalem. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *God's judicial process and sentence*:—The plain meaning is, that as fowlers and hunters lay snares and nets for birds and beasts on the mountains of Israel; so their priests and rulers, by their erroneous doctrine, fraudulent counsels, subtle edicts, and profane example, and countenancing of sin, deceived the people, and ensnared them to follow idolatry. *Doctrine*—1. There is no rank, but they will be found to have guiltiness to lay to heart, in a time when God pleads a controversy with a land. 2. As the Word of God doth reach and oblige all ranks of persons, be in what eminency they will; and as the Lord's faithful servants must preach against the sins of all, without respect of person; so the general overspreading of sin is no way to escape judgments, but rather to hasten them. 3. When God is coming against a people in judgment, it concerns them to be very serious in considering what He saith from His Word; and He will at last force audience and attention from the most stubborn. 4. The Lord's contending with His people by His Word is not an ordinary challenge, as of one displeased only, but the judicial procedure and sentence of the Supreme Judge. 5. God may testify much of His anger against a people, in the teachers and rulers He gives them, as being fit means to ripen them for judgment. 6. Subtle snares and insinuations are more dangerous for drawing men wrong than open violences. 7. It is a great sin in men when they prove a snare to others, or by their insinuations, example, or policy, draw them to sin against God. (*George Hutcheson.*)

Ver. 2. The revolvers are profound to make slaughter.—*The deep ways of apostates and false worshippers*:—There can be no blacker brand on a people or a man than this—he is an apostate, a revoler. We must understand this, their revolting, especially in reference to their falling off from the true worship of God to their idolatry. 1. It is a dangerous thing to venture on the beginnings of false worship, especially when the tide is flowing in. 2. It is a dangerous thing to be deeply rooted in superstitious ways. By custom men become deeply rooted. 3. The hearts of apostates are the most deeply rooted in wickedness. 4. Idolaters, especially apostates, are profound and deep. Only those who have the Spirit of God that searches the deep things of God, are likely to stand out against the deep policies of idolaters. God calls their “sacrifices” “making slaughter,” by way of reproach. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) **I have been a Rebuker of them all.**—Marg. “correction.” The sin of the people was increased by the circumstance that God had not ceased by His prophets

to recall the Israelites to a sound mind, since they might not have been wholly irreclaimable. Or God may be thought of here as complaining that He had been an object of dislike to the Israelites, as though He said, "When I sent My prophets, they could not bear to be admonished, because My Word was too bitter for them." Reproofs are not easily endured by men. What is clear is that the people of Israel were not only apostates, but hopelessly contumacious and refractory in their wickedness. (*John Calvin.*)

Ver. 3. I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hid from Me.—*Knowledge as a basis of judgment*.—To know Ephraim is to know all his shifts, evasions, and cunning devices, all his plots, pretences, and base ends. 1. God's eye is upon the secrets of men's hearts. 2. God's eye upon our hearts and ways is a special means to humble us. 3. God will deal with men according to their present ways. 4. Defiled worship exceedingly defiles the souls of people. 5. A morally and religiously defiled nation is near to ruin. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *God's knowing*.—Emphasis is laid on the "I." God had known Ephraim all along. However deep they may have laid their plans of blood, I have all along known them; nothing of them has been hid from Me. Even now, when under a fair outward show, they are veiling the depth of their sin, when they think their way is hid in darkness, I know their doings, that they are defiling themselves. Sin never wants specious excuse. Although (in some way unknown to us) not interfering with our free will, known unto God are our thoughts and words and deeds, before they are framed, while they are framed, while they are being spoken and done; known to Him is all which we do, and all which, under any circumstances, we should do. This He knows with a knowledge before the things were. How strange, then, to think of hiding from God a secret sin, when He knew, before He created thee, that He created thee liable to this very temptation, and to be assisted amidst it with just that grace which thou art resisting. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *Nothing hid from God*.—While the Americans were blockading Cuba, several captains endeavoured to elude their vigilance by night, trusting that the darkness would conceal them as they passed between the American war ships. But in almost every case, the dazzling rays of a searchlight frustrated the attempt, and the fugitive vessel was captured by the Americans. The brilliant searchlight, sweeping the broad ocean and revealing even the smallest craft on its surface, is but a faint type of the Eternal Light from which no sinner can hide his sin. (*Sunday School Chronicle.*)

Ver. 4. They will not frame their doings to turn unto their God.—*Framing the doings*.—This is one of those strong Old English expressions which have been retained in our north country speech. People say, "He frames well," meaning of a new servant, he sets hopefully to his work, he shows adaptation. Hosea lived at the time when Israel, whose sin had ripened before Judah's, was beginning to suffer its punishments. Hosea directs the eye of Judah to the miseries falling on Israel, bidding her take warning and hasten to turn back from all her wicked ways to God. In the case of Israel there is a kind of hopelessness that they would ever repent, and the text expresses this hopelessness,—*"They will not frame their doings,"* &c. Such a description of men's state in relation to God is suitable to every generation. **I. EVERY MAN'S FIRST DUTY IS TO TURN UNTO HIS GOD.** Shew it is his duty from these considerations. 1. The claims and relations of God. The eye of every created thing but man is towards God. Whatever view may be taken of those relations—Creator, King, Father—this is certain, God ought to be something to every man—ought to be all that He can possibly be. Man should turn to Him. 2. The conditions of our being. Our condition is one of dependence. Possibly one of gracious friendship with our Creator. We are certainly under temporary conditions on which depend the eternal conditions. 3. The fact that man is turned from God. None are disposed to deny that fact. The consequences are too plainly written on the care-burdened earth—too certainly stamped in on human consciousness. Men everywhere are trying to turn to God, then they must be turned from Him. 4. The special call made by God, in His mercy, through Christ. All natural calls of God are sealed and intensified by His extraordinary call. A new pressure God has put on men—urging them to Himself in Christ. The voice of the Cross is, "Turn ye; turn ye"! It is man's greatest duty, because not concerning the transitory but the eternal, not the temporary but the essential. A true life is a continual turning to God, as

the needle to the pole. II. PRECISELY IN THIS FIRST AND GREATEST DUTY MOST MEN FAIL. One of the most constant efforts of a Christian ministry is to point out the various hindrances keeping men from God, their self-delusions, their religious delusions, their procrastinations. Men's *doings* are the apparent hindrance; men's bad wills are the real hindrance. By "men's doings" are not meant single, isolated acts, but sets and courses of conduct, habits of life, moulds in which conduct is regularly cast. These become such power for evil, because they re-act on the will, enslaving it. So the Old Testament and our Lord and His apostles all say so much about men's doings. What will be the real seeking after God? Its fountain must be in the heart. Penitent yearning of the soul for God. Its expression must be in confession and prayer. The test and proof of its sincerity must be a changed conduct. In every case there will be a suitable "framing of the doings." Men are not without heart desires for God, nor without lip confessions and seekings; but how few can stand the further test of the way in which they "frame their doings." Let us test ourselves by the Scripture terms for the spirit of the ungodly. 1. Lust of the flesh. Indulgence of bodily passion. What have we given up in order to turn to God? 2. Lust of the eyes. The higher pleasures of mind. 3. Pride of life. The great sin of our times. Further, test our religious profession by our unforgivings and envyings. What sincerity then is there in our turning to God? This is the Lord's reproach. "Ye will not frame your doings to turn unto God." A man's sincerity is seen in what he will give up for an object. Illustrate from the going to war; framing their doings to show their patriotism. God looks for a like sincerity. But, after all, behind the doings is the real thing keeping men from turning to God. It is the bad will, the self-centred will. And so this must be the Divine reproach, "Ye will not come unto Me, that ye might have life." (*Robert Tuck, B.A.*)

Framing the doings.—The words in the original are very elegant. Jerome and Vulgate render, "They will not give themselves to think of such a thing." Mercer and Castellius, "They will not do their endeavours." Tremellius, "They do not apply any action of theirs any way to turn unto the Lord." Drusius and Pagninus, "Their custom in their ways of sin will not suffer them to turn to the Lord." Septuagint and Calvin, "They give not their counsels, their studies, to turn to the Lord." They will not give their mind to turn to the Lord, they will not put forth themselves into any posture that way. It is true, we can do nothing without the Lord, but yet the sin lies in our wills rather than in our power, therefore the will is charged by God. They cannot turn unto God of themselves, but yet they may do somewhat, they may bend themselves upon it, they may think of it, they may attend upon the means. 1. Israel will not so much as set his heart to think of anything that will bring him unto God. Not so much as to think, are my ways right or not right? 2. Though a man cannot turn to God, yet through the common work of God's Spirit he may do this, he may be willing to hear and consider what is said for the ways of God. 3. They will not wait on God in the use of means. 4. They will not apply the rule of the Word to their actions. Whatsoever they think will make for their own ends, that they will follow. 5. The light and power they have they will not use. 6. They will not join in with the work of God. 7. They will adhere to their old customs, to their former ways, to what they have received from their forefathers, and been trained up in. 8. They will take and improve to the uttermost every advantage they can have against the ways of God. If we will not frame our doings to turn unto the Lord, He may break us, break that frame which we raise in our own imaginations. Observe—(1) Apostates seldom have any inclination to turn unto God. No meltings of spirit, no yieldings, but their hearts are hardened, and they depart farther and farther from God. (2) True repentance is not only to leave evil, and to do good, but to turn unto God as our God. (3) It is God's just judgment to give men over to the devil to be blinded and hardened when they forsake Him and His truth. (4) Impetuosity of spirit blinds the mind. "The spirit of whoredoms is in them"; and then follows, "they have not known the Lord." Whatsoever is said against their way cannot convince them. When the mind is possessed by passion, love, fear, sorrow, or any other strong affection, and carried out powerfully to the object that excites them, it will not listen to, it will not understand anything urged against it; the voice of reason is unheeded, charming never so wisely. Some have a spirit of sluggishness and love their ease; a spirit of covetousness, and they must have their estates; a spirit of ambition, and they must have their honour and

respect; a spirit of pride and self-love, and they must not on any account grant that they are ignorant and mistaken; therefore they cannot see the truths, the ways of God. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *Life framing*:—The perfection and beauty of all life—vegetable, animal, intellectual, and moral—depends largely on “framing,” by which I mean culture. Scotland was once a barren soil, but industry and skill have turned it into one of the most fruitful and prolific lands to farmers in Europe. More: the orchid would not be so popular as it is, but for the care and skill of the botanist: the rose would not be the beautiful flower that it is, but for the gardener: nor would the carnation, nor the chrysanthemum be the favourites they are, but for the care bestowed upon them by professionals. The same law applies to the feathered tribes. It is a well-known fact that the almost endless variety of pigeons we have in England sprang from the common blue-rock pigeon; and Dr. Drummond says that if all these pigeons could be banished to some distant island for a few years, and their descendants brought back, they would be totally changed; for they would have become blue-rock pigeons. The same law applies with redoubled force to man. Let a man neglect his body for a little while, and he would become little better than a beast or a savage. Let a man neglect his mind, and disorder will follow. Let him neglect his moral nature, and his sympathies will be stunted, and his conscience will cease to commend him when he does right, and to warn him when he does wrong. This was the sin of those to whom the prophet spoke: “They will not frame their doings to turn unto their God.” I. WHAT IS THIS LIFE FRAMING TO WHICH THE WORD OF GOD CALLS US? 1. Each man possesses a soul, which must exist for ever amongst the spirits of the redeemed, or be consigned to eternal punishment. 2. Some men tell us that the brain is the greatest power in man; others, that that power lies in the heart; while others contend that it lies in the will. The fact is, Christian character calls all these powers into requisition (1 Tim. vi. 9-11). How is this character to be secured? (1) There must be repentance. (2) Prayer and self-denial. These are as necessary to expel the evil propensities of your nature as they were to expel devils in our Saviour’s day. (3) Faith in Christ. (4) All men can live such a life if they will. A man may be humble in his origin, and poor in his circumstances, but these things do not prevent him rising to the dignity of a perfect man in Christ. II. LOOK AT SOME OF THE REASONS WHICH MEN URGE FOR THE NEGLECT OF THIS DUTY. “They will not frame their doings to turn unto their God.” The reasons which men urge for the neglect of this important work are, at best, mere excuses, and too often hollow pretexes. 1. Some plead the unfavourable situation in which they are placed. Their companions stand in the way. They would sneer at them, revile them, or even persecute them if they could. To read the Bible, to pray, and to talk about religion in their presence would be impossible. Oh, man, where is thy courage, where is thy manhood? 2. Others plead the pressing claims of their worldly occupations. These are allowed to take precedence. Thought, conversation, and care are bestowed on houses, lands, and worldly wealth, as if there were no better inheritance for man. 3. Business is urged as an excuse. They have to build their house, educate their children, provide for their families, and these leave them no time to carry into effect that which they know to be their duty to God and to themselves. Now observe—(1) There is time enough for every one to save his soul. Others find time to do their duty to God, and you can if you will but try. (2) That family duties and cares need not stand in your way, for the calm influences of religion are just what you need to help you to bear life’s heavy cares. (3) There are methods of amassing wealth in our day which are hurtful to men and abominable to God. 4. Others plead the strength of their passion. They are naturally intemperate, or unchaste, or dishonest, or grasping. 5. All these excuses indicate a shocking indifference to the claims of God upon you, and show, besides, an amazing ignorance of religion. They show that you don’t understand the necessity of religion, as you understand the necessity of food for the hungry, raiment for the naked, or houses for the homeless. You undervalue its importance as compared with other interests. 6. What does God say to these excuses? (*H. Woodcock.*) *The guilt and danger of refusing to serve God*:—Men will not act upon the principle that the great business of life is to serve and please God, and enjoy His favour, here and hereafter. 1. They will not treasure up that truth which is the only medium of sanctification. 2. They will store up folly till there is no room in their minds for Divine and sanctifying truth. 3. Men so associate themselves together that

it would rupture all their friendships to become the friends of God. 4. Men so commit themselves against religion, the Bible, the Sabbath, the people of God, &c., as to cause them great embarrassment when there shall be occasion to take back these commitments. 5. Men so locate themselves and enter such employments as to require a change, and perhaps a rupture of all their earthly relationships, should they turn to serve and please the Lord. 6. They pollute their consciences with those acts of moral defilement which will greatly pain them should they become the children of God. 7. They advance such sentiments with regard to Divine things before the ungodly that should they change their course they will be thereby much hindered in their efforts to do good. 8. All their habits of thinking, speaking, and acting are at variance with the habits of godliness. 9. They put off religion until all their preparation for eternity is crowded into the few last moments of life. Remarks—(1) What a calamity it is that men will not use a little of their wisdom in the matters of eternity, and not be continually blocking up their way to heaven. (2) The people of God have great cause for gratitude that He has not suffered them to go on to a returnless distance from Him. (3) Every benevolent man will be doing all in his power to hold back his fellow-men from ruin. (4) It would be wise if men would calculate to be saved, and be shaping their ways for heaven. (*National Preacher*.)

Moral frameworks:—They cannot set up any framework of God; they are poor moral carpenters; their fingers lose all skill when they seek to put up something that shall have the appearance at least of morality and goodness. They no sooner set up one side of the edifice than the other falls down, and the framework will not hold together, because the spirit is wrong. Away with your mechanical morality; away with your frameworks of honour and social security, even of education when it is meant as a substitute for moral earnestness and purity. It is the spirit that must be renewed; we do not want a framework, but a genius of heart, an atmosphere of soul, a new manhood. "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." Make the tree good, and the fruit will be good. Do not trouble yourselves about the framework. You are not carpenters, you are men; you are not mechanics, you are souls. Do not trifle with the tragedy of life. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*)

The use of means:—A people are yet the more inexcusable in their impenitency when they will not so much as think on endeavouring or using the outward means which might tend towards repentance. They might have fought and yet not come speed, because of their unsoundness and formality in their way; but they were either so ignorant, or malicious and impious, as they did not so much as endeavour to bend their course that way. They would not "frame their doings." (*George Hutcheson*.)

Outward conduct preventive of inward repentance:—Dr. Pusey says, "The rendering of the margin, although less agreeable to the Hebrew, gives a striking sense, 'Their doings will not suffer them to turn unto their God.' Not so much that their habits of sin had got an absolute mastery over them, so as to render repentance impossible, but rather that it was impossible that they should turn inwardly, while they did not turn outwardly. Their evil doings, so long as they persevered in doing them, took away all heart, whereby to turn to God with a solid conversion." Sin begets sin, and the longer men indulge in it the weaker they become in good desire and earnest resolution. But the Hebrew gives another idea. "They," the people in general, Ephraim is no longer addressed personally, "will not frame," lit., will not give (LXX *οὐκ ἔδωκαν*; Vulg., Non dabunt cogitationes suas). Their will is concerned, the seat and centre of their life is wrong, and so long as that is alienated from God (Eph. iv. 18), they do not, they cannot frame their doings. They have created and cherished a mighty impulse within them which drives them on, like the devils drove the swine into the deep. This implies resistance to God and His Spirit (Acts vii. 51). (*J. Wolfendale*.)

Self-hinderers:—Betsy, an old coloured cook, was moaning around the kitchen the other day, when her mistress asked her if she was ill. "No, ma'am, not 'zactly," said Betsy. "But the fac' is, I don't feel ambition 'nough to get out of my own way." As we read this, our memories ran back over a long line of meetings, in which we recalled the faces of many, who after long seeking have never been converted, or others who have never grown in grace, or still others who have never been entirely sanctified, because like Betsy, they have not had ambition enough to get out of their own way. Almost every sort of difficulty has been suggested, perhaps they will candidly confess that Betsy has exactly hit it. (*Dr. Pepper in "Christian Standard."*)

Necessary preliminaries to a godly life :—Few have any notion that there is a certain way to repent and believe, and fewer still indicate the nature of that way. How are men so to frame their doings as to turn unto their God? I. BY THINKING ON CERTAIN SUBJECTS. We act from motives when we act as men. But what are the motives? The creation of our own thoughts. The man who centres his thoughts on the advantages of fame, or wealth, or knowledge, turns to their pursuit. His thoughts excite his feelings, and his feelings urge him to a resolution. If I am to repent I must think of my sins in relation to the character of the Holy God, and the self-sacrificing Christ. It is only as I muse that the fires of penitence will burn. If a man is to turn to any new course of conduct, he must have new motives, and if he is to have new motives, he must have new thoughts. II. BY THINKING ON CERTAIN SUBJECTS IN A CERTAIN WAY. 1. With concentration. 2. With persistency. 3. With devotion. III. BY THINKING ON CERTAIN SUBJECTS WITH A PRACTICAL INTENT. Merely to increase our theological knowledge, or make our feelings glow with religious sentiment would be of little service, but to think in order to translate the thought into action, to embody the idea in the life—this is the way. Thoughtlessness is the curse of humanity. Think on right subjects; think in a right way; think with a practical intent. (*Homilist*.) **They have not known the Lord.**—*Ignorance of the national Jehovah* :—By this sentence the prophet extenuates not the sin of the people, but, on the contrary, amplifies their ingratitude, because they had forgotten their God, who had so indulgently treated them. As they had been redeemed by God's hand; as the teaching of the law had continued among them; as they had been preserved to that day through God's constant kindness,—it was truly an evidence of monstrous ignorance that they could in an instant adopt ungodly forms of worship, and embrace those corruptions which they knew were condemned in the law. It was surely an inexcusable wickedness in the people thus to withdraw themselves from their God. This is the reason why the prophet now says that "they know not Jehovah." But if they were asked the cause, they could not have said that they had no light, for God had made known to them the way of salvation. Hence, that they knew not Jehovah was to be imputed to their perverseness; for, closing their eyes, they knowingly and wilfully ran headlong after those wicked devices which they knew, as it had been stated before, to be condemned by God. (*John Calvin*.)

Ver. 5. **And the pride of Israel doth testify to His face: therefore shall Israel and Ephraim fall in their iniquity.**—*The fall of Israel* :—Tiglath-pileser died in B.C. 727, and was succeeded by Shalmaneser IV. The refusal of Hoshea to continue the annual tribute brought the new Assyrian monarch into the West. Tyre was besieged unsuccessfully, Hoshea carried away captive, and Samaria blockaded for three years. During the blockade Shalmaneser died, and the crown was seized by one of the Assyrian generals. The latter assumed the name of Sargon, in memory of the famous Babylonian monarch who had reigned so many centuries before. The capture of Samaria took place in his first year (B.C. 722); 27,280 of its inhabitants were sent into exile, but only fifty chariots were found in the city. An Assyrian governor was appointed over it, who was commissioned to send each year to Nineveh the same tribute as that paid by Hoshea. The comparatively small number of Israelites who were carried into captivity shows that Sargon contented himself with removing only those persons and their families who had taken part in the revolt against him; in fact, Samaria was treated pretty much as Jerusalem was by Nebuchadnezzar in the time of Jehoiachin. The greater part of the old population was allowed to remain in its native land. This fact disposes of the modern theories which assume that the whole of the Ten Tribes were carried away. (*Prof. Sayce*.) **Pride aggravating sin** :—1. It is a great aggravation of sin when men are swelled with conceit under it, so that their thoughts of themselves are nothing lessened, but they dare defend sin, please themselves in it, and rise against such as do reprove it, and be filled with proud impatience under corrections inflicted because of it. 2. As pride is a sin that will not conceal itself, so this sort of pride is a notorious proof of men's guiltiness which will justly condemn them, and plead for God in so doing. 3. Sin will certainly bring on ruin, especially when men are not only obstinate in it, but swelled with pride for all that. 4. God's judgments will be universal on all ranks, according as they have sinned. (*George Hutcheson*.) **Pride before destruction** :—The prophet, having condemned the Israelites on two

accounts—for having departed from the true God—and for having obstinately refused every instruction, now adds, that God's vengeance was nigh at hand. "Testify then shall the pride of Israel in His face"; that is, Israel shall find what it is thus to resist God and His prophets. The prophet no doubt applies the word "pride" to their contempt of instruction, because they were so swollen with vain confidence as to think that wrong was done them whenever the prophets reproved them. It must at the same time be observed that they were thus refractory, because they were like persons inebriated with their own pleasures; for we know that while men enjoy prosperity, they are the more insolent, according to that old proverb, "Satiety begets ferocity." (*John Calvin.*)

Ver. 6. He hath withdrawn Himself from them.—*Divine withdrawal*.—"Withdrawn" is a word that may well chill our heart. It would be enough to express intolerable displeasure, if it stood just as it stands in this verse; but a larger meaning belongs to the word. "Withdrawn" is in some senses a negative relation, but it was a distinctly positive and we may add repelling action which the Lord meant to convey by the use of the term. All words were originally pictures, and the real dictionary when it appears will be pictorial. The Lord in this instance frees Himself from them. That is the literal and broader meaning of the prophecy. He releases Himself, He detaches Himself, He shakes off an encumbrance, a nuisance, a claim that is without righteousness. This may be taken in two senses. 1. The people are going with flocks and herds as if bent on sacrificial purpose; they will give the Lord any quantity of blood—hot, reeking blood; but the Lord says, I will have no more of your sacrifices; they are an abomination to Me; I hate all the programme of ritual and ceremony and attitude, if it fail to express a hunger and a reverence of the heart and mind. So the Lord is seen here in the act of taking up all these flocks and herds, and all these unwilling priests, and freeing Himself from them, throwing them away, as men pass out of their custody things that are offensive, worthless, and corrupting. Or—2. It may mean that the Lord shakes Himself free from the clutch of hands that have no heart in them: He will walk alone. He will not give up His shepherdliness, though He have no flock to follow Him. Every woman is mother, every man is father, and a man is not the less father that all his children are thrice dead, and are as plants plucked up by the roots, and cast out to the burning. The shepherdliness is not determined by the number of sheep following or going before; shepherdliness is a quality, a disposition, an inspiration, an eternal solicitude. If need be God will continue His shepherdliness though every sheep go astray, and every lamb should die. Mark the disastrous possibility! Men may be left without God; the Almighty and All-merciful may have retired, gone away; away into the shade, the darkness of night; He may have enshrouded Himself in a pavilion of thick darkness, where our poor prayers are lost on the outside. To this dreadful issue things may come. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *Unacceptable sacrifices*.—The heap of their sacrifices should not recall the sentence against them, nor bring any mitigation of their trouble, nor procure access to God and His favour, who had justly deserted them. 1. The greatest contemners of God may at last stand sensibly in need of Him. 2. Impenitent sinners may make offer of many things, when they do not give themselves to God. 3. It is a very sad stroke, when the Lord is not only away, but has really deserted a people, "withdrawn Himself from them." (*George Hutcheson.*) **But they shall not find Him.**—*Too late*.—I. THE MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL WORKS. "Seek the Lord." This implies a distance between man and his Maker. It is not the distance of being, but the distance of character. The great work of man is to seek the Lord morally, to seek His character. 1. This is a work in which all men should engage. 2. This is a work which all men must attend to sooner or later. II. THE MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL WORKS UNDERTAKEN TOO LATE. "They shall not find Him." "He will withdraw Himself from them." This is the language of accommodation. He puts forth no effort to conceal Himself, He alters not His position, but He seems to withdraw from them. As the white cliffs of Albion seem to withdraw from the emigrant as his vessel bears him away to distant shores, so God seems to withdraw from the man who seeks Him "too late." (*Homilist.*) *Repenting too late*.—The main truth in this and other passages of Holy Scripture which speak of a time when it is too late to turn to God, is this; that it shall be "too late to knock when the door shall be shut, and too late to cry for mercy when it is the time of justice." God waits long for sinners; He

threatens long before He strikes; He strikes and pierces in lesser degrees, and with increasing severity, before the final blow comes. In this life He places man in a new state of trial, even after His first judgments have fallen on the sinner. But the general rule of His dealings is this; that when the time of each judgment is actually come, then, as to *that* judgment, it is too late to pray. Not too late for *other* mercy, but too late as to this one. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *Too late* :—About thirty years ago, a gentleman from New York, who was travelling in the South, met a young girl of great beauty and wealth, and married her. They returned to New York, and plunged into a mad whirl of gaiety. The young wife had been a gentle, thoughtful girl, anxious to help all in suffering or want, and to serve her God faithfully. But as Mrs. L. she had troops of flatterers; her beauty and dresses were described in the society journals; her *bon-mots* flew from mouth to mouth; her equipage was one of the most attractive in the park. In a few months she was intoxicated with admiration. She and her husband flitted from New York to Newport, from London to Paris, with no object but enjoyment. There were other men and women of their class who had some worthier pursuit—literature, or art, or the elevation of the poorer classes—but L. and his wife lived solely for amusement. Mrs. L. was looked upon as the foremost leader of society. About ten years ago she was returning alone from California, when an accident occurred to the railroad train in which she was a passenger, and she received a fatal internal injury. She was carried into a wayside station, and there, attended only by a physician from the neighbouring village, she died. The doctor said that it was one of the most painful experiences of his life. “I had to tell her that she had but one hour to live. She was not suffering any pain. Her only consciousness of hurt was that she was unable to move; so that it was no wonder she could not at first believe me. ‘I have but an hour, you tell me?’ ‘Not more.’ ‘And this is all that is left me of the world. It is not much, doctor,’ with a half smile. The men left the room, and I locked the door, that she might not be disturbed. She threw her arm over her face and lay quiet a long time; then she turned on me in a frenzy. ‘To think of all that I might have done with my money and my time! God wanted me to help the poor and the sick! It’s too late now! I’ve only an hour!’ She struggled up wildly. ‘Why, doctor, I did nothing—nothing but lead the fashion! The fashion! Now I’ve only an hour! An hour! —’ But she had not even that, for the exertion proved fatal, and in a moment she lay dead at my feet. No sermon that I ever heard was like that woman’s despairing cry, ‘It’s too late now!’”

Ver. 8. Blow ye the cornet in Gibeah.—*An earnest ministry* :—The idea of the passage is, Give an earnest warning of the judgment about to break on the people, sound the alarm and startle the population. **I. THE NATURE OF AN EARNEST MINISTRY.** “Cry aloud.” Let the whole soul go forth in the work. Earnestness is not noise. “A celebrated preacher, distinguished for the eloquence of his pulpit preparations, exclaimed on his death-bed, ‘Speak not to me of my sermons: alas! I was fiddling whilst Rome was burning.’” 1. It is not frightening people. 2. It is not bustle. He is always on the “go.” Genuine earnestness is foreign to all these things. It has nothing in it of the noise and rattle of the fussy brook, it is like the deep stream rolling its current silently, resistlessly, and without pause. 3. An earnest ministry is living. It is the influence of the whole man. 4. Such a ministry is a matter of necessity. The Divine thing in the man becomes irrepressible, it breaks out as sunbeams through the clouds. 5. Such a ministry is constant. It is not a professional service; it is as regular as the functions of life. 6. Such a ministry is mighty. **II. THE NEED OF AN EARNEST MINISTRY.** Why was the “cornet” to be now blown in Gibeah, and the “trumpet” in Ramah? Because there was danger. 1. The moral danger to which souls around us are exposed is great. 2. It is near. It is not the danger of an invading army heard in the distance. The enemy has entered the soul and the work of devastating has commenced. 3. It is increasing. The condition of the unregenerate soul gets worse and worse every hour. (*Homilist.*) *Cry aloud* :—But after much observation and many deep yearnings over those who are going astray as sheep without a shepherd, it is my firm conviction that here is at least one key to the situation. This was the method of the great evangelical revival of the last century. Whitefield took his place on Kensington Common, where the bodies of executed criminals were left dangling on the gallows, and there, with twenty or thirty thousand of the

lowest rabble before him, he would point to the gallows, and, with that voice which was like the sound of many waters, exclaim: "If you want to know what wages the devil pays his servants, look yonder." Such methods at first grated on the fine sensibilities of Wesley. He says: "I could scarce reconcile myself at first to this strange way of preaching in the fields, having been till lately so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order that I should have thought the saving of souls a sin if it had not been done in a church." Can we reconcile ourselves to such irregular methods? Can we accept the twofold requirement and preach the Gospel not only "in season" but "in season, out of season"? (*A. J. Gordon, D.D.*) *Earnest Christian effort*:—Godly Baxter says of himself, "I confess, to my shame, that I remember no one sin that my conscience doth so much accuse and judge me for, as for doing so little for the salvation of men's souls, and dealing no more earnestly and fervently with them for their conversion. I confess that, when I am alone, and think of the case of poor ignorant, worldly, earthly, unconverted sinners, that live not to God, nor set their hearts on the life to come, my conscience telleth me that I should go to as many of them as I can, and tell them plainly what will become of them if they do not turn, and beseech them, with all the earnestness that I can, to come to Christ, and change their course, and make no delay. And though I have many excuses, from other business and from disability and want of time, yet none of them all do satisfy my own conscience when I consider what heaven and hell are, which will one of them be the end of every man's life. My conscience telleth me that I should follow them with all possible earnestness night and day, and take no denial till they return to God." *After thee, O Benjamin.*—*Front-rank men*:—There is good reason to believe that this was the tribal battle-cry. The R.V., in its margin, favours this idea. It there reads, "After thee, Benjamin! (see Judg. v. 14)." The reference is to the passage in the Song of Deborah: "After thee, Benjamin, among thy people." Many commentators interpret this as addressed to Ephraim; e.g., Delitzsch: "Behind thee," i.e., "Ephraim, there followed Benjamin among thy (Ephraim's) people (hosts)." On the other hand, the Pulpit Commentary reads, "Following thee, O Benjamin, with thy people"; and Dean Stanley (*Jewish Church*, vol. i.) renders, "After thee, Benjamin, in thy people." Psalm lxxviii. seems to corroborate this interpretation. This psalm is a glorious song of triumph. It refers to past history; it recalls to mind God's wondrous dealings with His favoured people; the miracles He had wrought for them, the victories He had enabled them to win. The allusion to Zebulun and Naphtali in verse 27 seems to be a direct reference to the Song of Deborah, where these two tribes receive honourable mention (ver. 18): "Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeopardied their lives unto the death in the high places of the field." But first among the four tribes mentioned in the psalm we have Benjamin: "There is little Benjamin, their ruler," or leader; i.e., ruling or leading the procession. But why thus ruling or leading the festal procession? Perhaps with some reference to the fact that the first judge and the first king had sprung from their tribe. But also, no doubt, because this was the position that its warriors had taken on many a hard-fought field. Though a small tribe, it was famous for its warlike character, and bore out the prediction of Jacob: "Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf; in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil" (Gen. xlix. 27). I. A NOBLE MOTTO. Lead the way. To be among the first in things that are good is a grand ambition. Emulation is praiseworthy if "a man strive lawfully." It is not to be confounded with envy, which seeks to outstrip another from mere jealousy; nor with self-exaltation, which springs from vanity; nor with that meanness which seeks to make one's self great by lowering or debasing another. It is the desire to be in the front rank in what is good; to be zealous and active for the right. "After thee," then, O my soul, let others be, in striving to do good. "After thee," in helping the oppressed, in succouring the needy. Not holding back, but pressing to the front. "After thee," in time of danger and difficulty. Lead the way; join the forlorn hope. II. A NOBLE MOTTO, WITHOUT GOD'S BLESSING, IS UNAVAILING. Hosea depicts the invading hosts in the midst of Benjamin. "The evil day and destruction denounced, is now vividly pictured as actually come. All is confusion, hurry, alarm, because the enemy was in the midst of them. The cornet, an instrument made of horn, was to be blown as an alarm, when the enemy was at hand. The trumpet was especially used for the worship of God. Gibeah and Ramah were cities of Benjamin, on the

borders of Ephraim, where the enemy, who had possessed himself of Israel, would burst in upon Judah" (Pusey). Then in this supreme moment of danger and anxiety an endeavour is made to rally the warriors of the tribe; their battle-cry is raised, "After thee, O Benjamin." But in vain. The hand of the Lord is against them (vers. 9, 10). Without God no effort can be successful. He alone can give the strength. The blessing of the Lord it maketh rich. Without it there is no true prosperity; high aspirations cannot be reached; lofty ideals, great efforts will not avail. Against God who can be successful? Learn—We must have God's blessing on our efforts, otherwise they are in vain. Therefore, "Seek ye the Lord." III. A NOBLE MOTTO, WHEN TRANSFERRED TO THE CAUSE OF SIN, BECOMES DOUBLY DISASTROUS. It is very sad to see splendid opportunities wasted. This is sad. But it is more sad to see noble abilities, precious opportunities, large means used for evil purposes, against God and what is good. To sin is bad enough; but to be a leader and teacher of sin is satanic. The right use of the noble Benjamite motto demands, therefore, the preliminary inquiry in the council chamber of the soul, "In what direction am I going? In what things do I desire to be found amongst the first?" (*J. S. S. Sheilda, D.D.*)

Ver. 9. Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke.—*The Lord's anger* :—"Desolate" may be reckoned with energetic adjectives. It was another form of the word that the prophet used; it was a substantive, colder than ice, hollower than the wind: Ephraim shall be a desolation. Here we come from the descriptive word into the concrete term—a desolation; a word which carries its own limitations and qualifications. You cannot amend the word, you cannot enlarge it, you can add nothing to its cheerlessness; desolation admits of no companion term; it must be felt to be understood. There have been times when the house was a desolation; there was no light in the windows; though they stood squarely south, and looked right at the sun at mid-day, yet they caught no light; there was silence in the house; no sound; the fire crackled and spluttered, and spent itself in vain explosions, but there was no poetry in all the way of the flame, there was no picture of home in all the blank shining of the hollow tongues of fire that licked the grate, but said nothing, yet only hinted that the place was empty; bed and cot and favourite fireside, all vacant, and the very grandeur of the house an aggravation of its vacancy. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Why is God so wrathful? Is this an arbitrary vengeance? Doth He delight to show His omnipotence, and to chastise the insects of a day because He is almighty? Never. There is always a moral reason,—*"The princes of Judah were like them that remove the bound."* God has always been jealous of the landmark. God is honest; would His Church were also honest! God will not live in the house until the false weights and scales be taken out of it; God will not tabernacle with men whilst they are pinching the poor of one little inch of the yard length; He will trouble the house with a great moan of wind, until the balances be right; then He will say, You may now pray. And every sentence will be an answer. From the beginning we have seen that God would have the landmark respected. Here are the princes of Judah, thieves. It must be an awful thing to rob the poor as they were robbed by the great in all ages. It must be an infinitely difficult thing for a prince to be honest; it is an almost impossible thing for a rich man to be really honest. The Lord is the defender of the poor. We cannot understand how, but there is in history, taking it in great breadths, a spirit that reclaims what has been taken unrighteously, that punishes the men who trifle with landmarks and boundaries, and old family fences. God rebukes the rich; God never blesses human greediness. Judge not by appearances, or by narrow instances; take in cycles of time, great spans of history, and see how the slow moving but sure moving spirit of providence readjusts and reclaims, and finally establishes according to the law of honesty and righteousness. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 10. The princes of Judah were like them that remove the bound.—*Breaking bounds* :—It was a custom among the heathen and the Romans, if any man removed the bound, the ancient landmark, to adjudge them, if poor, to slavery, to dig in deep pits; if rich, to banishment, and a forfeiture of the third part of their estates. The princes of Judah broke down the bounds in a fourfold manner. 1. They took away other men's estates, as Ahab did Naboth's. 2. They broke all bounds; all laws and liberties. They will not be bound by laws, saying

thus, "Laws were made for subjects, not princes." 3. They broke the bonds of religion. This is the great breach of bonds, when people provoke God. 4. They broke the bonds of their own covenants, and regarded them not. The bounds of religion and laws, as they keep in obedience, so they keep out judgments. And we ought to look on laws in both those points of view, not only as means to keep us in order and duty, but also to keep out wrath. If we break our bounds, we must look that wrath should break in upon us; therefore we had need do as men that live near the sea, when the sea breaks in upon them, they presently leave all other businesses, to make up the breaches. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *Landmarks, or bounds* :—In the East, advantage was taken, wherever possible, of natural divisions, such as river beds, tributary stream lines, or edges of valleys; but in the open ground, the separate properties were only marked by a deeper furrow, or by large stones almost buried in the soil. Stealthy encroachments might easily be made by shifting these stones.

Ver. 12. **Therefore will I be unto Ephraim as a moth.**—*The moth; or God's quiet method of destroying* :—"And I am like the moth to Ephraim, and like the worm to the house of Judah."—Keil and Delitzsch. "The moth and worm are figures employed to represent destructive powers: the moth destroying clothes (Isa. l. 9, li. 8; Psa. xxxix. 12), the worm injuring both wood and flesh." The words indicate God's quiet method of ruining. In two or three verses in this chapter He is spoken of as proceeding in His work of destruction as a lion. Here as a "moth"—working out ruin silently, slowly, and gradually. I. HE WORKS DECAY THUS SOMETIMES IN THE BODIES OF MEN. Oftentimes men die violently and suddenly, but more frequently by some insidious hidden disease which, like a "moth," works away quietly at the vitals, gradually poisoning the blood and undermining the constitution. The moth is often so small and secret in its workings that medical science can seldom find it out, and when it finds it out, though it may check it for a time, it cannot destroy it: the moth defies all medicine. At the heart of some of the strongest trees in the forest there are hosts of invisible insects noiselessly at work; the forester knows it not, the tree seems healthy; until one fine morning before a strong gust of wind it falls a victim to these silent workers. So with the strongest man amongst us. II. HE WORKS DECAY THUS SOMETIMES IN THE ENTERPRISES OF MEN. Often men find it impossible to succeed in their worldly avocations. Mercantile establishments that have been prosperous for generations have the "moth" in them. They have not been conducted by godly men and that in a right spirit; so God sent a "moth," and the moth has been working away for years silently, secretly, and gradually, until all the vitality has been eaten up. III. HE WORKS DECAY THUS SOMETIMES IN THE KINGDOMS OF MEN. Effeminacy, luxury, ambition, greed, self-indulgence, servility, irreverence, these are moths, and decay sets in, and it falls not by the sword of the invader but by its own "rotteness." IV. HE WORKS DECAY THUS SOMETIMES IN THE CHURCHES OF MEN. What destroyed the churches of Asia Minor? The "moth" of worldliness and religious error. Some of our modern churches are obviously slowly rotting away. A realising faith in the invisible; brotherly love; practical self-sacrifice; Christliness of spirit, are being eaten up by the moth of secularity, sectarianism, superstition, and religious pretence. Thus, too, individual souls lose their spiritual life and strength. God deliver us from those errors of heart that like a moth eat away the life! (*Homilist.*) *The moth* :—The mention of the moth in Scripture is, with a single exception, confined to the destruction caused in clothing by the larvæ of the little clothes' moth (*Tineidæ*), of which very many species are found in Palestine. No other lepidopterous insect is alluded to in Scripture, and the class, including butterflies and moths, is not very numerously represented in the Holy Land, the dry climate of which, together with the scarcity of wood, is not particularly favourable to the development of this group. The number of recorded species in the Holy Land is about two hundred and eighty. (*Canon Tristram.*)

Ver. 13. **When Ephraim saw his sickness . . . then went Ephraim to the Assyrian.**—*The folly of creature-confidence* :—Men continually provoke God to chastise them, but rarely make a due improvement of His chastisements. Instead of turning to God, they dishonour Him more by applying to the creature under their distress rather than to Him. I. MEN, IN TIMES OF

TROUBLE, ARE PRONE TO LOOK TO THE CREATURE FOR HELP RATHER THAN TO GOD. 1. In troubles of a temporal nature. Sickness of body. Distress of mind. Straitened circumstances. God is invariably our last refuge. 2. In spiritual troubles. Under conviction of sin. In seasons of temptation or desertion. Though foiled ten thousand times, we cannot bring ourselves to lie as clay in the potter's hands. II. THE CREATURE CANNOT AFFORD US ANY EFFECTUAL SUCCOUR. There are circumstances wherein friends may be instrumental to our relief; but they can do—1. Nothing effectual; and 2. Nothing of themselves. Apply—(1) Let us guard against this sinful propensity, both in our national and personal concerns. (2) Let us especially rely on Christ as the healer of our souls. To Him then look with humble, uniform, unshaken affiance. (*Sketches of Sermons.*) *Wrong methods of relief* :—Under a grievous sense of their disease and weakness, instead of applying to Jehovah, Ephraim and Judah went “to the Assyrian, and sent to King Jareb.” The Assyrian king was ever ready for his own aggrandisement to mix himself up with the affairs of neighbouring states. I. MEN ARE OFTEN MADE CONSCIOUS OF THEIR SPIRITUAL MALADY. Depravity is a disease of the heart. It impairs the energies, mars the enjoyments of the soul, and incapacitates it for the right discharge of the duties of life. A great point is gained when a man becomes conscious of his disease, and the sinner of his sin. II. MEN FREQUENTLY RESORT TO WRONG MEANS OF RELIEF. The Assyrians had neither the power nor the disposition to effect the restoration of Ephraim to political health. Sometimes men go—1. To scenes of carnal amusement; or 2. To sceptical philosophisings; or 3. To false religions. These are all miserable comforters, broken cisterns. III. RESORTING TO WRONG METHODS OF RELIEF WILL PROVE UTTERLY INEFFECTIVE. What can worldly amusements, sceptical reasonings, and false religions do towards healing a sin-sick soul? Like anodyne, they may deaden the pain for a minute only, that the anguish may return with intenser acuteness. There is but one Physician of souls. (*Homilist.*) *Christ as physician of the spiritually sick* :—Wherever we look, or wherever we go, we are met by one or another of God's loving mercies. In the extremity of their distress, Ephraim and Judah chose the most unholy and unlawful means for their deliverance. They had no bright confidence in the fountain of living waters. I. THE ENTIRE ISRAEL OF GOD SUFFERS MORE OR LESS FROM HEART AND SOUL SICKNESS. There is not a prophet under the old dispensation, nor an apostle under the new, but speaks without one qualifying term of the sinfulness of man. Does not God's Word, however, seem to contradict the saying that the spiritual sickness of a guilty soul is universal? Is not this inferred—that some souls are not in this lapsed condition—when Jesus said, “They which be whole need not a physician”? Those words were directly addressed to the Pharisees, and were meant as a rebuke to that proud, self-righteous seed, whose thoughts were always running upon their own moral excellency. No sinner, with the taint and defilement of sin upon him, can possibly be whole in the scriptural acceptation of the word. II. WE ARE OFTEN DRIVEN IN OUR DISTRESS TO UNAVAILABLE SOURCES FOR OUR RELIEF. Assyria was, at that time, a mighty nation, and apparently held in her large grasp the destinies of the house of Israel: nevertheless, when that distressed people came to her king for succour, his hands were tied and his instruments were powerless. Yet they took the best wisdom of the children of this world. The heart of man is a very insufficient, I had nearly said the worst of all imaginable counsellors. And men have no knowledge of their true Physician, or no taste for His medicines; they have no life to seek the grace of salvation, or no love freely to embrace it. There is a class of professors who accept the invitations of Jesus, but only in a qualified sense. They receive Him as a great Prophet, an intercessory Priest, an everlasting King. But only the sick care to hear of Him as the Great Physician. III. HE WHO CURES OUR MALADY MUST HIMSELF BE FREE FROM IT. Christ and none but Christ is pointed at in these words, “For He who knew no sin was made sin for us.” After what manner did He cure? 1. By changing the appearance of sin, and showing what we thought mere little scars to be large wounds. 2. By giving a new channel to the thoughts when they have beheld enough of corruption to alarm, to disturb, and to humble the whole man. 3. By teaching a praying penitent songs of praise, and testifying so strongly to the length and breadth and height of His mercy, that he shall have no depth of desire for anything else. When the heart is cured, how can it do otherwise than sing? When the will is cured, its principal delight is to search the revealed counsels of the Most High; the cure is effectual; the thanks-offering

must not be less than cordial. (F. G. Crossman.) *Sin and sorrow*.—I. SIN, HOWEVER REJOICED IN, BRINGS MANY SORROWS IN ITS TRAIN. Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound. Sin is the disease of the soul; bitter to bear, difficult to cure. Like the leprosy over the body, it overspread the entire framework of the mind. Conscience itself is either blind or dumb; blind, that it does not see our danger, or dumb, that it does not sound an alarm. Sometimes it is a silenced preacher, or an ambassador in lousds. The disease of the body may be known by various symptoms, so may that of the soul. The taste is vitiated. Disease produces want of rest. It prostrates the strength. It darkens and obscures the beauty of the outward frame. Some diseases rob the soul of reason. Sinners are described as "mad upon their idols." II. MEN, WHEN INVOLVED IN SUFFERING, OFTEN HAVE RECOURSE TO WRONG SOURCES OF RELIEF. 1. They do so in worldly trials. Illustrate by Ephraim sending to King Jareb. So with men now. The creature is everything and God nothing. 2. In spiritual distress. Men are often sorry for their troubles, not for their transgressions. When conscience is aroused men try partial repentance and amendment; sacraments, &c. III. A SUCCESSION OF TRIALS MAY BE NEEDED TO CONVINCE MEN OF THEIR SIN AND DANGER, AND DRIVE THEM OFF FROM FALSE REFUGES. Various are the means God employs. If lighter judgments fail, heavier are sent. IV. THE ULTIMATE DESIGN OF GOD'S PROCEDURE WITH HIS OWN PEOPLE IS NOT DESTRUCTION BUT SALVATION. "They will seek Me early." "Come, and let us return." (S. T.) *Storm-signals—a caution for sin-sick souls*.—There is a tendency in the heart of man to want something to look to rather than something to trust to. Looking at the fallacy of Ephraim as illustrative of a common tendency of mankind, and using the text as the picture of a sinner in a peculiar state of mental anxiety, notice.—I. THE SINNER'S PARTIAL DISCOVERY OF HIS LOST ESTATE. It is here but a partial discovery. Ephraim felt his sickness, but he did not know the radical disease that lurked within. He only perceived the symptoms. How many men there are who have got just far enough to know there is something the matter with them. They little reck that they are totally ruined. They still cling with some hope to their own devices. II. THE WRONG MEANS WHICH HE TAKES TO BE CURED OF HIS EVIL. He tries to make himself better. All that man can do apart from the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ is utterly in vain. Matthew Wilks used to say you might as well hope to sail to America on a sere leaf as hope to go to heaven by your own doings. III. THE RIGHT MEANS OF FINDING HEALING AND DELIVERANCE. Whoever will be saved must know that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came down from heaven, lived a life of sanctity and suffering, and at last became obedient unto death. He is a Divinely ordained Saviour. You must believe He is willing to save. There must be a leaning on Him, a dependency on Him. God requires nothing of you but that you should depend for all on Christ. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *Israel and King Jareb*.—So Ephraim and Judah went to the wrong person, and did not gain much by their application. It seemed to them an excellent policy. Israel could not choose to be independent. Neither can we be independent. Where is there a man that seriously reflects upon our earthly lot that does not feel there is a secret sickness, a hidden wound, somewhere? Man is the great sufferer the wide world over. Either man has been unduly and abnormally elevated, or else he must needs be fallen. Man's distresses and disappointments spring from his fall. He is not what God intended him to be, and therefore he does not enjoy what God intended him to enjoy. He is out of harmony with God, and therefore out of harmony with nature. Besides outward evils, there is the prevalence of moral evil, which in many cases proves the very worst evil of all. When Ephraim and Judah saw that things were not all right with them, they fell back upon the Assyrian, instead of throwing themselves upon God. And even so when men begin to be conscious of the disappointments of life, and feel an inward discontent, like a disease preying upon their hearts, how often do they follow the example of Israel, and seek in the creature what can only be found in the Creator! Some take refuge in the pre-occupations of business. Others fly to more intoxicating excitements. There is the distinct attempt of human perversity to get away from its inward sense of want, and emptiness, and helpless misery, by falling back upon the world, instead of turning to God. How shall God deal with us when we show ourselves so perverse and froward? What course do we force upon Him by our folly? The appearance that God bears to us will ever be determined by the attitude that we assume towards Him. It was a terrible and

startling part that the God of Israel undertook to maintain in dealing with His ancient people. It would have been no true kindness on God's part if He had granted them prosperity when they were apostate from Him. This must have led them to feel the more satisfied with their apostasy, and the less disposed to repent. As it was, the prophets could point to each fresh disaster as a proof that the nation was under the judgment of God, and that their sin was proving their ruin. It is no less His love to us that makes Him deal with us in a similar manner. He has to thwart us just that He may show us how little King Jereb can do for us. (*W. Hay Aitken, M.A.*) *Help sought from the creature*:—Carnal hearts seek to the creature for help in time of difficulty. They saw their sickness, their wound, and they "sent to King Jereb." They look to no higher causes of their trouble than second causes, therefore they seek to no higher means for their relief than second causes. They regard their troubles as such as befall other men as well as them, and so look not up to God. They are led by sense, and the second causes are before them, and near to them, but God is above them and beyond them, and His ways are often contrary to sense. They little mind God in their straits, but send for help unto the creature. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *The wrong physician*:—A poor fisherman in the town of Nairn, on the Moray Firth, had for some years been afflicted with a troublesome cough, and, having consulted many doctors, was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse. He had heard, however, that there were very skilful men in Edinburgh, and he decided to go. During the voyage, he told some of the sailors his object in going to Edinburgh, and they advised him to see Sir James Simpson. It was often a very difficult matter to get an interview with Sir James, but, to his surprise, he was at once admitted to the consulting-room, stated his case, and after a short examination Sir James said, "You've applied to many doctors already, you said?" "Yes, sir, a good many." "Have you gone to the Great Physician?" The man was silent. "Well, my good man," resumed Sir James, "I advise you to go to Him; I am sorry I can do you little good. You had better go home, and just take as good care of yourself as you can." The man was very much affected, for he now understood that his case appeared hopeless. Putting his hand in his pocket and taking out a few coins, he said, "What have I to pay you, doctor?" "My friend," said Sir James, putting his hand kindly on his shoulder, "I don't want any money from you. I ask only an interest in your prayers. Good-bye. Don't forget to go to the Great Physician." After thanking the doctor, he returned home, sought and found Christ as his spiritual Physician and Saviour, and soon afterwards died.

Ver. 15. I will go and return to My place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek My face: in their affliction they will seek Me early.—*God's end and design in affliction*:—This whole chapter, with the following one, contains a pathetic remonstrance of God's just quarrel with His people; aggravated by much long-suffering and lenity, and many warnings, verbal and real, on His part, and much stubbornness, impenitence, and multiplied provocation on theirs; He using all means to reclaim and save them, and they using all means to despise Him, and ruin themselves. In the text we have the Lord concluding upon a severe course, as being necessary, and likely to be more effectual for their conversion. **I. THE PROCURING CAUSE OF GOD'S AFFLICTING HIS PEOPLE.** 1. The procuring cause is made up of these two—sin and impenitence. (1) We may see how unwilling God is to afflict His people. Judgments are termed "His strange work," but mercy is His darling attribute. He will not leave them, unless they drive Him away. (2) We see where the true blame of the many sufferings and miseries of the Church is to be found. The abounding of sin, and the want of repentance, those make her troubles to abound. This is our folly, that usually we abuse all God's goodness, and will not part with our sins, till we smart for them, and be beaten from them. We pull punishment out of God's hand. **II. GOD'S WAYS OF AFFLICTING HIS PEOPLE.** Upon the withdrawing of His gracious presence, as necessarily follows affliction, as mist upon the setting of the sun. This was heavier than all His corrections. No evil does the child of God fear so much, or feel so heavy, as God's absenting and withdrawing Himself in displeasure. **III. THE END OF GOD'S THUS AFFLICTING HIS PEOPLE.** 1. God's intention in the means. To bring them to a sorrow for their offences, and an ingenuous confession of it. If He withdraw Himself it is not to leave them for ever and look at them no more. On the contrary, it is that they may learn whether it is better

to enjoy Him or their sins. 2. The efficacy of the means for reaching it. There is moral fitness in great affliction to work a diligent seeking of God, before neglected, and acknowledgment of sin, before unfelt. Affliction sets men in upon themselves, calls in their thoughts, which, in a fair season, more readily dissipate and scatter themselves abroad. When a man is driven by force from the comforts of the world, then, if he have any thoughts concerning God, these begin to work with him. When a man is straitened on all hands by a crowd of troubles, and finds no way out, then he finds his only way is upward. (*Archbishop Leighton.*) *God's withdrawal and return:*—Sin is here characterised as an offence. 1. It is committed against God. 2. It is contrary to the nature and judgment of God. 3. It awakens the indignation of God. I. BECAUSE OF SIN, GOD WITHDRAWS HIMSELF FROM HIS PEOPLE. 1. He goes and returns to His place, when He leaves His people in the hands of their enemies, and does not interfere. 2. When He removes from them the ordinances of His grace—the symbols of His presence. 3. When He allows these to continue, but is not in them. 4. When He leaves them to insensibility under His dealings. 5. When the soul, feeling His absence, seeks for Him in vain. II. GOD'S WITHDRAWAL FROM HIS OFFENDING PEOPLE IS NOT ABSOLUTE AND FOR EVER. 1. Though God withdraws from His people, He does not cease to love them. 2. He never withdraws His spirit and grace for their preservation in the faith. 3. He never withdraws from them finally, and so as never to return. 4. Sometimes, when He withdraws in the way of ceasing to afford sensible comfort, He is present in the way of restraining, and defending, and sanctifying—in the way of chastisement. There are degrees in the withdrawals of God. III. THAT GOD RETURNS TO HIS PEOPLE WHEN THEY ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR OFFENCE AND SEEK HIS FACE. 1. They must acknowledge their offence. This implies that they have discovered it. That they see its enormity. That they are contrite and penitent. That they forsake it. That they go to Christ's blood. 2. They must seek God's face. They feel that their comfort is in God only. They mourn and lament His absence. They seek Him in the appointed ordinances of His house. They seek Him by prayer. They are dissatisfied with the choicest of means and ordinances, if God be not in them. They seek Him in Christ. (*James Stewart.*) *Coming to God in trouble:*—"We only see those birds, sir, when the storms are about," said an old man to me on the seashore last week. That is typical of some people who only come to God in times of storm, and dearth, and epidemic, and never make their dwelling in God. (*J. H. Jowett, M.A.*)

CHAPTER VI.

VER. 1. Come, and let us return unto the Lord.—*The characteristic marks of true penitence:*—These words are the expressions of that penitence which was excited in the Israelites by God's departure from them, and by His grace that accompanied the affliction. I. THE CHARACTERISTIC MARKS OF TRUE PENITENCE. It will always be attended by—1. A sense of our departure from God. With unregenerate men the thought of being at a distance from God never distresses. As soon as the grace of repentance is given, men see that they are as sheep gone astray. 2. An acknowledgment of affliction as a just chastisement for sin. The impenitent heart murmurs and rebels under the Divine chastisements: the penitent "hears the rod, and Him that appointed it." 3. A determination to return to God. When a man is once thoroughly awakened to a sense of his lost condition, he can no longer be contented with a formal round of duties. To hear of Christ, to seek Him, are from henceforth his chief desire, his supreme delight. 4. A desire that others should return to Him also. This is insisted on as characteristic of the great work that shall be accomplished in the latter day (Isa. ii. 3). The penitent feels it incumbent on him to labour for the salvation of others. II. THE GROUNDS ON WHICH A PENITENT MAY TAKE ENCOURAGEMENT TO RETURN TO GOD. 1. From a general view of God's readiness to heal us. 2. From that particular discovery of it which we have in the wounds He has inflicted on us. Apply—1. To those who have deserted God. 2. To those who are deserted by God. (*Skeletons of Sermons.*) *Man's*

highest social action :—The prophet calls on those who had been smitten, or sent into exile, to put away all confidence in an arm of flesh, to renounce all idolatries. I. THAT SOCIETY IS AWAY FROM GOD. Not locally, of course; for the Great Spirit is with all and in all, but morally. Society is away from Him in its thoughts; away from Him in its sympathies; away from Him in its pursuits. II. THAT ESTRANGEMENT FROM GOD IS THE SOURCE OF ALL ITS TRIALS. Because the prodigal left his father's home he got reduced to the utmost infamy and wretchedness. Moral separation from God is ruin. Cut the branch from the root and it withers; the river from its source, and it dries up; the planet from the sun, and it rushes into ruin. Nothing will remove the evils under which society is groaning but a return unto God. Legislation, commerce, science, literature, art, none of these will help it much so long as it continues away from Him. III. THAT RETURN TO HIM IS A POSSIBLE WORK. (*Homilist*.) *Luxury and ease* :—I. THE FACT OF BACKSLIDING. Had there been no wandering from the Lord, there would have been no need of a return to Him. From passages in the histories of Solomon and David, as shewing how luxury and ease conduce to backsliding. Solomon would be now called a child of God. He did start well. But the history of Solomon shows us that no amount of experience is in itself a safeguard. Whether young or old in the faith, we need the preserving grace of God from moment to moment. In Solomon's case the affinity with Pharaoh, and marriage with his daughter, are like the first links in a long chain of backsliding. Is it not often the case that believers, even when apparently walking in the fear of the Lord, may be cherishing some secret sin or indulgence, which, like a seed concealed in the earth, finally germinates and blossoms forth into open backsliding? Solomon fell through self-indulgence. And the Christian who is self-indulgent, who makes the means entrusted to him by God minister to his love of luxury and desire for worldly pomp, is on the high road to idolatry. God did not leave Solomon undisturbed in his idolatry and self-indulgence. The record of David's fall is given in 2 Sam. xi. Idleness is the parent of vice. Lurking lusts, encouraged by the quiet, creep out of their hiding-places, hold converse with the heart, and seek to drag him into all manner of sin. David fell before temptation, and set himself to commit further sin, in the hope of covering that already committed. This is almost invariably the case with the backslider. II. GOD'S DEALINGS WITH THE BACKSLIDER. "He hath torn—He hath smitten." It is in mercy, and not in wrath, that God deals with His backsliding children. Punishment has for its object, the vindication of the authority of God as the moral Ruler. It is judicial as well as remedial. But its chief purpose is the backslider's restoration. III. A GLIMMER OF FAITH ON THE PART OF THE BACKSLIDER. "He will heal us—He will bind us up." In the heart of the backslider there lies hidden the germ of a God-given faith, like seeds in a mummy case. IV. THE GOODLY RESOLVE. "Come, and let us return unto the Lord." Some seek to heal their backslidings without dealing with God Himself. How are we to return? Through Jesus, the once crucified, the now risen and exalted One. (*W. P. Lockhart*.) *Signs of true penitence* :—I. WHEREVER THERE IS TRUE REPENTANCE, THERE WILL BE A RETURNING UNTO THE LORD. 1. A true penitent will be sensible, not only of straying from God, which hath made a distance between God and him, but that his straying hath begotten an averseness, and turned his back upon God, so that he needs to re-turn. 2. A penitent will have a deep sense, that all other courses he has essayed in his straying from God, are but vanity. II. THE ORDINARY FORERUNNER OF A TIME OF MERCY, IS THE LORD'S STIRRING UP HIS PEOPLE TO SEEK HIM. Here they are excited, and excite one another to this duty. "Come, and let us return," and this is their temper in a time of love. (*George Hutcheson*.) For He hath torn, and He will heal us.—He hath torn, and He will heal us :—The philosophy of the Divine judgments is here most explicitly expounded. The motive of every Divine judgment, within the limits of this life, is mercy. We see but dimly what may lie beyond this life. Here, at any rate, the one constant patient aim of God, by every means of influence which He wields, is to bring men unto Himself. It is important to remember, what some schools of Christian thought have strangely forgotten, that God's righteousness is not a righteousness which would be satisfied equally by the conversion, or by the punishment of a sinner. We cannot abstract the righteousness from the living person who is also the Father of that sinner; and who loves him with such tenderness that He is capable of even an infinite sacrifice, that that child may not die but live. God's righteousness, God's justice, God's

holiness, yearn for the restoration of the sinner to righteousness, quite as much as His mercy and His love. And through life they are spending all their arts and efforts to take him captive, and to bring him home. It is beginning to be fully recognised, in the physical sphere, that judgments are but rich blessings in disguise. There are indeed some dark passages of Scripture history which seem to contradict this principle: e.g., Pharaoh of the hardened heart. This cannot be fully explained, but it makes this terrible suggestion—what must be the doom of a heart that is hardened even against the Divine love? There is a growing hardness where the will is in it. The blow that is sent in mercy, if it fails to open the heart's sealed portals, strikes down. The heart hardened against God, hardens itself further. And this is His law, and part of the solemn conditions of our life. But there is nothing on earth irreparable while we can repent and turn unto the Lord; "for He hath torn, and He will heal us." There is absolutely nothing in the experience of the sinner, the sufferer, which God cannot transmute into joy. No calamity can long oppress the spirit which He wills to draw to the shield of His strength, and to rest on the bosom of His love. Or is the sorrow a remembrance of sin? With the word of forgiveness, the bitterness of the sorrow passes. God can forgive the iniquity of the sin. Is it temptation? Believe that temptation is God's benignant ordinance for the trial and assay of spirits. God has not left you untroubled. (*J. Baldwin Brown, B.A.*) *God's time for mercy*:—1. When God's time of mercy is come, He puts a mighty spirit of seeking into men. 2. A joint turning to God is very honourable to God. "Come, and let us return." 3. Times of mercy are times of union. 4. True penitent hearts seek to get others to join with them. 5. In times of the greatest sufferings a truly penitent heart retains good thoughts of God. 6. A penitent heart is not a discouraged heart. A repenting heart is not a discouraged, but a sustained heart. But we must not falsely encourage ourselves. Our hope is in God. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *He hath smitten, and He will bind us up*.—*Hope for a bleeding Church*:—The text may be considered as the language of a Church. I. *SMARTING UNDER RECENT CHASTISEMENTS*. 1. Shew the sufferings of such a Church. 2. These sufferings are to be received as from the hand of God. 3. And regarded as chastisements of God for the sins of the Church. II. *HOPING FOR A SPEEDY REVIVAL*. That hope rests on the following grounds. 1. On the mingled exercises of mercy and judgment which characterise God's government of His Church. 2. On the regard which God has to the honour of His name, and the success of His cause in the earth. 3. On the ground of the mediatorial prerogatives of the Son of God. 4. On the promised power and grace of the Holy Spirit. III. *RESOLVING UPON IMMEDIATE REFORMATION*. Let us give up the language of complaint and mutual recrimination, and substitute for it the voice of prayer. (*T. Vasey.*) *Hope in God's mercy*:—The reason here given, why the Israelites could return safely and with sure confidence to God is, that they would acknowledge it as His office to heal after He has smitten, and to bring a remedy for the wounds which He has inflicted. The prophet means that God does not so punish men as to pour forth His wrath on them for their destruction; but that He intends, on the contrary, to promote their salvation, when He is severe in punishing their sins. The beginning of repentance is a sense of God's mercy; when men are persuaded that God is ready to give pardon, they then begin to gather courage to repent; otherwise perverseness will ever increase in them. (*John Calvin.*)

Ver. 2 *After two days will He revive us: in the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live in His sight*.—*Death the gate of life*:—Let us look, not on the dying side, but on the living side. Each shadow has its light; each valley its height; each night its dawn; each wound of the oyster-shell its pearl; each kind of death its counterpart of life. To have the one is to have both. It is, therefore, a mistake to be ever thinking of what you must give up. Think rather of what you must take in. Follow hard after Christ, to be with Him, for Him, like Him. Let your intimacy with Him be like those closely pointed stones in the old buildings of Thebes, between which it is impossible to insert even a sheet of writing-paper. Obey Him up to the hilt. So will ever new blessings disclose themselves to you; and as you climb to them you will be insensibly drawn away from things that fascinated and injured you. Reaching out after a fuller measure of life, you will hardly realise the cost by which alone you can enter upon its enjoyment. The wrench of death will be less perceptible amid

the joy which sheds its light on your face, and the warm glow into your heart. 1. Above all, trust the lead of Jesus. "He will revive us; He will raise us up; and we shall live in His sight." He knows every step of the way through the dark valley; because, as the Captain of salvation, He has been obliged to traverse it with each son whom He has brought to glory. He is with you, feeling for you infinitely, though you cannot see Him. It is impossible for Him to take one false step, or inflict one needless stab of pain. Out of your suffering He is going to bring glory to Himself and blessedness to you. He sometimes seems to tarry. His stages of redemption are so slow; but His love is dealing more wisely with thee in its delays, impetuous spirit, than it could in haste! It is hard to wait when heart and flesh are failing; but thy God will be the strength of thy life, and thy portion for ever. He knows the nearest path that will lead thee to it. Trust His hand and purpose running through the circumstances of thy life. 2. And out of all this will come the more abundant life. Suffering at first isolates us; but afterwards it links us in the closest bonds with all who are sitting on the hard benches of the school of sorrow. We learn to comfort them with the comfort with which we have ourselves been comforted of God. The water streams from the smitten rock. The flower springs from the dead seed. The crystal river flows from the melting glacier. The bright gold emerges from the dark mine and the cleansing fires. When you are sure that Jesus asks aught of you, yield up your will to Him; ask Him to come, and take it and blend it with His own. Be willing to be made willing. Wait for Him. Trust Him. Do not be afraid. He will gently open the door of life, through which you will pass out of the vale of death into wider and more abundant blessedness. And, in the end, when the lesson is fully mastered, we shall find that His going forth has been prepared as the morning; and He will come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain, unto the earth. Abraham shall take his Isaac from off the altar and lead him home; Joseph shall weep tears of welcome on his father's neck; Job shall have more prosperity than before his trial; the young confessors shall emerge from the fire without their bonds; flowers shall grow where the black cinders lay; and where the body was buried in the sepulchre amid tears of hopeless sorrow, there shall be a joyous resurrection. We shall live again, and shall know the Lord as never before. Wait to see the end of the Lord; He is very pitiful; He is human in His tenderness. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Christ and His people*.—I. THE CONNECTION OF CHRIST WITH HIS PEOPLE. The head and the members. "We are made alive in Christ." His victory over death is ours. He who had life in Himself quickens whom He will. 1. The power manifested on the third day was a type of the power to be manifested at the general resurrection. 2. Christ's resurrection not only a type of a physical but of a spiritual resurrection. The soul is quickened together with Christ. II. THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST REALISED BY HIS PEOPLE. The risen life is spent in the sight of the Lord. Before the crucifixion the apostles had the bodily presence of the Lord, subject to time and place, e.g., Christ was not with the dying Lazarus, because He was in Perceæ. After the resurrection they lived in His presence as they had never lived before. Stephen saw Him standing in the ready attitude of help. He stood by St. Paul; His eye was on His faithful martyr, Antipas. All the disciples went about with a constant sense of Christ's oversight, working under the King's eye. The soul risen with Christ believes that it lives in His sight. Faith in this promised presence will be a source of strength and patience. Remember how Christ's eye is on His servants at their work, in their sufferings, and during their worship. (*W. Watters, M.A.*) *The third day*.—In shadow, the prophecy was never fulfilled to Israel at all. The Ten Tribes were never restored. Unto the Two Tribes what a mere shadow was the restoration from Babylon, that it should be spoken of as the gift of life, or of resurrection! The strictest explanation is the truest. The "two days" and the "third day" have nothing in history to correspond with them, except that in which they were fulfilled, when Christ, "rising on the third day from the grave, raised with Him the whole human race." (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*)

Ver. 3. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.—*Follow on*.—In the context, the deliverance of God's Church out of her troubles is foretold. In the same words our salvation in Christ is figured forth. "Knowledge" here includes the whole of experimental and practical godliness; for in religion we only know what we feel and do. In making progress in the life

of godliness, the two words of our text are—a condition, a rule, and a spur.

I. THE RECOMMENDATION OF OUR TEXT IMPLIES—1. That the pursuit is worthy. 2. That there is a leader whom we are to follow. 3. That the pursuit is begun. Regeneration has been experienced, pardon has been conferred, spiritual life is possessed. 4. That there is danger of stopping short. There are difficulties without, and foes within.

II. SPECIAL REASONS FOR OBEYING THE TEXT. 1. Only so can the genuineness of our religion be proved. 2. Only so can our mission be fulfilled. 3. Only so can our characters be developed. 4. Only so can heaven be reached. How much there is enfolded in that word “overcometh.” Uncoil it by Divine help in your lives.

III. ENCOURAGEMENTS TO CHEER AND STIMULATE. 1. Bread is provided for the hungry. 2. A staff of promises for the weak. 3. Repose for the weary. 4. Complete success is guaranteed. (*R. Berry.*)

Knowing the Lord:—Ignorance is a lamentable evil. It unfits persons for acting their part with propriety in civil life, and it is far more injurious to them in the concerns of eternity.

I. WHAT IS MEANT BY KNOWING THE LORD. 1. It is to be scripturally acquainted with His character. No correct knowledge can be acquired concerning God and salvation, but through the instrumentality of the Word. In the volumes of nature and providence there is much to be learned concerning the existence and goodness of God. Only from the volume of inspiration we learn what God is, not only as our Creator and Preserver, but also as our Redeemer. 2. It is to give Him the homage which is due unto His name. There is the necessity of acknowledging Him—returning unto Him in new allegiance, by repentance unto life, and giving Him an unreserved reverence, in obedience to all His laws, ordinances, and commandments. Knowledge without a corresponding practice would only add to our condemnation.

II. EXPLAIN THE PROPOSAL OF FOLLOWING ON TO KNOW THE LORD. 1. It is to persevere in cultivating intercourse and acquaintance with Him. In so far as it has pleased God to reveal Himself unto us in His Word, it is our duty to learn what He hath revealed. We may, however, learn all that is to be theoretically known regarding God, and yet remain spiritually ignorant of His gracious character. His perfections will be best understood by a practical reliance upon them, and on acting agreeably to their nature. 2. Following on to know the Lord shall be crowned with success. Exertion in this Divine pursuit shall be successful. Disappointment is impossible. We shall know all the blessings of the New Covenant, whether pertaining to justification, adoption, or sanctification. We shall know and understand the law of our God, believingly feel its importance, and sincerely practise its requirements.

III. THE ENCOURAGEMENT TO FOLLOW ON TO KNOW THE LORD. This blessing of our Saviour’s coming is—1. Progressive and certain. “Prepared as the morning.” A knowledge of Divine things cannot be obtained but by a Divine teacher. The going forth of God the Saviour to enlighten and cherish His people, when they seek after Him, is as certain as the outgoings of the morning, which are a settled and regular constitution of nature. 2. Pleasant and desirable. “His going forth is prepared as the morning.” It is ever comfortable to know that in the midst of difficulties there is One prepared to give us relief. Christ, our Almighty Saviour and Friend, is so prepared. As the morning air and light are agreeable to the watchman who has been marching his weary rounds in the dark—to the weather-beaten mariner who has been tempest-tost through the night—so agreeable, and unspeakably more so is the coming of God our Saviour to enlighten and relieve them that are cast down and overwhelmed with the sense of sin, to help and comfort them that are ready to perish. 3. Quickening and salutary. “He shall come unto us as the rain.” Rain is not less necessary than heat for the production of vegetable life. It is like the circulation of the blood in the human body, that which keeps the whole system alive. 4. Invigorating and satisfying. “As the latter and former rain unto the earth.” The expression, latter and former rain, has reference to the two periodical rains that fell in the land of Canaan. As necessary as these rains are the showers of grace in the Church to water the seed of the Word, that it may spring up in our hearts unto everlasting life, to encourage its growth, and to perfect its fruits of holiness and meetness for the heavenly world. From this subject we may see ground for cherishing large expectations. God is gracious, His promise is large, and His Word is unimpeachable. God is able to carry you on to perfection; trust in Him then for all needful supplies, and you will not be disappointed. From this subject all may see the importance of being possessed by saving knowledge. (*John*

Shoolbraid.) *The fuller knowledge of God*.—Some give this rendering, “We shall know, and shall pursue on to know Jehovah,” and they explain the passage thus,—that the Israelites had derived no such benefit from the law of Moses, but that they still expected the fuller doctrine which Christ brought at His coming. They then think that this is a prophecy respecting that doctrine, which is now by the Gospel set forth to us in its full brightness, because God has manifested Himself in His Son as in a living image. But this is too refined an exposition; and it is enough for us to keep close to the design of the prophet. (*John Calvin.*) *Need of perseverance in seeking the knowledge of God*.—All Scripture writers bear witness to the faithfulness of God; and call upon us, by patient continuance in well-doing, to seek for glory, honour, and immortality. I. THE IMPORTANT OBJECT OF THE BELIEVER’S PURSUIT. Of true believers it may be said, “they follow on to know the Lord.” In what does this knowledge consist; and in what way is it communicated to the mind? It is not a mere knowledge of such a Being as God, as Creator and Upholder; nor is it such an idea of God as is conceived by those who exalt one attribute to the exclusion of another, who make Him all mercy, forgetful of His perfect justice. We cannot know the Lord to our comfort, till we know Him as our God and Father in Jesus Christ. By nature, we stand at an immeasurable distance from God; and the more correct are our notions of His power, His holiness, and His glory, the more discouraging will they be if they are unconnected with the Redeemer as our Mediator with the Father. This knowledge is implanted in the soul by the Holy Ghost. II. THE CERTAINTY OF ITS FINAL SUCCESS. He who “follows on” shall not fail of the grace of God. This truth is plainly declared, and figuratively exhibited. The figures are the morning and the rain. Learn—1. How needful is this knowledge. 2. The reason why those who have attained some knowledge of Christ do not attain to more enlarged and experimental acquaintance with spiritual things. Be patient in hope, and persevering in prayer. (*W. Mayers, A.M.*) *The duty and happiness of progressive spiritual knowledge*.—The works of God in nature are here employed to describe His moral government, His ways with His Church, His dealings with His people for their spiritual discipline and sanctification. The enlightening and comforting influences of the Holy Ghost shall as surely be vouchsafed to the soul longing for salvation, as the rain, the former and the latter, refreshes and fertilises the earth. The laws and operations of nature are not more certain than the fulfilment, in the revelation of grace, of God’s exceeding great and precious promises. The Divine promises and threatenings rest on the same foundation—the immovable foundation of His everlasting unchangeableness, His perfect faithfulness, His universal presence, His almighty power. The text contains a duty and a promise. Our duty is “to follow on to know the Lord,” and to its performance we are incited by a gracious promise. “Then shall we know Him”; for His going forth, His care and condescension to meet us in mercy is prepared—is as predetermined and customary as those successive changes and established operations of His visible works which we so beneficially and continually experience. According to the text, the safety and happiness of knowing the Lord, and of following on to know Him, are consequent upon returning to the Lord with penitent acknowledgment and lively compunction on account of apostasy and disobedience. Suffering and wretchedness, in this world or in the next, or in both, are necessarily the results of sin. Alienation from God is likewise spiritual insensibility, a moral death. It is also a condition of ignorance. The way of transgressors is hard. Consider what it is to know the Lord. How incomparably great is the excellence of this knowledge! The knowledge of the Lord comprehends the experience of the Divine goodness and loving-kindness, together with the fruits of faith and obedience to His commandments. Saving knowledge is communicated through the offices of the one Mediator, and the agency of the Holy Ghost, imparting an efficacious blessing upon prayer, the Word, and the ministrations of the Church. It consists in veneration and love towards the Lord—a meek but firm affiance in His promises and mercy, and in persevering obedience to Him. Let us make it our first and supreme concern to attain to the knowledge of God as our reconciled Father in Christ Jesus. Having attained this, your salvation is begun. While this knowledge implies and cherishes an approval of God’s ways and will, and is accompanied with love to Him and delight in Him, it likewise implies justice and mercy and charity to our fellow-creatures. (*Thomas Ridley, M.A.*) *The progressive character of the Christian life*.—Christian life is not a house, but

a plant. It is not complete, but grows. 1. It is growth in faith. Its beginning is, or may be, as small as a grain of mustard-seed. The least bit will do to begin with. Act upon what you now believe to be true and right as relates to our duties to God, to our fellows and ourselves. With God's help I will undertake every known duty. Sin is to be eradicated, and holiness is to increase. In such a spirit the seed will germinate, the tree will grow, and strength will come, and what before was impossible will now be easy. 2. In knowledge: acquaint thyself with God. Ascend the mountain. There are ever new disclosures in creation, providence, and redemption. 3. In experience: here faith is verified. If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine. Faith alone blesses our life; unbelief is destructive. It works ruin to all our highest interests to live without faith—in government, in society, and in the family. Principles which cannot with safety to all dearest concerns be followed are necessarily false. Faith is confirmed in life and assured in death: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." 4. In good works: religion is also practical. The tree bears good fruit, and bears it perennially. The Christian will improve in the quantity and quality of the good he does. Like the palm-tree, he will be fruitful to the end of life. (L. O. Thompson.)

Divine knowledge, and the means of acquiring it.—It is a universal law that nothing great can be achieved without perseverance. For want of considering this, many who commence a religious course with zeal and joy run well for a season, but meeting with unexpected difficulties, grow weary and give up the race. I. DIVINE KNOWLEDGE.

1. To know the Lord implies a general knowledge of His being, nature, and attributes. 2. It signifies a more particular and experimental knowledge of God, especially of His justice and mercy, these being the two great attributes exercised in the stupendous work of human redemption. The true believer is happily possessed of an experimental knowledge of the Divine mercy. 3. A more peculiar knowledge of God, especially of His goodness and love, is obtained by the sincere and pure in heart who "follow on to know" Him. 4. To know the Lord includes also, profound veneration; ardent love; humble confidence; and sincere and uniform obedience. II. THE MEANS OF ACQUIRING DIVINE KNOWLEDGE. 1. God

could, no doubt, communicate a perfect knowledge of Himself instantaneously. But in doing so He must work a miracle, and this without answering any valuable end. The gradual operations of God in providence and grace are accommodated to our finite capacities, enabling us, step by step, to trace Him in His wondrous works. 2. To illustrate this Hosea uses two beautiful figures—the "morning" and the "rain." 3. That this is the mode of the Divine manifestations evidently appears—(1) From the media through which they are communicated; His works, His Word, and His Spirit. (2) From the gradual manner in which God has revealed His will unto man by successive dispensations. (3) This appears in the rise and progress of religion in the soul. The understanding is enlightened; the judgment convinced; the heart affected; and the will subdued. Hence contrition, repentance, faith, and prayer. Justification follows, and, in full, sanctification. (4) We see, therefore, the necessity of following on to know the Lord, pressing on as after a guide through a crowd, as after a light in a dark place. When fully sanctified, there is as much necessity as ever for following on. The fountains of Divine knowledge are perennial. There are yet unexplored heights, and lengths, and depths, and breadths of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge. (Thomas Rowe.)

Perseverance in attaining the knowledge of God.—I. TO KNOW GOD REQUIRES THAT MEN SHOULD SEEK TO KNOW HIM. The knowledge of the Most High is not instinctive and intuitive. Now, the world by wisdom knoweth not God. How strange that men should think to know God and religion without diligence, whilst they think not to know any human science or profession without application, and diligence, and exertion! Would to God that men were as wise for eternity as they are for time. It is, however, not merely necessary to give diligence in order to know God, we must "follow on" to know Him. The crowning grace of the Christian is constant perseverance. To him that overcometh, the promise of eternal life is made. II. THE ENCOURAGEMENT AS IT IS HERE SO VIVIDLY PORTRAYED. "Then shall we know." God who cannot lie hath spoken this. The prophet adds two beautiful figures. The morning of the day is sure to come. The former and the latter rain will return in their seasons. (Hugh Stowell, A.M.) *Following on to know.*—In Christ, the prophet promises, they should have inward knowledge of Him, ever growing, because the grace, through which it is given, ever grows. We know, in order

to follow; we follow, in order to know. Light prepares the way for love. Love opens the mind for new love. The gifts of God are interwoven. They multiply and reproduce each other, until we come to the perfect state of eternity. Through eternity we shall follow on to know more of God. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *Divine knowledge*.—We may consider this in two ways. 1. As an address of good men to themselves, being a kind of soliloquy, or self-admonition and encouragement. 2. As addressed to the godly from each other. The language is an expression of holy confidence. This admits of various degrees, but without some degree of it we shall never seek the Lord; shall never cleave to Him with full purpose of heart. Between this holy confidence and presumption there is no resemblance. I. AN IMPORTANT SUBJECT—Divine knowledge. To be destitute of this knowledge is to be in a perilous and even a perishing condition. Knowledge is the same to the soul as the window is to the building, or the eye to the body. Knowledge is essential to right conduct. It is from ignorance that a disregard to the Saviour springs. It is from ignorance that legality springs. Nothing can be truly religious or moral that is done in ignorance, because then there would be no motive or principle, and to these the Lord looks in all our actions; all righteous conduct is begun and carried on in the renewal of the mind. God's empire is founded in light; the devil's kingdom is founded in darkness. God opens the eyes of all His subjects, and they follow Him from conviction and disposition. Bishop Hall says, "God never works in a dark shop." "He that commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." But what is this knowledge to which such importance is attached? What is it to know the Lord? It is one thing to know that there is a God, and another to know what He is. It is much more than knowing Him to be almighty. It is a knowing Him to be "righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works." Such knowledge as this, if there be no more, will operate upon a sinner's mind conscious of guilt, so as to produce distance, alarm, and fear. It is necessary to the recovery of a fallen creature that God should be known as the justifier of those who believe in Christ. In creation God is above us. In providence He is beyond us. In His holy law He is against us. But in Christ He is with us, and for us, and in us too. This knowledge is not a merely speculative knowledge. It is experimental. Some professors are like December nights, very clear, but alas! very cold. This is all that can be said with regard to their religion. But the knowledge of the Gospel is saving; it is the light of life; it descends from the head to the heart. What a difference there is between a mere conviction and a cordial assent! II. A NECESSARY DUTY. "Follow on to know the Lord." This includes three things. 1. The practising what we know. Why should God give you more light while you are not disposed to make use of what you already have? 2. Diligence in the use of appointed means. God has ordained meditation, reading the Scriptures, hearing the Word, conversation with those who know a little more than ourselves, but, above all, prayer to the Father of mercies, as the appointed means. 3. It implies continuance in this active course. You have not only to hear, but also to watch. III. AN ASSURED PRIVILEGE. "Then shall ye know." If probability is enough to actuate a man, how much more should real certainty do so. The assurance of success should encourage us in regard to others. Do not deal harshly with them. If unable for a time to embrace religious truths, be not impatient. God shall reveal this to them in His own time and way. Let this encourage you with regard to prayer. Are you desirous of knowing more of the blessed Saviour? Go on and you will know more and see more. Two cases in which this encouragement may be applied. 1. If you are in perplexity with regard to the path of duty. 2. Do you wish to know God better by appropriation? Are you anxious to know your own interest in Him? IV. A STRIKING ILLUSTRATION. Taken from the "morning" and the "rain." As the morning, gradually; as the rain, periodically and regularly. He who gives the former rain in its season, will not fail to give the latter rain in its season. Even after the stress and strain of life, there shall be a reviving in your spiritual experience, to your own great comfort, and to the praise of our faithful and covenant-keeping God. (*William Jay.*) *The knowledge of God*.—It is spoken of here as something distinct and definite. It is as palpable as the morning light. It is as sensible as the rain that waters the earth. Is any knowledge of God possible? The agnostic says, "We cannot know God. If He exists, He is beyond our reach. He is unknowable." He

does not deny that there is a God; he only denies that He can be known. In an important sense, the agnostic is right. The agnostic is not born again; he has never known the regenerating power of the Holy Ghost; therefore he cannot see the kingdom of God. Degenerate man cannot understand and appropriate the things of God—the truths of the spiritual world. Is man, then, born into this world with no capacity for knowing God? By no means. The spiritual faculties are not completely destroyed. In many ways they respond to the voice of God. No man is born either an atheist or an agnostic. The organs of spiritual life may be only rudimentary, but they exist. It is possible to know God, but only by the renewing and enlightening grace of His Holy Spirit. The knowledge of God is not reached by an intellectual process. It is faith which apprehends the invisible God, yet it is also experience which affixes the seal to the knowledge which faith attains. It is no exclusive privilege of the man of culture, it is equally open to the unlettered, the simple, the child. The “pure in heart shall see God.” It may be said, if one man can know God, why may not another? There is a gulf between the natural and the spiritual man, wider than that between animal and plant life. The distinction is as broad as between the living and the dead. The new life of regeneration is a beginning, a bud of promise, a day dawn; it is not the consummation of the spiritual life. The work and duty of the Christian is to follow on to know the Lord. We must take heed lest we become examples of “arrested development.” How can firm lasting faith be attained? 1. By realising to its depth our emptiness and need, and then our utter inability to supply it. 2. By clearing away certain obstacles which commonly clog up and check the flow of the grace of God. Of these the first and most obvious is sin. Then there is worldliness. Then neglect of prayer. Prayer is the key that will unlock the treasures of Divine knowledge. (*R. H. McKim, D.D.*)

A new consciousness.—The infatuation of knowledge is the course of life; to know, the desire to know, unsettles life. Yet what is most of our knowledge? The world is a vast, wide churchyard, and what we call knowledge is but a reading of inscriptions. Much so-called knowledge is but curiosity, and when that curiosity is satisfied, it turns, like other unsatisfied appetites, upon, and corrodes itself. Our nature seeks Divine knowledge; knowledge, not of notions, but of facts; not of sentiments, but of laws. A man may talk of God, who has no rest in God. 1. If religion is progression, it is surely, before it can be this, a beginning; but as a beginning it is a consciousness. Consciousness which being translated is knowledge. Religion should produce happiness, but that is not the chief idea of religion. A holy heart has three stages in its history. (1) To find something within us tending to evil, contrary to our full and free consent. The first part of our spiritual combat is when the world within awakes, and we find ourselves all wrong. (2) A state in which it is interrupted; when it would do good, and mourns that evil is present with it. (3) A state when it finds itself again sometimes rebelling against the better part. There is a state of apparent religious life which is not a state of consciousness or knowledge;—there is a want of conviction, and also mistaken apprehension. What a power the principle of grace is in the soul! This knowledge is great because God is the substance of the soul. The soul stands on and in God; so long as I stand on and in carnal and notional and phenomenal knowledge, I know not how to say my soul has a substance. When God is the substance of the soul and all its knowledge, then the blessed life and the blessed knowledge give light within. 2. But it is a progression. “Follow on.” What states grow out of this first state, the seminal germ of the Christian life? The evidences brighten as we follow on to know the Lord. You should determine to ascend to the knowledge of the higher law of the Christian life. Then shall we know when our knowledge shall no longer be narrowed by limited sensations. Every sense I possess is only a material sheathing of some deeper and higher sense, which cannot find its appropriate expression here. I can only conceive of the state of souls as a state of immortal consciousness, a state where hope and memory are one, and love is only passive in certain and secure possession. (*Paxton Hood.*)

Diligence in religion.—Doctrine: That the way to thrive in religion is to follow on, to pursue, to hold our hand to it, when once our hand is in it. I. WHO THEY ARE WHOM WE MAY CALL TO FOLLOW ON. There are some whom we cannot call to follow on, because they have not yet stirred a foot in religion. There may be some whom the King has brought into His chambers, and assured of His love. Their business is to follow on. Others have got but some glimmerings of solid

hope from the Lord. Others have gained some mastery over spiritual foes. Others are yet only striving. Others can only be said to have some desires towards God. Others have only had passing convictions of sin. Yet others know nothing more than inward uneasiness. II. WHAT IS IT TO FOLLOW ON? 1. You must make religion your great end. 2. You must be persuaded of the weight and worth of religion. 3. You must hold fast what you have. 4. You must be moving forward, labouring for more. 5. You must habitually attend upon religion, and make it your chief business. 6. You must be resolute and vigorous in your endeavours. 7. You must entertain a hope of success. 8. If you fall, you must get up again, and quicken your pace. III. CONFIRM THIS DOCTRINE. However small your beginnings or hopes may now be, yet persevere. You have God's Word for it. "You shall reap, if you faint not." 1. You have God's Word of promise for it (Matt. xxv. 29). 2. It is the Lord's ordinary way in His works, to bring great things by degrees out of small beginnings. 3. The works of grace in the soul ordinarily arise from very small beginnings. Consider—4. The bountiful nature of God, who surely will not always flee from those who follow Him, but will at length be found of them. 5. No person gets a refusal from heaven, but those who court it by their own indifference. A faint way of seeking is to beg a denial. 6. As importunity is usually in all cases the way to come speed, so it has special advantages in this case which promise success. 7. Such followers the Lord does not bid to go back. And this is encouraging. 8. The Lord commands you to follow Him (Luke xi. 19). IV. PRACTICAL IMPROVEMENT. 1. Those who have not yet begun to seek the Lord are neither prospering in their souls, nor are they in the way to it. 2. It is no wonder that backsliders have lean souls. 3. They are in no prospering case who are at a stand in religion. 4. The smallest spark which you now have may be brought to a flame. 5. See what is the ruin of many communicants. It is not that they get nothing, it is that they carry nothing away; they follow nothing on. They do not hold their hands to it when they are at home. (*T. Boston, D.D.*) *The benefit of following on to know the Lord*.—I. A COURSE OF CONDUCT PROPOSED. Knowledge in general is an excellence. The knowledge here proposed is most excellent, as to its nature and object, and most profitable to its possessor. 1. The proposal implies a previous state of ignorance and estrangement. This was manifestly the case with Israel, and it is but too true a picture of our own times. 2. The proposal implies reformation begun. The obstinacy has given way. They are ashamed. They seek His face "early," earnestly. 3. The proposal is that of following up these good beginnings. We may learn much concerning God in His attributes and relations. The inquiry should be followed up in the way He has prescribed—the way of righteousness, self-denial, prayer, and religious obedience generally. We should follow on in the manner He has prescribed—sincerely, humbly, fervently, perseveringly. II. THE ENCOURAGEMENT ASSUMED. 1. This "going forth" is a certain blessing. The "outgoings of the morning" are settled by a Divine constitution. 2. This "going forth" is a progressive blessing. The condition suggested is that of improvement—of going on from good to better. It is a state of improving light. The subject should teach us—1. The importance of saving knowledge. Those who remain at a distance from God must remain in darkness and barrenness and misery. 2. It should encourage exertion. 3. It should induce large expectations. 4. It should confirm us in a patient continuance in well-doing. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *Conditions of knowledge*.—There must be no sitting down by the wayside, no loitering, no laziness in all the school of the Church. "We shall know if we follow on to know." If we practise the little we do know, we shall get outlook of things that lie beyond, and confidence to deal with them. Love shall beget love; capacity shall enlarge itself into a still fuller capacity, and practice in prayer should, so to say, end in skill of supplication; we shall know the way to the throne and the seat of mercy, and come boldly to it as of right, not in ourselves, but invested in us by the grace of God. "Prepared as the morning"—is established as the morning. It is a great action of law, a great movement settled, regulated, determined from eternity. "He shall come unto us as the rain," not the occasional shower, not the intermittent baptism of soft water, but "as the latter and former rain unto the earth." Both must come, each in its own time, and in its own way. Thus we have law, and thus we have mercy. Here we have philosophy which earthly philosophy has not yet comprehended; condescension that leaves behind no amazement that it can

stoop so low as to touch the farthest away. It is in these mysteries we live; in these voices we hear the only music we care to listen to. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *Patient perseverance*:—Is God revealed by the works of creation, or are those works the instruments for the memorial and confirmation of a previous revelation? We incline to the latter view. We cannot regard mankind as having been at any time independent of a revelation. Every man has, by traditional revelation, a knowledge of God's existence. When we examine into the works of nature, we find the confirmation of the truth with which we have been previously and independently made acquainted. There is no such thing as a light of nature, or natural religion. I. **THE OBJECT OF THIS KNOWLEDGE.** In the works of nature, and without the aid of the Bible, God is merely set forth as God, and not as the Lord; that is, He is known only as Creator. We regard this knowledge of the Lord as absolutely essential to man's happiness. By the knowledge of the Lord, we mean acquaintance with His purposes and plans. For this a preternatural revelation is necessary. We must know God as a being possessing a mind and purpose with respect to human actions and conduct. We can see but a faint shadow of God's purposes in the works of creation. It is desirable to know the Lord, for the sake of His law. Unless there be a law of moral restraint, there must exist a state of misery. II. **THE NATURE AND KIND OF THIS KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD.** It must be of a practical character. It must be capable of the test of good deeds. Unpractical knowledge and imperfect knowledge are one and the same thing. To know is to perceive with certainty, or to see with approbation. Love is not perceived and apprehended by the intellect, but by the heart. Intellectual knowledge should be the handmaid of heart knowledge. And a heart knowledge is identical with a practical knowledge. III. **THE PRESCRIBED MEANS OF ACQUIRING THIS KNOWLEDGE.** "Follow on to know the Lord." The advance to the perfect knowledge of the Lord is independent of all external circumstances and all innate abilities; and thus if we all employ the same simple means, then the result will be the same in all. (*W. H. Wright, B.A.*) *Go on, go on*:—Arago says, in his Autobiography, that his master in mathematics was a word or two of advice which he found in the binding of one of his text-books. Puzzled and discouraged by the difficulties he met with in his early studies, he was almost ready to give over the pursuit. Some words which he found on the waste leaf used to stiffen the cover of his paper-bound text-book caught his eye and interested him. "Impelled," he says, "by an indefinable curiosity, I dampened the cover of the book, and carefully unrolled the leaf to see what was on the other side. It proved to be a short letter from D'Alembert to a young person disheartened like myself by the difficulties of mathematical study, who had written to him for counsel. 'Go on, sir, go on,' was the counsel which D'Alembert gave him. 'The difficulties you meet will resolve themselves as you advance. Proceed, and light will dawn and shine with increasing clearness on your path.' That maxim," says Arago, "was my greatest master in mathematics." Following out those simple words, "Go on, sir, go on," made him the first astronomical mathematician of his age. What Christians it would make of us! (*Old Testament Anecdotes.*) *Knowing by following on*:—When climbing Snowdon, I one day scaled some precipitous rocks called "Crybydiskil," i.e., "edge of the plate," because on each side of the narrow ridge was a sheer precipice of several hundred feet. A thick fog came on which hid from view everything but ourselves and the bit of knife-edge on which we straddled. We knew that the ridge led direct to the summit, which we should reach if we went "forward." We could see two yards beyond us, but not an inch farther. This was enough for the very next advance, when a further similar glimpse was revealed. So by creeping along the first few inches, we saw the next few hitherto hidden. So, as the Scripture says, "Follow on to know the Lord." (*Newman Hall.*) *Practical devotion promotes our knowledge of God*:—Near the Arctics the fogs are prevalent and thick. This is because there is so much ice drifting down from the vast frozen fields of the north, the meeting of which with the warmer southern waters fills the air with moisture. If we keep our minds at the edge of the cold regions of secularity, we may expect that our minds shall be in a fog as respects religious truth. Drift into the warmer air of practical devotion, accustom your heart to the prevalence of spiritual sentiments, and see how clear God's truth will become. (*J. B. Ludlow, D.D.*) **His going forth is prepared as the morning.**—*Morning cometh*:—1. The time of deliverance is the morning, the morning after the sad, dark night,

As light is comfortable in the morning, after a dark and stormy night, so is deliverance after trouble. God's mercies after afflictions are very sweet. 2. The Church has no afflictions unfollowed by a morning. 3. It is God's presence which constitutes the saints' morning. 4. God's mercies to His people are prepared and decreed. 5. The saints in the night of their affliction can comfort themselves in this, that the morning is coming. It is night yet, but the morning will come; it is approaching. 6. The saints' night is darkest a little before their deliverance; as a little before the dawning of the day the darkness is most dense and terrible. 7. God's mode of deliverance is gradual. As the day breaks by degrees, so the saints shine gradually in their lives, answerable to the light which God imparts. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *The going forth of the Lord prepared as the morning*.—These words show just where Ephraim was in soul experience. He does not represent one destitute of spiritual light and life, but a quickened vessel of mercy, but one who was wrapping himself up in a garment, not of Christ's giving, nor of the Spirit's application. And there are many still who have the fear of God in their hearts who are wrapping themselves up in a covering which is not of God's Spirit. There is something more to be known than the bare doctrine of Christ's righteousness. That doctrine may even become a lying refuge if the mere letter of truth is sheltered in, and the Holy Ghost does not experimentally make it known to the soul. I. THE SOUL EXPERIENCE INDICATED. "A following on to know the Lord." To know the Lord is the desire of every living soul. To know Him by His own Divine manifestations, by the gracious revelation of His grace, His love, His presence, His glory. To know the Lord is to know, experimentally and spiritually, the power of Jesus' blood and righteousness. Thus to know the Lord is the sum and substance of vital godliness. But the expression "follow on" implies that there are many difficulties, obstacles, and hindrances in a man's way, which keep him back from knowing the Lord. 1. Sometimes a man takes up the notion that he is but a self-deceiver and a hypocrite. 2. Sometimes Satan hurls a blasphemous suggestion into our carnal mind. 3. Sometimes the remembrance of past sins, lying as a heavy weight on the conscience, presses a man down with despondency and despair. 4. Sometimes the gusts of infidelity will so blow on a man's mind as to make him doubt the reality of all religion. 5. Sometimes the recollection of many inconsistencies, foolish thoughts, words, and actions, stand like mountains of difficulty in his way. 6. Sometimes great worldly troubles hinder him. 7. Sometimes darkness besets the mind, and clouds of unbelief rest on the soul, and the way is obscure. The work of the Spirit in a man's soul is to carry him on in spite of all these obstacles. It is really astonishing how souls are kept alive. For what are we to follow on? To know the Lord, as the sum and substance of all religion, as the very marrow of vital godliness. II. SEEKING THE LORD AND NOT FINDING HIM. This is a part of experience through which every soul passeth. Here lies the difference between a living soul in his darkest hours and a dead professor. A living soul knows that God is to be found of His saints, but cannot always find Him for himself; but a dead professor knows nothing about God at all. It is to the living soul walking in darkness, and unable to find God, that the text says, "His going forth is prepared as the morning." There is an appointed time for the Lord to go forth: and this is compared to the rising of the sun. All His goings forth are as much prepared, and the moment is as much appointed, as the time is fixed every morning for the sun to rise. III. THE FRUIT AND EFFECT OF THE LORD'S COMING. As the rain—softening and fertilising. To understand the spiritual, we must first know the meaning of the natural figure. Explain the two rain seasons of Palestine. In the "early rain" is a figure of Christ's first coming to the soul. By the "latter rain" is suggested Christ's coming in Christian experience. (*J. C. Philpot.*) *Christ the day-dawn and the rain*.—The most ancient Jewish commentators find the last fulfilment of these words in the great promised Messiah. It is Christ, then, whom our faith must grasp under these two figures, the day-dawn and the rain. The world is a great book of symbols for the soul of man to read God by. There is something of common likeness in these two figures, and yet something distinctive is conveyed. There is a twofold coming of the Son of God, the first in His own person to establish and confirm the Gospel, the second in His Holy Spirit, to apply it to the heart. The one of these may very fitly be compared to the morning, and the other to the rain. I. THE DAY-DAWN AND THE RAIN REPRESENT SOME RESEMBLANCES BETWEEN THE COMING OF CHRIST IN HIS

GOSPEL AND IN HIS SPIRIT. 1. They have the same manifest origin. The day-dawn comes from heaven and so does the rain. They are not of man's ordering, but of God's. And it is not less so with the Gospel and Spirit of Christ. Man neither invented them nor discovered them. They carry their evidence with them, like heaven's sun and heaven's rain. We may learn the origin of our faith in a study of the grandeur and comprehensiveness of its plan, and in a feeling of its power in our souls. The same God who makes morning to the world by the sun, gives the dawn of a new creation to the spirits of men through the Saviour. 2. They have the same mode of operation on the part of God. That mode of operation is soft and silent. The greatest powers of nature work most calmly and noiselessly. And like to these in their operations are the Gospel and Spirit of Christ. When our Saviour came into the world, it was silent and alone. So it was with His entrance into the heart. There is no outward crisis to tell of the birth of souls. 3. They have the same form of approach to us—in perfect freeness and fulness. The morning light comes unfettered by any condition, and so, also, descends the rain. The Gospel opens on the world priceless and free as the light which waits but for the eye to be unclosed to see and share it all. As free is the Spirit of Christ. Nor has He less fulness. 4. They have the same object and end. It is the transformation of death into life, and the raising of that which lives into higher and fairer form. The Gospel and Spirit of Christ have the same aim—life and revival. The Gospel of Christ is the Word of life. The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of life. As both work together for life, so both must co-operate for revival. II. SOME POINTS OF THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THEM. 1. Christ's approach to men has a general and yet a special aspect. The sun comes every morning with a broad unbroken look, shining for all, and singling out none. There is a universality of kindness about him which men, with all their powers of limitation, have never been able to abridge. But the rain as it descends, breaks into drops, and hangs with its globules on every blade. There is a wonderfully individualising power in the rain. The Gospel of God's grace enters the world with the broad universal look of daylight. It singles out none that it may exclude none. The arms of God are as wide as His call, and the power of Christ's atonement is as unlimited as the invitation to it. But Christ comes after another manner with His Spirit. Here no man can tell how God is dealing with another. 2. Christ's coming is constant, and yet variable. The sunrise is of all things the most sure and settled. And Christ visits men in His Gospel, steady and unchanging as the sun. But with the Holy Spirit it is otherwise. His coming varies in time and place, as the rain, whose arrival depends on causes we have not fathomed. 3. Christ's coming may be with gladness, but also with trouble. What can be more joyful than the returning sun? But God comes also in the cloud, and there is a shade over the face of nature. So Christ comes, through His Spirit, in the conviction of sin. 4. Christ's coming, in His Gospel and Spirit, may be separate for awhile, but they tend to a final and perfect union. They are indispensable to each other. Sunlight without rain, and rain without sunlight, can only work evil. The Gospel without the Spirit, would be the sun shining on a waterless waste. The Spirit without the Gospel, would be the rain falling in a starless night. Some have a very distinct perception of the Gospel in its freeness and fulness, but they have ceased to derive from it the comfort they once enjoyed. They need the rain. They have been too neglectful of the secret life of religion, which is its soul. (*John Ker, D.D.*) *The goings forth of the Lord*.—By His going forth, we are to understand the communications of His grace in behalf of those who desire an interest in His favour. I. THE IDEA SUGGESTED BY THIS EXPRESSION IS THAT OF CERTAINTY AS TO THE EVENT. Before the faintest streaks of light appear, we feel no misgivings as to the return of morning. The longest winter night will come to an end. Thus certain and infallible are God's gracious purposes to penitent souls. As soon shall the sun forget to rise, as His goings forth of grace and mercy be frustrated. This may encourage seeking souls, afflicted ones, weeping mothers and fathers, and those who are approaching the end of life. II. AN IDEA SUGGESTED BY THE FIRST IMAGE IN THE TEXT IS THAT OF CLEARNESS. What a change does the dawning morn produce upon the face of nature and the views of man! We find the path which before was doubtful open to our view. We can go to our avocations without stumbling, or, if travellers, prosecute our journey without fear. By the glorious light which God sheds upon their path, His people are guided into all truth. The most wonderful discoveries are made to their souls,

and they see more accurately than they ever did before the marvellous things of God's law. The entrance of God's word gives light, and crooked things become straight before it. III. ANOTHER IDEA SUGGESTED IS THAT OF GLADNESS AND JOY. "The light is sweet; and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun." As the night is the season of gloom, the morning is one of cheerfulness and joy. In Psalm cxxx. the truly penitent soul is represented as waiting for the consolations of religion under the image of those who watch for the coming of the morning. Neither the moon in all her beauty, nor the stars in all their brightness, can compare with the splendours of the orb of day. At his rising universal nature is refreshed, and the earth on which he shines puts on a robe of gladness. And it is thus with the "goings forth" of the Lord. Let but the healing beams of the Sun of Righteousness arise upon the soul, and even the wilderness and the solitary place will be glad for them. The whole heart is inspired with a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory. IV. ANOTHER IDEA SUGGESTED IS THAT OF PROGRESS. Not all at once, but gradual, is the beauty of the morning. So the goings forth of the Lord are gradual upon the soul, until from the first dawns of spiritual light it is rendered capable of beholding the august glories of the Gospel. The second illustration in the passage is taken from the rain. Between rain that descends upon the earth, and the influences of Divine grace on the soul, many pleasing analogies obtain. Rain is the work of God. It falls according to the appointment of Him who causes it to descend on one city and not upon another. The rain falls sometimes gently and persistently, sometimes violently. Like the former and the latter rain of the East, there are two seasons in the Divine life, when the influences of the Divine Spirit are particularly requisite. Young converts stand in need of the one, and aged saints of the other. (*J. L. Adamson.*) *Coming as the morning*:—A recent traveller gives a striking description of sunrise among the Himalaya Mountains. "We were watching," she says, "the first flash of rosy dawn on a high snowpeak, as the stars disappeared one by one. The song of the first bird blended with the roar of the stream that fretted its way through the narrow gorge. Then we could trace the forms of trees, shrubs, and flowers above and below our path, and enjoy the fragrance of the eglantine blossoms strewn hither and thither like patches of snow." Presently, however, her attention was drawn to a mimosa-tree which seemed quite dead. Its leaves, although green, were closed and drooping. Yet the root had not been disturbed—branches, twigs, blossoms, and the leaves themselves all appeared perfect. Was it dead, or only asleep? "As we watch and wonder, the slanting rays of yellow light from the great sun, hidden hitherto by the mountain opposite, creep toward us. They touch the mimosa-tree, and at the same moment we hear the rustle of the morning breeze among its leaves. Even as we look the delicate twigs are stirred; they flutter in the wind, they lift themselves to the golden rays, and, ere we pass on, the leaves are expanded, the blossoms erect, and the tree seems to rejoice among its fellows in its gracious fulness of life." (*Sunday Companion.*) *Genuine piety*:—I. IN GENUINE PIETY THE INDIVIDUAL MAN HAS TO DO WITH THE GREAT GOD. He has to "follow on to know the Lord." II. IN GENUINE PIETY THE GREAT GOD HAS TO DO WITH INDIVIDUAL MAN. "His going forth is prepared as the morning," &c. 1. He cometh to him as the "morning"—full of promise. What a delightful season is the morning. It rings the knell of the dark night, and heralds the coming day. How delightful the morning to the sufferer on his bed; to the mariner on the ocean, &c. God comes to the man that is "following on" to know Him; puts an end to the night of his guilt, and throws around him the first beams of a glorious day. He comes as the night to the wicked; He comes as the morning to the good. We would not have Him come as the noon to us. He would consume us with His glory. 2. He comes to him as "the rain"—full of refreshing influence. "He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." What a glorious change do the seasonable showers produce upon the parched earth! they change every part into life and beauty. Thus the Almighty comes to the good man, and he feels it to be a time of refreshing from the "presence of the Lord." Learn from this the glorious destiny of the good. It is a "following on" to know Him, "whom to know is life eternal." (*Homilist.*) *The gentleness of Christ*:—The Jews regarded these words as a prophecy of Christ. As such take them. How beautiful is the morning! How refreshing is the rain! I. BOTH ARE INDEPENDENT OF MAN. "The day is Thine, O Lord, Thou hast prepared the light." "He prepareth rain for the earth." They both emanate from God. How true of grace

and mercy! He who gives morning to the world gives dawning to the soul. 1. How softly and silently come the light and the rain! How true of Christ's coming into the world and of His mission among men! "He shall not strive," &c. "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation"—with spectators looking on. 2. How true of Christ's entrance into the soul! Not in the storm, but in the still small voice. "My conversion," says a French evangelist, "was as gentle as a mother's kiss." II. BOTH ARE NECESSARY TO MAN. Nanson tells us how they longed for the light! In India and Australia, how the thirsty land cries out for the refreshing showers! So the soul of man needs Christ. III. BOTH ARE FULL AND FREE FOR MAN. The sun and the rain come for all. No "Trusts" can monopolise them. How true of the Divine love! It is like the great sea whose waves beat upon every shore. "Draw up the blind," said George Dawson; "let in the light." When the gentle rain descends, you put out your ferns and flower-pots. Get where there are showers of blessing that your soul may be refreshed. (*A. Hampden Lee.*) **He shall come to us as the rain.**—*Christ as the rain*:—1. Christ's coming to the heart, and the rain's coming to the flower, are alike in this, that each is by the sovereign ordering of God. Modern science has attained wonderful knowledge of the laws that govern the movements of the clouds. But we are as dependent upon God now, as ever, for the early and the latter rain, for the showers that water and refresh the earth. Equally dependent are we for those influences of the Holy Spirit by which Christ in all His preciousness and graciousness is communicated to the soul. 2. The coming in each case affords scope for the energy and efficacy of prayer. Whilst God is sovereign in His gifts, He is not arbitrary in their bestowment either in nature or in grace. There are innumerable and well-attested instances in which God has heard the prayers of His people for rain. And so the coming of Christ with spiritual power into the heart and into the Church may be secured by earnest and importunate prayer. 3. The coming of Christ in refreshing presence and power is often preceded by lightning and tempest. Dark clouds of adversity, fierce winds of temptation disturb and terrify the soul. When the storms of spiritual trial have encompassed the soul, Christ by His blessed Spirit comes in gentlest and most unobtrusive ministry to every parched leaf and drooping flower of the Christian graces. 4. The coming of Christ is like that of the rain in its benign and blessed results. The roots of religious life are fed. The fountains of spiritual energy in the soul are replenished. (*T. D. Witherspoon, D.D., LL.D.*) *The Spirit as rain*:—1. As rain, the influences of the Holy Spirit are copious. 2. Are seasonable. 3. Are refreshing. 4. Are fertilising. 5. Are from above. (*G. Brooks.*) **As the latter and the former rain.**—The analogy between nature and grace is very close. God employs nature as a typical thing. He designs through it to image forth Divine things. He would have us be observers of nature, to look through nature up to nature's God. Years ago, an observing writer told how he "viewed the ravages of winter as the Jews did the desolation of their temple when its expressive types and symbols were demolished or defaced by the Babylonian armies, and thus he viewed spring as the rebuilding of the creation-temple, in which are renewed all the sweet and significant emblems of the everlasting Gospel." In the same spirit may we consider the "early and latter rain," the second of the two images employed by the prophet Hosea. Now, we read about the "former and the latter rain" in other parts of Scripture as well as in Hosea. (Thus in Deut. xi. 14; Jer. v. 24; Joel ii. 23; James v. 7.) Rain typifies and sets forth Divine influence and grace. It falls to fertilise where all was dry and fruitless. It falls to renew the face of the earth. It falls to ripen and mature the grain. In Judea the rain fell plentifully twice in the year. About September, and about March, it chiefly and more copiously fell. Now, the month Abib, or March, was the first month in the ecclesiastical or holy year; and hence we have light thrown on the expression, "the latter rain in the first month." It may be observed, without any undue pressing of the similitude, that rain being the vapours exhaled by the sun, would cease to fall were the sun withdrawn from the firmament. The parallel between growth in nature and growth in grace, being clear, we are taught at once that Divine grace comes not apart from Him who, being the Son of God, died on the Cross for our sins, that through the Holy Ghost sent down, the fruitless soil of our fallen nature might have fertility—be quickened into newness of life. Now, it strikes us as interesting that, in the passages we have cited, beginning with the Book of Deuteronomy, and ending with the Epistle of St. James, there should be seen a certain order which we may

follow as we try briefly to exhibit some truths suggested by our subject. In Deuteronomy, we read how God would give the first rain and the latter rain. Passing on to Jeremiah, we see how the people refused to fear the Lord who giveth rain both the former and the latter. In Hosea we read of the fuller knowledge to be enjoyed by those who serve the Lord. In Joel we read of the joy of the children of God to whom had been given the former rain. Then in St. James we read of the patience that becomes the Christian as he waits for the coming of his Lord. Undesigned as this order may be, it is nevertheless interesting. It suggests to us the thought of progressiveness. As the Christian dispensation is fuller, brighter than the Jewish; so the believer should advance, following on to know the Lord. Beginning, then, with the words of Deuteronomy, we read in chap. xi. 13, 14: "And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto My commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul; that I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil." As Israel sought spiritual blessings, so should Israel enjoy temporal blessings as well. These were the terms of the Divine covenant. Grace, free and undeserved grace, itself the outflow of the Divine love, would bestow these blessings. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things (temporal necessities) shall be added unto you." Thus the prophet Jeremiah speaks: "But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart, . . . neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the Lord our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter in his season." In the days of Moses, multitudes of the Israelites had turned from God. They entered not into the promised land, because of unbelief. On them "the former and the latter rain" never fell. So, in the days of Jeremiah, many feared not God, who yet saw how His covenant with nature was kept, and around whom privileges were gathered. The words of the prophet Hosea (chap. vi. 3) tell of the bright and blessed results of real repentance, "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." We observe in this verse that "the latter rain" is placed before "the former"; and it may be just said by the way that "the latter rain" (*malkush*, from a verb "to delay") was more probably that which fell in the autumn, and "the former rain" (*girah*) that which fell in the spring; though this is questioned. (See Calmet's Dict.) Without seeing in this uncertainty any explanation of the precedence of "the latter rain" in the verse in Hosea, something perhaps may be inferred as to the inseparableness of "the former and the latter rain." Grace is glory begun. And so the apostle Peter speaks: "And hope to the end (or, 'hope perfectly,' *τελειως ἐλπίζετε*), for the grace that is being brought unto you (*φερομένη*) at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Life eternal being the knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ whom He has sent, Divine grace, typified by the early rain, must cause this knowledge to take root in our heart. And then, little and limited though that knowledge be at first, like the shower's first drops, yet "we shall know, if we follow on to know the Lord." Where rain has come, rain will come. "They go from strength to strength." Sin, as they follow on, becomes less strong; God becomes more "the strength of their heart." So the prophet Joel speaks of the joy of Christians: "Be glad and rejoice in the Lord your God, for He hath given you the former rain moderately, and He will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain and the latter rain in the first month." In this verse, we are directed in the margin to observe that "the former rain moderately" is in the Hebrew "the . . . according to righteousness." In the Septuagint the literal rendering would be, "For He gave to you (the) food (*τὰ βρώματα*) towards (or 'with reference to') righteousness, and will rain for you rain early and late (latter), according as before." It does not seem quite plain how we are to take the words, "the former rain according to righteousness," or "a teacher unto righteousness" (as Hebrews will have it), if they are not taken in some way to have regard to a teacher (perhaps Joel himself) typical of the Messiah. Concerning ourselves, however, with the rendering of our Authorised Version, "the former rain moderately" (or "in due measure"), we shall see that the children of Zion were to be glad and rejoice in the Lord their God, giving glory to Him who had kept and remembered His covenant, who had sent and who would send the shower to fructify the earth, and who had shed abroad in their hearts the very grace that shower should typify. "Be glad and rejoice"; your hearts have been disposed to holiness through Divine grace; God will perform the good work in

you which He has begun. So spake the inspired prophet. And, in truth, joy becomes the Christian. But this joy, we remember, requires patience. And St. James, in the last passage remaining for us, speaks of "patience": "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord"; and he proceeds to employ an illustration fetched from the tiller and the field. In the purpose and promise of God, precariousness has no place; and between seed-time and harvest nature exacts her needed interval. Time is needed for the early, time for the latter rain to fall. So spiritually; and more also. Natural rain may be withheld; drought may be instead. Grace shall always come, if rightly sought. It cannot fail. Patience becomes the Christian; the Word of God sown in his heart shall not be left waterless. But a span separates the early from the latter rain. To none should the time be either too long or yet too short. "Be patient unto the coming of the Lord." And once again, there is encouragement in the thought of the rain, the latter rain, where there may have been a declension, where watchlessness may have been allowed, or where trial and temptation may have chilled devotion and zeal. Rain sought again, shall fall to revive. Never forsaken by a covenant God, penitent Israel, idolatrous and prayerless no more, will receive the blessing of abundance of rain: "he shall grow as the lily," and "revive as the corn." (*Christian Observer*.)

Ver. 4. **Your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.**—*Instances of inconstancy in good men:*—Men's convictions die away, their resolutions prove abortive; they run well, but don't continue; begin to build, but leave their work unfinished. This is a most unhappy case, as dangerous and fatal as it is common. I. **THE CAUSES OF THIS WRETCHED INCONSTANCY.** Is it because men have no power, or no encouragement to do otherwise? Neither can be the reason, because where there is no power at all, there is no sin, and where there is no encouragement to exert the power we have, if we are not altogether without sin, yet we seem to have such an excuse for our sins, as takes away much the greatest part of their guilt. One represents God as the author of sin; the other as wanting in goodness and love to His creatures. That so many do no more than begin well, is not from want of power; since God, the righteous Governor and Judge of the world, never requires beyond the measure of what He has given. Does God command all men to repent? The reason is that by the grace of the Gospel all shall be enabled to repent who do not wilfully refuse and resist that grace. And no one can plead in excuse for himself, when he repents of his sins, and then relapses into them, and after all his fair promises and repeated resolutions, never makes thorough work of it, that he has not sufficient motives to make him exert himself. The true causes of inconstancy are—1. Want of seriously and distinctly considering the nature of the change upon which they are entering, the reasons for it, and the pains and time it will cost to effect it. (1) They don't consider that every sin is to be forsaken, and every duty to be practised; nor do they reflect what these particular sins and duties are, and what is meant by forsaking the one and practising the other. For want of a distinct notion of their duty, men find themselves bewildered, are at a loss how to proceed, and never want an excuse for not doing what they ought, or for doing what they ought not, when they are under strong persuasion. (2) Men don't seriously consider the reason upon which their purpose of a change ought to be founded, and therefore they miscarry. The little they do is not the effect of judgment and rational conviction, so much as of some passion accidentally raised in them. (3) Men don't consider the pains they must take, and the time that must be spent in effecting this change (Luke xiv. 28). The difficulties of religion are to be duly considered. It is as wrong to exaggerate the difficulties as to underestimate them. Conversion is a work of time. Men are not presently cured of the vices which have grown habitual. Habits which have been long contracted are not immediately unlearned again, and contrary habits planted in their room. Some have talked as if the new creature were an instantaneous production, and the habits of grace were infused in a moment. And this representation has done no little mischief. 2. Another cause of men's inconstancy is their being but half resolved. And this is a very common case. They are so far from being fully determined as hardly to know which side they shall take. It is not strange that such imperfect resolutions are quickly broken. Instability of conduct is the necessary effect of irresoluteness of temper. 3. Another cause is men's not exercising a suitable caution and vigilance, in

order to avoid the occasions of sin, and all those temptations that beset them, and endanger their falling back into their former way of living. If they would not fall, why do they walk in the same slippery places? 4. Another cause is their not persevering in the instrumental duties of religion, particularly the duty of secret prayer. Did they from day to day maintain their intercourse with heaven, they would be much better prepared to do the will of God upon earth, and to resist and overcome any temptation which should beset them. II. THE CERTAINTY THAT THESE INEFFECTIVE PURPOSES OF AMENDMENT, THESE MERE BEGINNINGS, WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED INSTEAD OF TRUE REPENTANCE AND HOLINESS OF LIFE. 1. The Gospel requires nothing less than repentance and true holiness. This is abundantly evident from Scripture passages. 2. Such an imperfect transient goodness is not that repentance and holiness of life upon which the Gospel insists. Is confessing sin the same as confessing and forsaking it? Can they be said to repent, who do not bring forth fruits meet for repentance? And the character of a man is to be taken from his habitual practice. He that doeth righteousness is righteous. 3. Out of regard to the perfections of His nature, and the declarations of His Holy Word, God will not dispense His saving mercy upon any other terms than those set forth in the Gospel. Evangelical repentance and obedience there must be. III. WHAT METHOD WE SHOULD TAKE IF WE WOULD NOT ONLY MAKE SOME ENTRANCE UPON THE WAYS OF RELIGION, BUT GO ON IN THEM, AND HOLD OUT TO THE END. Avoid those things which are the usual occasions of inconstancy in this most important affair. And give ourselves to frequent meditation of those great truths on which religion is founded. And often renew our good resolutions, and arm ourselves every day before we go forth into the business and temptations of the world. Bend our chief force against those sins which do most easily beset us, and most frequently overcome us. Frequently make this reflection, that while we spend our time in trifling thus with religion, life not only goes on, but goes off too, and death approaches. Let us reflect every one for himself, whether, and how far, this subject concerns us. 1. Consider that you have all the difficulty without the benefit of a thorough reformation of heart and life. 2. You can have no real satisfaction in your present course. 3. Every time you return to your sins, after you have resolved to forsake them, and begun to do it, you make your condition worse than it was before. 4. In what light will your present manner of acting appear when you come to die? IV. THE METHOD WE SHOULD TAKE IF WE WOULD NOT ONLY MAKE SOME ENTRANCE UPON THE WAYS OF RELIGION, BUT GO ON IN THEM, AND HOLD OUT TO THE END. 1. Good men are too apt to change as to their diligence and activity in the Christian life. 2. Hath the time been when the Christian was vigilant and circumspect? One would think that the advantages he must have reaped from thence should have kept him so; and yet they do not always effect it. 3. There may be the loss, as to the good man's conscience, of its former sensibility and authority. Conscience is an inward sense and feeling of good and evil. Sensibility of conscience appears not so much in discovering the nature as the degrees of moral good and evil. How careful should we be to maintain this sensibility and tenderness of conscience. 4. Hath the Christian disengaged himself to a great degree from the affections of the lower life? He is very happy herein, but let him not be secure, as if he was not liable to a change. The following are among these affections of the lower life, which even in Christians sometimes prevail too much. (1) Admiration and esteem of worldly things. (2) Love of sensual pleasure. (3) Immoderate hopes and fears, joy and sorrow about present things. (4) Intemperate anger, or a proneness to kindle into warm resentments upon very trivial occasions. (5) A spirit of devotion is not always kept up. His indevotion appears in his disuse of religious thoughts and contemplations, in which time was that he more frequently employed himself. And also in the little pleasure which Christians take in the duties and exercises of religion. It is attended with want of desire after spiritual and eternal blessings. Two directions. 1. Fix in your minds a just and lively apprehension of the much greater peace and pleasure which attend an even and regular course of piety than the contrary. 2. Have your eye upon the first tendencies of the heart to wander from God, and immediately oppose and check them. (*H. Bonar, D.D.*) *Religious constancy*.—This is a mournful voice of expostulation. The thing which aroused the prophet's sad lament is as familiar to us as it was to those who lived in that day. The same temptations follow the same passions, and substantially the same experiences are the result. The inconstancy of men in goodness; the facility

with which they are excited; the quickness with which they recognise the better way; the rapidity with which they forget it,—these are the themes of the Old Testament and the New alike, and also of observing men in profane literature. The topic is the inconstancy, the remission, of religious emotion. There is a vast amount of tremulous excitement, there is a great deal of feeling, which runs for an hour very deeply; and yet, the transiency of religious life and of religious feeling is just as much a matter of remark to-day as it was a thousand years ago, and just as much a matter of remark in the Church as it was in the synagogue. The obvious reason will be, of course, in the nature of the human soul; in its proclivity downward and backward towards the animal, on which it is based and from which it sprang. Men have a very brief religious experience because the power of the world is so strong over them. There are many persons who do not want to be conformed to the world; who do not desire to have any fluxes of feeling. They ask, How shall I prolong these experiences? 1. There is much error in the doctrine of the uses of feeling, and therefore of its degrees, and of the possibility of equal emotion on the part of all. If religion were the putting of persons through a Divine process from which each one emerged amply equipped, and equipped like every other, then every one might demand that his experience should be like that of every other one; but such is not the case. Men are brought into the religious state with all their conditions of constitution, or of soul and mind, with all their conditions of education and non-education, with all their misteachings and prejudices; and they begin at different points. Each one has problems of his own in life. God in His providence deals with each particular man according to the method which is adapted to him. Feeling is not to be sought as a luxury. The object of feeling is to be an operative one. Though there should be pleasure in it. Persons who enter a Christian life, and seek to promote such a life by the experience of feeling, exquisite, abundant, and continuous, may think that they are seeking religion, while often they are only seeking self. What, then, is to be the limit of feeling? How much feeling is a man to have? Enough to maintain himself vitally. Enough to impel him on every side to the duties which belong to his station and to his nature. The most powerful loves in life are latent. Everywhere in life, true and wholesome feeling tends to clothe itself in action. I have known many persons who gave up a thousand ethical duties for the sake of having experience, as it is called. There are many who are attempting to be eminent in their Christian life by having a full-orbed emotive experience all the time. But there are a great many persons so constituted that depths and currents of feeling such as others have are quite impossible to them. The law of the production of feeling must be better understood. It is thought that feeling so exists in men that one has but to wish for it, long for it, pray for it, try for it, to have it come. No person trying on any other side of the mind would ever come to such a conclusion. Try it with caution, or mirthfulness. Would they come at demand? The causes which produce feeling are various. There are certain ideas or elemental truths which produce the sense of awe: there are others that produce the sense of faith; others that produce love, or joy, or sorrow, or remorse. Whoever wants a given feeling must understand what are the truths which stand connected with its production. Take also into consideration the law of continuity of feeling in men. Feeling, when it becomes continuous, is insanity. Emotions never run in channels. They are always changing. They rise and fall. If one observes a wholesome mind, he will find that there are scores of feelings which alternate, first one being in the ascendancy and then another. The on-going of the impulses of a wholesome mind is like the progress of a time. Nothing is worse for a person than to attempt all the time to have just one state of mind, because he thinks that to be a Christian is to have God in one's thoughts all the while. You cannot do it, and you ought not to try to do it. It is unnatural. There is a law of the inspiration of distinctively moral feeling. There is an impression that religious feeling is the direct product of the Divine Spirit. It may be, as harvests are the product of the sun; but the sun works differently on different growths. Now, the moral or spiritual part of a human being, that part which makes him a man, not an animal, comes from God. It is universal mind, moving in universal space, that gives us vitality, and inspires our reason and moral emotions in all their variations. A true moral feeling is an inspiration of God; but it is an inspiration which acts differently in different persons. There is one class of men whose emotions distinctly run to ideas. All men's emotions follow reason. But there are some

men who have no distinct conceptions of moral emotion except those which evolve ideas—that is, differentiated truths, or a series of propositions. As, for instance, John Calvin. The beauty-loving element has power to open the door of the soul, and produce profound moral emotions. There are those whose moral feelings are largely dependent on the imagination. Two elements constitute the whole revelation of God, fact and fiction. The imagination, working with the reason, constitutes faith, generically considered. Every man should have a susceptibility of moral emotion through the imaginative element. How can any man read the Apocalypse of John, and appreciate it without imagination? There are different modes of reaching man's interior natures. It is ignorance or neglect of the laws of feeling that makes so much trouble with persons in their religious experience. There are many who think that if they are to have true moral feelings they must have them in a particular way; whereas true moral feelings come in an infinite number of ways. One hindrance to the development of moral feeling and to its continuous flow, in so far as continuity of moral feeling is practicable, is found in the law of discord of the force of malign feelings in changing the current and nature of a man's emotions. In the human soul, which is the most exquisite of all orchestras, you may have mirth, reason, wit, and humour, veneration, hope, faith, and they help each other, and are naturally harmonious, and cannot of themselves make discord. But when a man is in that peaceful and joyous state of mind which it is the nature of these combined elements to induce, let one single malign feeling strike in among them, and it will put them out of concord, and strike a line of discord through them. (*H. Ward Beecher.*)

Transient devotions.—The Church hath seldom seen happier days than those described in Exod. xix. God had never diffused His benedictions on a people in a richer abundance. Never had a people gratitude more lively, piety more fervent. But this devotion had one great defect, it lasted only forty days. God had to say, "They have quickly turned aside." Some divines regard the text as prophetic. In their opinion the goodness mentioned in the text is the mercy of God displayed in the Gospel. The dew signifies Jesus Christ. The morning dew intends the covenant of grace. We, however, regard a goodness like the morning dew as a seeming piety, which goeth away, is of short duration, and all the words of the text are a reproof from God to His people for the unsteadiness of their devotions.

I. THE NATURE OF THE PIETY IN QUESTION. We are not to understand by it those deceitful appearances of hypocrites who conceal their profane and irreligious hearts under the cover of ardour and religion; or the disposition of those Christians who fall through their own frailty from high degrees of pious zeal, and experience emotions of sin after they have felt exercises of grace. Hypocrisy cannot suspend the strokes of Divine justice one single moment, and it is more likely to inflame than to extinguish the righteous indignation of God. The piety we speak of lies between these two dispositions. It is sincere, but it is unfruitful, and in that respect it is inferior to the piety of the weak and revolting Christian. It is sufficient to discover sin, but not to correct it: sufficient to produce sincere resolutions, but not to keep them: it softens the heart, but it doth not renew it; it excites grief, but it doth not eradicate evil dispositions. It is a piety of times, opportunities, and circumstances.

1. By piety, like the early dew that goeth away, we mean that which is usually excited by public calamities.

2. In the second class of transient devotions we place that which religious solemnities produce.

3. That which is excited by the fear of death, and which vanishes as soon as the fear subsides. The most emphatical, the most urgent, and the most pathetical of all preachers is death.

II. THE INSUFFICIENCY OF THIS KIND OF DEVOTION.

1. In the text is an argument of sentiment and love. God represents Himself here under the image of a prince who had formed an intimate connection with one of his subjects. And the subject seems deeply sensible of the honour done him, but proves faithless. Equivocal reformations, appearances of esteem, are much more cruel than total ingratitude and open avowed hatred.

2. Consider the injustice of these devotions. Though they are vain, yet people expect God to reward them. Though men's complaints of God's not rewarding were unjust, yet God sometimes paid attention to them; for though He sees the bottom of men's hearts, and distinguishes real from apparent piety, yet He hath so much love for repentance that He sometimes rewards the bare appearance of it, as in the case of Ahab. The Jews knew this condescension of God, and they insulted it in the most odious manner.

3. There is a manifest contradiction between these two periods of life, between that of

our devotion, and that of our sin. A reasonable man acting consistently ought to choose either to have no periods of devotion, or to perpetuate them. There is a palpable danger in having both these dispositions. 4. Every part of devotion supposes some action of life, so that if there be no such action the whole value of devotion ceases. 5. Transient devotions are inconsistent with the general design of religion. This design is to reform man, to renew him, to transform him into the likeness of glorified saints, to render him like God. But how does a rapid torrent of devotion attended with no moral rectitude contribute to this end? 6. Transient devotions must render promises of grace to you doubtful, even suppose you should ever, after a thousand revolutions of transient piety, be in possession of true and real religion. 7. Consider the imprudence of a man who divides his life in this manner into periods of devotion and periods of sin. A heart divided in this manner cannot be happy. And the state of suspension which God assumes in the text cannot last long. (*James Saurin.*) *The condition of man as a wreck*.—I. MAN IS A WRECK. The picture which this book gives us of the Jewish people is truly a hideous and lamentable one. Sin rolls its warm, sparkling, but poisonous current through the veins of all. Man everywhere is a moral ruin. Physically, intellectually, and morally man is a wreck. He is at war with himself, at war with the universe, at war with God. But God is earnest about man in this condition. He appeals in the most tender and moving strains of love and mercy. II. MAN, THOUGH A WRECK, IS AN OBJECT OF IMPORTANCE. Nothing impresses so much the importance of man as the interest which the great God seems to take in him—the earnestness which He displays for his recovery. A great mind is never earnest about an unimportant object. Little minds grow enthusiastic about small matters. There is a strange power in suffering to heighten affection. As is seen in homes in times of sickness. III. MAN, THOUGH A WRECK, IS CAPABLE OF RESTORATION. Three things show this. 1. The condition of man in this world. 2. The deep aspiration of humanity. 3. The extraordinary means that are provided for man's restoration. IV. MAN, THOUGH A WRECK, EXERTS A FEARFUL POWER. Why did all God's operations fail? On account of man's power, even in his wrecked condition, to resist. Man counteracts the moral influence of nature and the tendency of providence: he even resists the appeals of the Gospel and the strivings of the Spirit. (*Homilist.*) *Occasional impressions*.—How little practical influence do the Divine claims possess on the hearts and conduct of men! There are some who, if visited by occasional impression, and if apparently aroused to a sense of their high obligations, yet fall back again to perverted habits as the natural element of life. To such as these Hosea wrote. I. THE NATURE AND EXCITING CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE DISPOSITION ALLEGED. The images employed are emblems of brevity and evanescence. The morning cloud is soon dispersed, and the early dew soon evaporates before the sunbeam. It affirms that the persons indicated had been the subjects of certain emotions towards God and His will, which appeared to be right and good, but which proved transitory and unsubstantial, and soon gave way altogether to returning habits of transgression and rebellion. There may often be the plausible semblance of regeneration without the vivifying reality. Here in the text is a disposition which effects no mental renovation, and takes no established hold—a mere inflamed excitement, subject at once to removal on the rise of new suggestions, expiring with the impulse of the moment, agitating and subsiding, promising and disappointing, springing and withering. 1. This disposition may be excited by remarkable interferences of the providence of God. Public and national providences have given rise, not seldom, to what has thus appeared as the spirit of religion. As in the times of the Israelite Judges. Times of prosperity and calamity have similar results in individuals. 2. By the presence of sickness and imagined approach of death. These are evidently calculated to lead to serious consideration on the interests of the soul. But too often the zeal keeps time with the disease; the recovery of health proves to be the resurrection of sins. 3. By the statements and appeals of Divine truth. Under the preaching of the Word, the emotions of many prove transitory and ineffective. II. THE EFFECTS OF THAT DISPOSITION ON THE INTERESTS OF THOSE WHO ARE THE SUBJECTS OF IT. 1. It assists to render the mind insensible to religion. The susceptibility is exhausted and deadened, and will no longer answer to what awakened it before. Persons whose impressions have gone away, cherish an absolute hatred of the memory of those impressions, and of the circumstances that inspired them. 2. It exposes to the signal retribution of future punishment.

To the accusation of the text are annexed threatenings of tremendous evils as consequent on the crime. The judicial result, arising from the previous transgressions, is at once stated. (*James Parsons.*) *Emotion in the religious life*.—No two figures could have been selected, either for delicacy or for beauty, to represent the religious feelings better than these—the beauty of the cloud, its promise and its quick departure; and the beauty of the jewelled morning, that excites admiration everywhere, and the speedy emptying of its beauty. So is it, so it has been, and so it will be with religious feeling that rises easily, that promises everything that is ecstatic and that is fugitive, going as do the clouds and the dew. One of the most important things to know to-day is the genesis of the feelings. The ignorance of men as to the laws and uses of feeling, and as to the means of producing, regulating, and retaining it, is monumental. All action proceeds from emotion, which is a reservoir of forces. Men seem to act from thinking; but thinking is altogether subordinate and auxiliary to feeling. That which makes a man act, that which sets him forward in research, enterprise, effort, is either open or latent emotion. You cannot produce a sound and large religious character, you cannot produce any change in the right direction without feeling. Susceptibility to emotion is, in its largest view, susceptibility to development in any direction. How much emotion does a person want? Enough to bring him into a condition of action. More than that. Enough to make him a little more alert, and to make his work easier. People who want intense emotion are not wise. It is creditable to persons to enter upon high Christian life without having had very deep experiences of feeling or emotion. Another mistake in regard to feeling is the temptation to make it continuous. It is contrary to nature. Persons often reproach themselves for losing their feeling when they ought to lose it. We are not constituted so that we can bear continuous emotion long in a single line. Then there is such a thing as the alternation of feeling. And alternation is desirable, for alternation is rest. Religious feelings exhausted by continued religious considerations are restored by the administration of social and secular things. Often the things which men avoid seriously and urgently are the very things which are necessary for them. The production of feeling is a matter very little understood. Buoyancy is a term by which we mean that kind of general animal emotion which is the result of high life-feeling such as children and all young animals show. It is a purely bodily quality. It must not be confounded with emotion. Quickness of susceptibility is a sign, not of deep emotion, but of temperament. By temperament several things are meant. Emotion proper results from the action on the feelings of some form of intellectual presentation. That is the general law. Is there any law, any principle, any direction that a man can give or take, by which one can facilitate the production of any feeling that he wants? Deep religious feeling is not a matter of chance; it is a matter of cultivation, as definite as cultivation in a field or garden of plants; and just as definite as cultivation in schools. (*H. Ward Beecher.*) *Instability of character*.—No valuable attainment is to be made without industry; and no industry is effectual but that which has the character of perseverance. Yet there is an impression almost universal, that spiritual blessings are to visit us unsolicited by our patient exertion; that, at all events, an occasional sensibility of feeling, and transient purposes of amendment will conduct us to all that is requisite for the life to come. Reflection might teach us the probability of there being an analogy between the requirement made upon us for the earthly, and that which is necessary for the heavenly attainments. Self-examination might show us how very foreign the knowledge of Divine things is to the darkness within our souls; how opposed the practice of what is righteous to the corruption which reigns there. Scripture would affix its authoritative seal on all which reflection and self-inquiry suggest. How unstable was the nation of Israel! What other means could Divine wisdom invent to give to their repentance a fixed, a lasting, an effective character? Mercies and judgments had been tried again and again. God speaks in the text as a man would speak with respect to persons with whom he had used every means of improvement, and used them in vain. The case before us is an exhibition of our own character and danger. It is the prototype of a large class among ourselves. Who have begun, but whose goodness has been like the morning cloud which flees before the approaching sun, or as the early dew soon caught up by his scorching heat. Those who so lately turned from sin to repentance, turn back again from repentance to sin. What are the causes of this short-lived goodness; the causes which lead to

the relapse into evil? Great deliverances—blessings from God of an unusual importance—may produce a temporary relaxation of wickedness or worldliness. This effect is also seen to arise from trouble. There are few who have not been led by sorrow and disappointment to make what has proved in the result an abortive struggle. Another frequent cause of temporary heats of religion is discovered in the power of conviction. Appeal to men is continually made by the Word of God, by His ministers, by His providence. The only surprise is that such impressions, grounded in truth, should not conduct the soul further; and that there is any point within the line which divides insincerity and sincerity at which it should stop. The solution is found in the state of the heart; there is, in truth, no principle to lead it onward to the true Christian character. The nature of religion has not been considered; its motives have not been weighed; its difficulties have not been calculated. No wonder that animal indulgence, the temptations of the world, and the persuasions and influence of others make it difficult for a pliable mind to act independently. (*T. Kenyon, M.A.*)

The instability of human goodness:—Ephraim and Judah were made better neither by promises nor threatenings, so that their case was very hopeless, and nothing seemed to remain but that the Lord should leave them. In the text we have that which made their case so hopeless. They had at times some goodness—Hebrew, “kindness.” They had at times some kindness for God and His way, some warmth of affections towards good. It was but sometimes. Their goodness was passing goodness. This instability is held forth by the similitude—1. Of a morning cloud; 2. Of the early dew. Such is the instability of many in the good way of the Lord, that the goodness at which they sometimes arrive passeth away as a morning cloud and as the early dew.

I. IN WHAT RESPECTS DOES THIS LIKENESS HOLD GOOD? The goodness of the saints cannot pass away totally or finally. But even the saints may lose much of the degrees of grace.

1. Men’s goodness often goes away very quickly as the morning cloud which appears only a very short while. Goodness of fellowship with Christ often fades quickly away. Goodness often passes quickly away after deliverance from trouble.

2. Men’s goodness ordinarily goes away by degrees, almost imperceptibly. Carnal security creeps leisurely on men, until by it they are taken off their feet. When temptation comes, man’s goodness is often amissing. Much goodness passes away in a time of persecution for the Gospel. And much when we are called to duty.

II. REASONS WHY THE GOODNESS OF MANY THUS PASSES AWAY.

1. Many, for all their goodness, have not the living Spirit of Christ dwelling in them.

2. Because the souls of many do not unite with Christ, who is the only head of influence.

3. Because, with many, religion is not their proper element. It is a forced matter with them that they have any at all. Self-love is their highest principle. They have no real love to the Lord, nor does the intrinsic beauty of holiness recommend it to them.

4. Because they have no spirit for difficulties and disappointments. They go forward cheerfully while things are laid to their hand; but disappointments take heart and hand from them, and they are knocked in the head.

5. Because of the entertaining of unmortified lusts, which, like suckers, draw the sap from the tree.

6. Because the profits and pleasures of the world soon charm away men’s goodness.

7. Because of unwatchfulness over the heart and life. I would exhort you, then, that have attained to anything of goodness or kindness to the Lord in His way, that you would set yourselves to hold it fast. (*T. Boston, D.D.*)

The impressions of natural men are fading:—In these words God complains that He did not know what to do with Israel, their impressions were so fading.

I. THE FACT THAT THE IMPRESSIONS OF NATURAL MEN FADE AWAY.

1. Prove the fact from Scripture. Take the case of Lot’s wife. Or Israel at the Red Sea. Or the young man who came running to Jesus. Or Felix. Or King Agrippa.

2. Prove the fact from experience.

(1) Many have had a time of awakening in childhood.

(2) Or at their first communion.

(3) Or in a first time of serious sickness.

(4) Or when there has come a first death in the family.

(5) Or in some season of religious awakening.

3. Show the steps of impressions fading away.

(1) Prayer gradually given up.

(2) Hearing the Word neglected.

(3) Failing to seek counsel and help of ministers.

II. REASONS WHY THE NATURAL IMPRESSIONS OF MEN DIE AWAY.

1. They never are brought to feel truly lost. The wounds of natural men are generally skin deep. They may be brought to say, “I am a great sinner”; but they are not brought to feel undone.

2. They never saw the beauty of Christ. A flash of terror will bring a man to his knees, but will not bring him to

Christ. Love only will draw. A natural man, under concern, sees no beauty nor desirableness in Christ. 3. He never had heart-hatred of sin. The impressions of natural men are generally of terror. They feel the danger of sin, not the filthiness of it. 4. They have no promises to keep their impressions. Natural men have no interest in the promises, and so, in the time of temptation, their anxieties easily wear away. III. THE SADNESS OF THEIR CASE. 1. God mourns over their case. It must be a truly sad case that God mourns over. 2. God has no new method of awakening. He speaks as even at a loss what to do, to show you that there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins. 3. No good by your past impressions. When the cloud is dried up off the mountain's brow, and the dew off the rock, the mountain is as great as before, and the rock as hard; but when convictions fade away from the heart of the natural man, they leave the mountain of his sins much greater, and his rocky heart much harder. It is less likely that such a man will ever be saved. Application. 1. You are now older, and every day less likely to be saved. 2. You have offended the Spirit. You have missed your opportunity. Convictions are not in your power. 3. You have got into the way of putting aside convictions. 4. When you come to hell you will wish you never had convictions, they will make your punishment so much the greater. Entreat all who now have any impressions not to let them slip. It is a great mercy to live under a Gospel ministry; still greater to live in a time of revival; still greater to have God pouring the Spirit into your heart, awakening your soul. Do not neglect it. (*R. M. M'Cheyne.*)

Transient impressions :—How is the too common disappearance of hopeful impressions to be accounted for? The great reason no doubt is that the heart has never been truly reached. But that is itself an effect produced by other causes which need to be sought after. The causes which tend to make religious impressions evanescent may be classified under three heads. I. THOSE WHICH ARE SPECULATIVE IN THEIR NATURE. When the conscience is awakened the soul takes refuge in perplexing difficulties, which revelation leaves unsolved. But such difficulties should never be allowed to keep us from religious decision. 1. The existence of difficulties is inseparable from any revelation which is short of infinite. All perplexities arise from imperfect knowledge. 2. The difficulties in revelation are of the same sort, so far at least as they touch conduct, as those which we meet in God's daily providence. 3. Difficulties in regard to things of which we are in doubt ought not to prevent us from performing duties that are perfectly plain. Whatever a man may be perplexed about, he knows full well that it is wrong to commit sin. Some however find perplexities of another kind. They are bewildered by the questions raised by modern discoveries. It is important for such persons to keep this principle in mind—truth already ascertained on its own appropriate evidence is not the less true because there are added to it some important truths in another department of human inquiry. We welcome truth from all quarters, for truth is near of kin to Him who sits upon the eternal throne. II. THOSE CAUSES WHICH ARE PRACTICAL. 1. Some are hindered from yielding to the promptings of their better nature by fear of opposition. 2. Others by the influence of evil associations. 3. Another hindrance is the fettering influence of some pernicious habit. III. CAUSES CONNECTED WITH THE CONDUCT OF PROFESSING CHRISTIANS. The seriousness produced by some searching discourse is often wiped out by the thoughtless, flippant remarks of a so-called Christian on the way home from Church. Or it may be that in time of trouble professing Christians prove indifferent and neglectful. But the inconsistency of others cannot excuse us. And, moreover, we know well that all Christians are not like those we have to condemn. Remember the consistent ones, and do not dwell exclusively on the inconsistent. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

Goodness like a morning cloud :—I. PORTRAY THE CHARACTER INDICATED. 1. Unfruitful hearers. Such feel a pleasure in attending the ministry of the Word; the passions are affected, the understanding is enlightened, and they form purposes for amendment of life, but the impression is momentary; there is no decision of character. 2. Transient reformers. Those who under providential visitations have determined to amend their ways and live to God, but afterwards have relapsed into sin. 3. Inconstant professors. Such go farther than the former: for a season they make a public profession of religion, and attend regularly the ordinances of God's house; but through unwatchfulness and a neglect of Christian exercises their piety degenerates, their affections become cold, and at last they abandon religion altogether. II. THEIR SIN AND DANGER. 1. Unwatchfulness. They

were cautioned, warned, and admonished; but instead of guarding the avenues of the soul, they were heedless and trifling. 2. Unfaithfulness. Had they walked in the light, their path would have been that of the just (Prov. iv. 18). 3. Ingratitude. They have had signal displays of the Divine beneficence. The returns they make are blasphemy instead of praises; pride, instead of humility; sin, instead of holiness; hatred, instead of love. 4. Rebellion. God has been striving with them in a variety of ways. Yet their lives have been marked with instability and indecision. Such has been their sin and such the mercy of God. But the day of vengeance is at hand. And their state is awful beyond description. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *Evanescence of the early dew*:—By the word of the prophet Hosea, the Divine reproach fell on Ephraim and on Judah, that their goodness was as a morning cloud, and that as the early dew it passed away. Bright was the promise of the innocent dawn, but the promise was unfulfilled. Mr. Kingsley, in a touching reflection—literally reflection, looking back on the “long lost might-have-been,” adverts to that personal idea which every soul brings with it into the world, which shines dim and potential in the face of every sleeping babe, before it has been scarred, and distorted, and encrusted in the long tragedy of life. Dr. Caird has said of the birthday of the worst of men, that although it ushered a new agent of evil into existence, and was a day fraught with more disasters to the world than the day in which the pestilence began to creep over the nations, or the blight to fasten on the food of man, or any other physical evil to enter on a career of world-wide devastation,—yet might this day, when the vilest of humanity first saw the light, be in some aspects of it regarded as better (despite Solomon’s text) than the day of his death. “For, to take only one view of it, when life commenced, the problem of good or evil, to which death has brought so terrible a solution, was, in his case, as yet unsolved. The page of human history which he was to write was as yet unwritten, and to that day belonged, at all events, the advantage of the uncertainty whether it was to be blurred and blotted, or written fair and clean.” Life, even in the most unfavourable circumstances, it is urged, has ever some faint gleams of hope to brighten its outset. The preacher owns that the simplicity, the tenderness, the unconscious refinement that more or less characterise infancy, even among the lowest and rudest, soon indeed pass away, and give place to the coarseness of an unideal, if not the animal repulsiveness of a sensual or sinful life. But he insists that at least at the beginning, for a little while, there is something in the seeming innocence, the brightness, the unworldliness, the unworn freshness of childhood, that gives hope room to work. Is there not, he asks, for every child, not in the dreams of parental fondness only, but in reality, and in God’s idea, the possibility of a noble future? “The history of each newborn soul is surely in God’s plan and intention a bright and blessed one. For the vilest miscreant that was ever hounded out of life in dishonour and wretchedness, there was, in the mind of the All-good, a Divine ideal, a glorious possibility of excellence, which might have been made a reality.” The most hardened ruffian, the most obdurate criminal, the most impenetrable reprobate was once a child. Most of what he has, the grown-up man is shewn to inherit from his infant self, but it does not follow that he always enters upon the whole of his natural inheritance. (*Francis Jacox, B.A.*) *Religious declension*:—Since in every age of the Church the prophet’s description of Ephraim finds but too faithful a resemblance, we must appropriate and apply to ourselves this affecting language. The case before us is that of instability in religion. The prophet’s lamentation does not regard those who have fallen into known, deliberate, and grievous sin. The case before us does not regard those whose ardour of feeling is less strong than it may once have been. Feeling is no test of principle. Feelings and emotions, though they will oftentimes accompany a religious state of heart, yet are not necessarily attendant on it; they are often the effects of mere animal spirits. The prophet deals with the inconstancy and decline of those who have professed to know God, but whose acquaintance with Him has not grown, but decayed. I. THE CHARACTER HERE DESCRIBED. 1. Those who have had strong convictions. Their consciences have been visited by the force of the most solemn and awakening appeals of God’s Word. The arrows of the Almighty have been lodged, possibly very deeply, in the heart. 2. These have been accompanied by feelings, strong correspondent feelings. The representations of God’s free and tender mercy in Christ Jesus have melted the soul into a love toward the Saviour, and the heart has prostrated itself at His footstool.

3. And these feelings have been followed by plans for the honour of God. 4. And this leads him to make great sacrifices. Such are some of the fair appearances, the goodly blossoms, which, in the outset of life, or after the first awakenings of the soul, appear in the characters of those who yet, alas! bring forth no fruit to "perfection." By and by, the power, the life, the unction is gone; there has been a worm at the root, eating out the spirit and the energy of the profession.

II. SOME OF THE CAUSES OF THIS DECLENSION. 1. Excessive ignorance of the heart. He knows not of the ten thousand specious forms of apology which his heart is devising, and no wonder that he is not prepared with a resistance. 2. Negligence in devotion. Wherever prayer is disused, or coldly performed, there are the infallible symptoms of decaying piety. 3. Unheeded afflictions. By trials and afflictions that check our complacent prosperity, God calls to some one whose early promise of excellence has disappointed the hopes of heaven. He seemed, whilst the pressure of God's hand was still felt, to have learned the things which belonged to his peace; but the immediate force being lifted off, and the prospect of speedily meeting God having vanished, he starts back; the things of sense again dazzle his eyes, stupefy his conscience, and carry him away captive. 4. Seductive worldly connection. Such alliances hang like a clog on the soul, and drag heavily upon that wing on which it might otherwise mount upwards with renewed strength towards the centre of blessedness.

III. WHAT IS GOD'S ESTIMATE OF THE CASE? It is a case which draws forth His severe anger. But the language of the passage rather presents God as grieved at the case, than in wrath. The appeal contains sharp rebuke and tender love. It says, thy case carries reproach to thyself, and draws compassion from My heart. What means this backward movement, when thou shouldst have moved forward? (*Robert Eden, M.A.*)

Fading impressions:—A celebrated preacher of the seventeenth century, in a sermon to a crowded audience, described the terrors of the last judgment with such eloquence, pathos, and force of action, that some of his audience not only burst into tears, but sent forth piercing cries as if the Judge Himself had been present, and was about to pass on them their final sentence. In the height of this excitement, the preacher called upon them to dry their tears, and cease their cries, as he was about to add something still more awful and astonishing than anything he had yet brought before them. Silence being obtained, he, with an agitated countenance and solemn voice, addressed them thus: "In one quarter of an hour from this time, the emotions which you have just now exhibited will be stifled; the remembrance of the fearful truths which excited them will vanish; you will return to your carnal occupations, or sinful pleasures, with your usual avidity, and you will treat all you have heard as a tale that is told."

Trifling with impressions:—This is one of those passages of Scripture in which God seems to represent Himself as actually at a loss, not knowing what else could be done to produce piety in hearts which had heretofore resisted the strivings of the Spirit. Yet, if you observe what these particular circumstances were which thus seemed to bring even Omnipotence to a stand, you will not find them such as might at first sight have been expected to produce such a result. God does not accuse Ephraim and Judah of being entirely unmoved by all the means which He had ever taken to move them. An impression had been made, but it had not been permanent. It is because the impression proved only transient that God represents Himself as at a loss—His resources exhausted, His purposes frustrated; for "your goodness is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away." There were some indications of goodness; some convictions of sin, some impressions of past guilt were produced. Resolutions of amendment were made, and partially carried into practice, but at the first impulse of temptation all these appearances vanished, just as the cloud disperses and the dew exhales before the sun shining in his strength. There can hardly be a less hopeful condition than that of a man on whom a weak impression has been made, but on whom it has not been abiding.

I. THE CASE DESCRIBED. The style of the preaching to which men are accustomed to listen will determine, in a great degree, the peculiar moral danger to which they are exposed. Cold preaching is likely to leave men in their natural torpor, and fervid preaching is likely to communicate a warmth which may be mistaken for the glow of spiritual life, but which, proceeding only from excited sensibilities, and not from a renewed heart, will immediately depart when the stimulating causes are withdrawn. You have only to follow one of the multitude who has been thus excitedly impressed, and you will find that no stops are taken to deepen the impressions. The influences

of seasons of affliction are much the same. It is melancholy and disheartening to observe how rapidly those promising appearances vanish. Men so often virtually mistake the action of grief for the action of conscience. This is the case conceived in the text. II. WHY SHOULD SUCH A CASE PRODUCE THE STARTLING WORDS OF THE TEXT? If religious impressions have been produced and then crased, the heart must be even harder than it was. Augustine says, "The facility with which we commit certain sins is a punishment for sins already committed." It is the property of our nature that the doing of a thing makes it easier to do it again. This property of our nature should teach us that in obliterating serious impressions we make it more difficult than ever that they should be reformed. Then comes the question, if we have offered successful resistance to the Spirit of God, will the strivings of the Spirit be more intense than before? It is on this very point that God represents Himself as putting the question of the text to Ephraim and Judah. Observe in these words of the text a peculiarity which is very touching and affecting. God addresses Himself to the very parties themselves whose goodness has vanished as the morning cloud or early dew. He proposes what we may call His difficulty, in the shape of questions, as though willing to be directed by those with whom He had striven in vain. He makes them, as it were, judges in the matter. What have you to answer to God? You, it seems, are found speechless. We will not say that your case is beyond hope, but we will derive a warning from the manifested peril in which you stand. Take good heed how you trifle with your convictions. Your eternity may be dependent on your present steadfastness. If you crush your present feelings, there is a fearful likelihood of your passing from one degree of moral hardness to another, until God Himself shall not know what to do for your conversion. (*Henry Melvill, B.D.*) *A threefold theme*:—I. DIVINE SOLICITUDE. The language implies—1. I have done much for thee. 2. I am ready to do more. 3. I am fettered in My actions. Almightiness has restrictions. It is God's glory that He will not outrage moral minds. II. HUMAN PERVERSITY. Men set their wills in hostility to God's. Hence He says, "What shall I do unto thee?" I can reverse the laws of nature, I can break up old universes and create new ones, but I cannot make beings whom I have endowed with the power of freedom, virtuous and happy, contrary to their own will. III. EVANESCENT GOODNESS. Whether the goodness refers exclusively to human kindness, or includes some amount of pious sentiment it matters not; it was so evanescent that it was of no worth. Goodness is of no worth to any being until it becomes supreme and permanent. Thank God for endowing thee with freedom; it is a fearful power. It gives to men a widely different destiny even here, but a destiny in eternity infinitely more dissimilar. (*Homilist.*) *Man's goodness*:—Either—1. God's goodness towards them, or 2. Their goodness, that is, their piety and holiness. God's goodness to them was as the morning cloud, for they, by their sin, had driven away God's mercy and goodness from them, even as the wind carries the dust before it. In these words God charges this people with three things whereby their hypocrisy was expressed. (1) Their vacuity and emptiness. (2) Their falseness and dissembling. (3) Their inconstancy and fickleness. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *On transient impressions*:—Notwithstanding the paralysing effects of sin upon the conscience, there are few persons, perhaps, living under the light of inspiration, who have not, at one time or another, felt the claims of heaven press upon them, and tasted, in some degree, the powers of the world to come. I. IMPRESSIONS BEARING THE SEMBLANCE OF RELIGION, AND PRODUCING EFFECTS WHICH ARE MISTAKEN FOR ITS GENUINE FRUITS, ARE GENERALLY, THOUGH BY NO MEANS UNIFORMLY, ATTRIBUTABLE TO EXTERNAL CAUSES. 1. The influence of education, and the force of habit often induce seriousness of mind, and generate a deportment which seems to harmonise with the principles of the Gospel. The collateral results of consistent piety are very many, and often they are very powerful. But they sometimes end in disappointment. Under the strain and temptation of life, the young man from a pious home fails and falls, the shadow of religion vanishes into aerial nothingness. 2. Impressions of a similarly transient nature are often produced by affliction in its varied forms. Such impressions are often, indeed, solid and permanent. But some persons under affliction resolve on the godly life, and then as the affliction passes so does the resolve. God removes affliction from the man's dwelling, and soon he himself banishes religion likewise; telling her, in effect, that though she may be a good companion in adversity, she is a gloomy guest in prosperity.

3. The faithful preaching of the Gospel, in very many instances, generates impressions which ultimately prove evanescent. The anxious pastor beholds with grateful joy these supposed fruits of his labours; but how deceitful these sometimes prove. The flower is nipped by the cruel blast, and forthwith it droops and fades away. II. TRANSIENT GOODNESS IS AN ESSENTIALLY DIFFERENT THING FROM VITAL RELIGION. The two may be more than externally assimilated to each other. The resemblance may, indeed, elude detection. The impressions we are now considering are essentially defective in reference to the two great points of sin and salvation. The professions of sin are not drawn from the hidden depths of self-knowledge; they do not grow out of that moral feeling which is generated by an insight into the holiness of God; they are not the genuine distinctive cry of the broken and contrite heart. They respect danger rather than degradation. There may be correct views of Gospel theory, they do not arise from, or connect themselves with a moral apprehension of the suitableness of the remedy to the nature of the disease. The goodness which is as the morning cloud wants spirituality of perception, in regard to the salvation of Christ; and it wants that pure complacency which cements the union of believers with their Lord. Lessons. 1. The importance of ascertaining the true basis on which our religion rests. In voluntary self-deception there is an equal mixture of sin and folly. 2. What an awful thing it is to sin against conscience. Backsliding and apostasy are different things. But no person who is actually sinning against the remonstrances of conscience can have scriptural evidence that he has been in a state of grace at all: he may rather draw the conclusion that he has not. 3. Consider the forbearance and tender compassion of Almighty God towards those who have basely treated and grievously offended Him. God never gives up a sinner who is unwilling to give up himself. (*W. Knight, M.A.*) *Goodness that will not last*:—Of this their goodness, the prophet says, the character was that it never lasted. The morning cloud is full of brilliancy with the rays of the rising sun, yet quickly disappears through the heat of that sun which gave it its rich hues. The morning dew glitters in the same sun, yet vanishes almost as soon as it appears. Generated with the cold of the night, it appears with the dawn; yet appears only to disappear. So it was with the whole Jewish people; so it ever is with the most hopeless class of sinners; ever beginning anew; ever relapsing; ever making a show of leaves, good feelings, good aspirations, but yielding no fruit. "There was nothing of sound, sincere, lasting, real goodness in them"; no reality, but all show, quickly assumed, quickly disused. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *A Divine expostulation*:—The compassion of God towards His fallen creature man is manifest in every part of the Divine procedure. Amidst our numerous provocations and offences the Lord is continually bearing and forbearing with us. The prophet Hosea points out the tenderness and care of Divine goodness towards the fallen race of men. I. THE NATURE OF THE EXPOSTULATION RECORDED IN THE TEXT. Nothing can more effectually stimulate us to obedience than the powerful impulse of gratitude. Whether we contemplate the works of nature, providence, or grace, we find in each a brilliant display of the goodness of God. Our salvation from beginning to end is wholly of grace, and therefore we are bound by the strongest motives of gratitude to glorify God by a holy life and conversation. But what is the report which either experience or observation must make of our daily conduct? If we calmly look back on our past lives, if we enter into a self-examination of our coldness and deadness in religion, of the little fruit we produce, we cannot wonder at the affecting and interesting expostulation contained in the text. What astonishing condescension is it that God should thus graciously reason with His creatures. God charges both Judah and Ephraim with wavering irresolution and manifest inconsistencies in their profession of religion. The charge is that they did not act up to their convictions. And how justly this may be applied to the whole of our conduct through life! The expostulation implies that God willeth not the death of the sinner, if we would renounce our evil courses, and turn with full purpose of heart unto Him, though He visit us occasionally with afflictions, and temporary losses, and various disappointments, yet He only chastens us for our good. The expostulation plainly suggests that all our ways are noticed by Him who is constantly about our path. God takes various methods to bring sinners to repentance. II. WHAT ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND BY THE CHARGE BROUGHT AGAINST EPHRAIM AND JUDAH? The morning cloud promiseth rain, and the early dew is some refreshment to the parched earth, but the cloud is soon dispersed, and the dew

does not sink deep into the ground. It does not extend to the root of the tree, and this is a fit emblem of the superficial religion which designates the character of numbers. The charge of being wavering and unstable too properly belongs to us. We profess to be followers of Christ, and yet how few of us imitate His Spirit, or imitate His example! Our goodness or piety, which ought to be uniformly alike, is like the morning cloud or the early dew. It shines bright and conspicuous for a season; but when temptations or persecutions arise, we have no stability, no depth of root, and therefore, like the stony ground hearers, are scorched up, wither, and fade away. Unless there be a fixed principle implanted by the Spirit of God in the heart, governing the choice, and directing the affections, there will be no steady or abiding influence on the conduct. When men promise fair, and do not perform, when they begin well in religion, and do not hold on to the end, but fall off from a good profession, the latter state of those men is even worse than the first. Though men do not quite cast off religion, yet if they are unsteady, uneven, and inconstant in it, they are like the morning cloud and early dew. The dispositions of the mind need to be changed by regenerating grace.

III. THE MANNER IN WHICH WE SHOULD IMPROVE THESE ADMONITIONS, BY A SERIOUS INQUIRY INTO OUR OWN CHARACTER AND CONDUCT. Let every man pay attention to the workings of his own mind, to the habits of his daily life, and more especially to his favourite pursuits. In this way he will read the progress or decline of religion in his own soul. Let him also pray with fervour for the constant aids of the Holy Spirit, to fan the flame of piety, to cherish holy dispositions, and to keep him securely to the end. And as these aids are promised to all who ask them, how can we have the benefit unless we apply for it? Let Christ and His atoning blood be precious in our eyes. (*J. Grose, A.M.*)

Goodness as kindness.—Some take the words to mean, "Your kindness," that is, the mercy which I have hitherto exhibited to you is "as the morning dew": "ye immediately dry up My favour." This seems not unsuitable, for we see that the unbelieving by their wickedness absorb the mercy of God, so that it produces no good, as when rain flows over a rock or a stone, while the stone within, on account of its hardness, remains dry. As then the moisture of rain does not penetrate into stones, so also the grace of God is spent in vain and without advantage on the unbelieving. (*John Calvin.*)

Transient convictions and true consecration.—**I. TWO KINDS OF RELIGION.** The transient and the truthful. Why do so many who seem to be sincere and earnest endure but for awhile? Worldliness, like the sun, dries up, and temptation, like the wind, scatters and dissolves what looked so beautiful. Truthful persons are sincere, there is a reality in their religion, something that abides. We may also call such a religion truthful as wrought in the soul by the Spirit of truth, by the Spirit, through the truth.

II. SOME PEOPLE HAVE ONLY KNOWN ONE OF THESE KINDS OF RELIGION, AND SOME HAVE KNOWN BOTH. Some have only known the transient. Hitherto it has been conviction without conversion; resolutions without love; deficient repentance and sorrow without real surrender. Truth has not conquered; no governing principle has been introduced into the soul; nothing permanently inscribed on the tablets of the heart. Some have only known the truthful. A few have been drawn gently and even from early life. Others have gone on in darkness several years, and have then been suddenly brought to a stand, and at once "translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son." A third class have known both. In their case there were many attempts and failures. Many settings out and goings back. Yet even such unlikely ones have been saved. Therefore let none despair.

III. WHAT MUST BE DONE IN ORDER REALLY TO PASS FROM THE ONE TO THE OTHER? If you would not have your feelings pass away, you yourself must pass in, you must yield yourself to God. Go in through the door, have really and personally to do with Christ, then religion will become to you an abiding reality. The reason why your religion is a transient one is that you have not yet begun aright. True godliness begins with the pardon of sins. God is willing to begin with the blotting out of sin. (*J. Cox.*)

Fickleness in religion.—"Fickleness cannot but be attended by fatal consequences." It has proved fatal to real progress and lasting prosperity. The Celts "shook all empires but founded none." Cæsar tells us that the same fault characterised the Gauls, and St. Paul bears witness to the same failing in his Epistle to the Galatians. It was the recurring sin of the children of Israel. God's gracious invitations to His people show how great and faithful was His love. But it seems at times as if Divine love itself were perplexed. "O Ephraim, what shall I do

unto thee," &c. Silently, imperceptibly, like the evanescent cloud, and like the sparkling dewdrop, their goodness and love passed away. I. THIS IS A COMMON FAULT TO-DAY. How many begin hopefully and then fall away. One of the saddest sights angels behold is a warm heart cooling in its love towards God, a beautiful life withering 'neath the blight of sin. It is most instructive to notice the cause of the downfall of Jewish kings. Many of them began well, but were not thorough, did not continue faithful, but substituted inferior things. "And King Ahaz took down the sea from off the brazen oxen, and put it upon a pavement of stones." Many begin by giving their best to God, but alas! they give up their early enthusiasm and become less zealous in His service.

II. BEFORE ENTERING UPON GOD'S SERVICE COUNT THE COST. Lord Wolseley mapped out the whole campaign before entering upon the Egyptian war. Britain's unpreparedness was the cause of many reverses in the great South African war. Jesus Christ is very explicit on this point. "Sit down, and count the cost." There is the bias of the heart towards sin. "When I would do good, evil is present with me." A fact that makes degeneration easy. Goodness requires effort. "Gird up the loins of your mind." Temptations and cares beset the upward path. Longfellow's "Excelsior." III. HOW TO CONTINUE FAITHFUL. Prayer is the arm of the soul that connects it with God, like the tram-car with the overhead wire. It brings down light and power. Study well the chart. Read the Bible. Have fellowship with Christ's people. The early Hebrew Christians had many temptations and trials, hence they were enjoined "not to forsake the assembling of themselves together." Keep in touch with God and with His people. (*A. Hampden Lee.*)

Fugitive piety.—I. THE PIETY CHARACTERISED BY THE TEXT. Very beautiful and full of promise, but disappointing. It was thus with the Israelites in the wilderness (Psa. lxxviii. 34-38). And there is much of the same piety now. Some spend their lives in sinning and repenting. In the Polar world at a certain season of the year the sun rises just above the horizon, streaks the black sky with fire, casts on the desolate scene a warm splendour, and then in a few minutes sinks again, leaving the sky as dark and the earth as cold as they were before. And thus it is with some amongst us in respect to their experience of religion. Men receive some great mercy, suffer some great tribulation, are powerfully affected by the truth, deeply wrought upon by the Divine Spirit, and it seems as if they would forthwith lead a new life, but in a little while they are as worldly or as wicked as they were before. What is done on Sunday is undone on Monday; the vow of the sick chamber is forgotten in convalescence; the promise of the sanctuary withers in the market-place.

II. THE DEFECTIVENESS OF SUCH PIETY. 1. The shameful inconsistency of it. Vacillating men are held in contempt, but all other vacillations are trifling compared with this religious instability. How suddenly, how frequently, how flippantly some of us pass from the highest to the lowest. Now God, now idols; now the spirit, now the flesh; now holiness, now frivolity and sin. 2. The profound misery of it. Such people know the sorrows of religion without its joy. They know little more of the path to heaven than the struggles of the "Strait Gate" or the woes of the "Slough of Despond." Before they get to "Palace Beautiful," or the "Hill Beulah," they turn back again, the bitterness of religion having gone to their heart, and its sweetness only to their lips. 3. The utter insufficiency of it. Some men look upon their fits of goodness with some satisfaction, but really there is no reason to do so. A transient piety leaves out the foremost grandeur of religion—its unchangeableness. Recognise God's great love to you. "Follow on to know the Lord." "He that endureth to the end shall be saved." (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *Fitful piety unsatisfactory*.—We need to feel the utter unsatisfactoriness of this fitful piety. Too often we look with complacency upon it. We argue thus: "I am not altogether bad; I have my times of good feeling, desire, and effort; the barren wilderness of my heart is relieved by green, blossoming shoots; the winter of my life has its snowdrops and violets, telling of the neighbourhood of golden seasons; I am comforted when I remember the recurrence of these days of gracious sentiment and aspiration." Such reasoning is entirely erroneous; there is no justification whatever for intermittent goodness. Its sufficient condemnation is its unlikeness to God's goodness. Hosea points out the contrast. Our goodness is "the morning cloud," whilst the goodness of God "is prepared as the morning" which brightens to the perfect noon; our goodness is "as the early dew," whilst the goodness of God is "as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth," it drops fatness the year round.

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." "Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness"; "Thy truth endureth for ever"; "His faithfulness faileth not." This is the crowning glory of God,—He abides from everlasting to everlasting in righteousness and love. The starry, steadfast firmament is supremely grand, but a meteor flash which startles the night counts little; the flowing river has a charm all its own, but the summer brook which dries whilst we look at it is only a disappointing fancy; the stately cedar sheltering successive generations appeals to the soul, but the gourd that springs in a night and perishes in one touches no deep chord. Righteousness in its essential nature is eternal, and therefore the righteousness of time and change is deeply perplexing and sad. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 6. For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice. — *Mercy and sacrifice not contrasts*:—God had Himself, after the fall, enjoined sacrifice to foreshew and plead to Himself the meritorious sacrifice of Christ. He had not contrasted mercy and sacrifice who enjoined them both. When then they were contrasted, it was through man's severing what God had united. If we were to say, "Charity is better than churchgoing," we should be understood to mean that it is better than such churchgoing as is severed from charity. For, if they were united, they would not be contrasted. The soul is of more value than the body. But it is not contrasted, unless they come in competition with one another, and their interests seem to be separated. In itself, sacrifice represented all the direct duties to God, all the duties of the first table. Mercy represented all the duties of the second table. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *The double rule of religion*:—It requires both mercy and sacrifice, but the relations between them properly preserved. 1. The rule of true religion requires that all God commands should be respected, and obedience endeavoured, so that moral duties be chiefly made conscience of. Under "sacrifice and burnt-offerings" is comprehended all their ceremonial performances, so far as they were mere external performances rested on by the people. His "not desiring sacrifice" is not to be understood simply, as if the Lord did not approve, even of the external performances which were enjoined by Himself; but comparatively, that He desired moral duties more than burnt-offerings. To which may be added, that in some cases, when moral duties come in competition with ceremonials, the Lord doth not desire ceremonials at that time, but moral duties. 2. Let men submit never so much to the external injunctions of religion and worship, or think to satisfy their own consciences therewith, yet where Christ is not closed with, to enable and make men willing and active in moral duties, they will not be approved in the other at all. 3. Such as would approve themselves to God, ought to make conscience of moral duties, both of the first and second table of the law, and particularly, the saving knowledge of God, whereby we may regulate the rest of our obedience. Shewing of mercy in cases wherein we seem not to be so strictly bound, will prove our reality in religion. (*George Hutcheson.*) *Mercy rather than sacrifice*:—I. ANSWER SOME QUESTIONS. 1. What is the difference between natural ordinances and instituted duties? By natural duties understand such duties as we owe to God as God, and to man as man, which we should have been required to fulfil if there had been no written law in relation to them. By instituted duties understand those which, if God had not revealed them, would have had no claim on us. Natural duties refer to attributes in God's nature and character, instituted, to the expression of His will. 2. God required sacrifice as well as mercy, but with these limitations. (1) I will have sacrifice, but not without the spirit. Instituted worship separated from natural worship is not regarded. (2) Not sacrifices to make atonement for their sins. (3) Not sacrifices of your own devising. 3. Why should God require mercy rather than sacrifice? Because mercy is good in itself, but sacrifice is good only in reference to something else. Sacrifices are but to further us in natural duties. II. SATISFY SOME OBJECTIONS. 1. Men's hearts are deceitful, and they may pretend cases of mercy when there is no such thing in hand. It is not for us to judge the sincerity of other men. God gives general rules for the ordering of a Christian life; and these general rules being observed, particular cases are to be ordered in prudence, faithfulness, and zeal; and where there is miscarrying through frailty, God will have mercy. 2. Can any duty of the second table be more excellent than the duties of the first? In both the tables there are internal and substantial duties and superadded duties. Comparing them it is plain that the substantial are to

be preferred before the superadded. Yet God is pleased to indulge men so far that He will let the duties of the second table take precedence. 3. But if God's ordinances are duties, can they be omitted at any time? There are two sorts of precepts, negative and affirmative. A negative binds always and at all seasons, an affirmative only binds always, but not at all seasons; for we cannot do two things at once, and one duty must be preferred to another. It is the Christian's skill, when two duties come together, which to choose. If God's own worship may be forborne in case of mercy, how much more men's institutions and inventions. God will have mercy rather than disputing about sacrifice. Mercy must be preferred before our own wills and lusts. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*)

Ver. 7. But they, like men, have transgressed the covenant.—*The breach of the covenant of works*:—General defection is a cause and presage of a sweeping stroke. 1. The crime charged on them. Covenant breaking. This is a crime of a high nature; it strikes at the root of society among men, and therefore is scandalous and punishable though it be but a man's covenant. How much more atrocious is the crime where God is the one party! God took the Israelites into covenant with Himself when He brought them out of Egypt. 2. Whom they resembled in breach of covenant. They acted like men. They were vain, light, fickle, and inconsistent as men. It may however be read, "like Adam." And he broke his covenant. Doctrine. Our father Adam broke the covenant of works. I. THE FATAL STEP BY WHICH THAT COVENANT WAS TRANSGRESSED AND BROKEN. It was the eating of the forbidden fruit. Consider the progress, the ingredients, and the aggravations of this act. As to the ingredients, notice the unbelief, pride, ingratitude, contempt of God, and the breaking of the whole law of God at once. As to the aggravations, notice that it was righteous Adam. The object by which he was enticed—a morsel of fruit. The smaller the thing was, the greater the sin. The nature of the thing. It was theft and sacrilege. The place where it was committed, and the time when it was committed. II. HOW WAS THIS FATAL STEP BROUGHT ABOUT? 1. The instrument of the temptation was a serpent; a true and real serpent. 2. It was acted by the devil. 3. Satan set upon the woman first, she being the weaker vessel. 4. He moveth a doubt concerning the command. 5. Then he falls on the threatening and contradicts it. 6. He proceeds as one that wished well to her and her husband, and pretends to show how they might both arrive at a high pitch of happiness speedily. 7. She being ensnared, he makes use of her to tempt her husband, and prevails. God left man to the freedom of his own will in this matter. He was not the cause of his fall. But why was not man set beyond the possibility of change? It is to be remembered that absolute immutability is the peculiar prerogative of God Himself, and every creature, in as far as it is a creature, is incapable of being so immutable. Man abused his own liberty, or freedom of will, and so broke the covenant. III. HOW WAS THE COVENANT OF WORKS BROKEN BY THIS FATAL STEP? 1. The command was violated. 2. The right and title to the promised benefit by that covenant was undermined. 3. He fell under the penalty of the covenant, became liable to death in its utmost extent. (1) The soul of man died spiritually, losing the image of God and the favour of God. (2) The body of man became mortal, death working within it and without it. (3) Soul and body were subjected and bound over to eternal death in hell. Learn—1. The nothingness of the creature when left to itself. 2. The hopelessness of salvation by works. 3. Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. 4. Take heed of forgetting the covenant of your God. 5. Here is a demonstration of the absolute necessity of being united to the second Adam, who kept the second covenant, and thereby fulfilled the demands of the first covenant. (*T. Boston, D.D.*)

Ver. 8 Gilead is a city of them that work iniquity, and is polluted with blood.—*Divine institutions corrupted*:—It is supposed that Gilead here means Ramoth Gilead: the metropolis of the mountainous region beyond Jordan and south of the river Jabbok, known by the name of Gilead (Josh. xxi. 28; 1 Kings iv. 18). It was here that Jacob and Laban entered into a sacred covenant with each other. It was once a very sacred place; it was one of the celebrated cities of refuge (Deut. xx. 23; Josh. xxiii. 28). The place, which was once a city of refuge, an institution of the God of heaven, had now been desecrated by wicked men, and become the scene of "iniquity" and "blood." I. That Divine institutions, specially designed for man's good, ARE OFTEN CORRUPTED BY HIM. Whilst all

places on earth are for the good of man, Gilead had a specific appointment. 1. The Bible is a special ordinance of God for good. Men have corrupted that by perverting its doctrines. 2. The Gospel ministry is a special ordinance of God for good. II. That Divine institutions specially designed for man's good, when corrupted BECOME THE WORST OF ALL EVILS. Holy Gilead, once the scene of Divine mercy, was now filled with "iniquity" and "blood." 1. A corrupted Bible is the worst of all books. Political tyrannies, slaveries, wars, persecutions, have all been sanctioned and encouraged by a corrupted Bible. 2. A corrupted pulpit is the worst of all ministries. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 11. Also, O Judah, He hath set an harvest for thee.—*Naturalness of retribution*:—Divine punishment for sin is elsewhere spoken of as a harvest. I. RETRIBUTION IS NATURAL IN ITS SEASON. There are the "appointed weeks of harvest." These weeks come round with an undeviating regularity. Punishment comes to the sinner naturally, so far as the proper time is concerned. In this life the sinner has many harvests. Every transgression is a seed, and the seed sometimes grows rapidly and ripens fast. II. That retribution is natural in its RESULTS. In harvest, the man reaps the kind of seed he has sown, whatever it may be, barley or wheat. Also as a rule the amount; if he has sown sparingly he reaps sparingly, if with abundance he will reap abundantly. He gets what he wrought for. It is just so in the retributive ministry of God. Hence he will never be able to blame either God or His creation for his wretched destiny, he reaps "the fruit of his own doings." III. The retribution is natural in its APPROACH. As soon as the seed is sown and germination begins, it proceeds slowly and silently from day to day, week to week, and month to month, towards maturation, its harvest state. It is just so with sin, it proceeds naturally to work out its results. "Lust, when it is conceived, bringeth forth sin; sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." (*Homilist.*)

CHAPTER VII.

VER. 1. When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered, and the wickedness of Samaria.—*The great deceiver and spoiler of the nation*:—We identify the deceiver as strong drink. I. THE DANGEROUS AND INSINUATING CHARACTER OF INTOXICATING DRINKS. "The thief cometh in." Compare the movements of thieves with the manner in which these drinks operate upon different classes of our fellow-men. 1. The thief will often seize the property of others under false pretences. So the strong drinks pretend to give strength to the weak, and to preserve the strong from becoming weak. Those drinks pretend to act favourably upon the sympathies of our nature, and to promote good fellowship among neighbours and friends. But when and where did strong drink perform such wonderful things? 2. The thief commits his depredations under the guise of friendship. If you are known to have money, many will offer friendship, and when they have gained your confidence, they will strip you of everything you possess. And it is thus with the friendly glass. 3. The thief pounces upon his prey at unawares. And the thief, strong drink, acts very much in the same way. To be forewarned is in many cases to be forearmed, but too many refuse to take warning, and hence the thief pounces upon them at unawares, and they become an easy prey. 4. The thief pays no respect either to age or sex. The thief is known to seize upon male or female, old or young, any party, or under any circumstance, if he can but meet with a victim. And the thief, strong drink, acts precisely in the same way. In every walk of life, in every condition of society, and under every variety of circumstance this thief commits his depredations. 5. The thief, in the accomplishment of his object, often takes away the life of his victim. Here is another most painful characteristic of strong drink. By this thief multitudes of men die and go to their long home. II. THE EVILS INFLICTED UPON OUR COUNTRY BY THE TRAFFIC IN STRONG DRINKS. "The troop of robbers spoileth without." 1. The vast extent of this source of evil. Thousands are engaged in the manufacture of strong drink. 2. The traffic fails to give an equivalent

for what it costs. 3. The traffic in strong drink spoils the morals of our country. 4. The traffic is spoiling the efforts of the Church. III. THE MEANS BY WHICH THESE EVILS MAY BE REMOVED. 1. The real cause of these evils must be kept distinctly in view. Individual example is the matter requiring supreme attention. 2. The manufacture and sale of intoxicating drinks, except for scientific and medicinal purposes, must be condemned. 3. The practical rather than the doubtful should be steadily pursued. There is always a danger of our having our minds diverted from the real to the visionary. It is a delusion to trust to acts of parliament. Personal and individual abstinence is the one thing to urge. (*D. Sunderland.*)

Ver. 2. And they consider not in their hearts that I do remember all their wickedness.—*The evil of inconsideration*.—What the prophet affirms of God's ancient people is gravely distressing. I. THE FACT ASSERTED. God remembers the wickedness of men. Wickedness denotes what is hateful and destructive. Men may excuse it, deny it, forget it; but God remembers it. 1. This fact is clear from the declarations of His Word. 2. From the perfections of His nature. "The Lord is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed." 3. From the equity of His government and a future judgment. You that forget God, and forget your sins, know that God remembers. II. THE EVIL STATED. That men forget this fact. The evil lamented is inconsideration. The want of consideration appears—1. In men's continued commission of sin. 2. In their doing this without regret. 3. In their readiness to extenuate sin. 4. In their disregard of future consequences. Wherein then consists the evil of this want of consideration? (1) They who are thus chargeable neglect the plainest admonitions of Scripture. (2) They oppose the frequent dictates of conscience. (3) They allow themselves in the practice of secret sins. (4) They may even proceed to the commission of open vice. (5) Thus proceeding they eventually ruin the soul. As to the duty of consideration, the authority of God commands it. The grace of God recommends it. The reason of man approves it. The aversion of man to this duty implies its importance. (*T. Kidd.*) *Man's sins in God's mind*.—God alone knows us perfectly. I. A FACT IN THE DIVINE PROVIDENCE OR GOVERNMENT. "I remember all their wickedness." "Remember," as applied to God in Scripture, does not represent a faculty of the Divine mind, but a state of God's nature, or the conduct of God in some particular instance. The text means, "Your sins are ever before Me." 1. God remembers all kinds and degrees of sin. 2. All the sins of all men. 3. He remembers accurately and completely. 4. Continually and for ever. And—5. With a practical result, that He may act upon His recollection. Then how wonderful is God's patience and forbearance! How entire must God's pardon be when He forgives a sinner! How complete will be the transactions of the judgment day! How full will future and final punishment be! II. THIS FACT IS FORGOTTEN BY THOSE WHO OUGHT TO REMEMBER IT. They do not think or reflect, at least, so as to feel. III. GOD'S COMPLAINT OF THIS FORGETFULNESS. God complains of forgetfulness, because it sears the conscience, leads to false views of a man's position, is personally offensive to God, and is frequently the occasion of final ruin. God does not hate you as a being, but He does hate your character. And this offensiveness to God is continually increasing. You can consider this matter, and at once. Enter then the path of serious thought and pursue it. (*Samuel Martin.*) *God's remembrance of sin*.—I. God REMEMBERS men's sins. "I remember all their wickedness." 1. This is a wonderful fact. When we think of the infinite greatness of Him to whom the universe is as nothing. Sin is no trifle in the eye of Him whose glory is His holiness. 2. This is not only a wonderful, but a solemn fact. God not only observes and knows my sins, but He remembers them. II. MEN DISREGARD God's remembrance of their sins. Why, then? 1. Because other thoughts engross their minds—thoughts of worldly wealth and power. 2. Because this thought, if it occurs to them for a moment, is too painful to be entertained. III. That men's disregard of God's remembrance of their sins LEADS THEM TO REVEL IN INIQUITY. "Now their own doings have beset them about; they are before My face." Here we have—I. Their sins in general. They are abundant and daring. Their sins encompass them on all sides, and they perpetrate them without shame under the very face of God. 2. Some of their sins are specified here. They made them glad "with their lies," with the lying praises with which they crowned the favourites of the prince, and

the lying calumnies and censures with which they blackened those whom they knew the princes disliked. (*Homilist.*) *God's record of our sins* :—The great stone-book of nature reveals many strange records of the past. In the red sandstone there are found in some places marks which are clearly the impressions of showers of rain, and these so perfect that it can even be determined in what direction the shower inclined, and from what quarter it proceeded; and this ages ago! So sin leaves its track behind it, and God keeps a faithful record of all our sins. *Now their own doings have beset them about.*—*Man beset by his own doings* :—Down from the dark ages comes the story—if memory is true to its charge—of an expert blacksmith, who was such a master of his trade, and withal so proud of his skill, that he often boasted no man could break a chain made by him. In time the blacksmith himself was imprisoned and manacled. With the hope that he might make his escape, he examined the chain to see if it was possible to break it, when, to his horror, he discovered that the chain was one made by his own hands, which no living man could break, himself included. The chain forged by his own hands made the blacksmith a helpless, hopeless prisoner in that vile dungeon. Is it not the same with us? Each of us is forging a chain we cannot break. Every bad habit becomes a link in the chain, which will bind, in hopeless slavery, the soul that makes it. Acts form habits. Let your acts be beautiful and Christlike, and your habits will be likewise. (*Paul S. Biggs Shipley.*) *The sin of the people* :—The prophet now arraigns all the citizens of Samaria, and in their persons the whole people, because they rendered obedience to the king by flattery, and to the princes in wicked things, respecting which their own consciences convicted them. He shows that the defection which then reigned through all Israel ought not to be ascribed to the king or to few men, but that it was a common evil, which involved all in one and the same guilt, without exception. If they wish to cast the blame on their governors, it will be done in vain. As soon as Jeroboam formed the calves, as soon as he built temples, religion instantly collapsed, and whatever was before pure, degenerated. How was the change so sudden? Even because the people had inwardly concocted their wickedness, which, when an occasion was offered, showed itself; for hypocrisy did lie hid in all, and was then discovered. It often happens that some vice creeps in, which proceeds from one man, or from a few; but when all readily embrace what a few introduce, it is quite evident that they have no living root of piety, or of the fear of God. They then who are so prone to adopt vices were before hypocrites; and we daily find this to be the case. When men become corrupt in their whole life, and degenerate from the pure worship of God, they are justly deemed adulterers. The prophet compares them to an oven, because they were not corrupted by some outward impulse, but by their own inclination and propensity of mind. They had been set on fire by an inward sinful instinct, and were like a hot oven. The blame rested wholly on themselves. (*John Calvin.*) *In the day of our king the princes have made him sick with bottles of wine.*—*Court intemperance* :—On the king's birthday, or some other solemnity yearly observed, the princes induced the king to drink until he became sick, and forgot and prostituted his place and authority by joining with scorners, or men eminently dissolute. Doctrine. 1. Days which men will have observed as days of festivity and solemnity do ordinarily prove days of great miscarriage and provocation against God. 2. Drunkenness and sensuality are heinous and crying sins, especially in rulers. It is a sad challenge that they should be given to "bottles of wine." 3. Nobles and princes and great courtiers are ordinarily great plagues and snares to kings, who, having their ear and countenance, do make use of it for no other end but to draw them to sin against God. 4. It is the height of sensuality, when men not only become brutish themselves, but dare invite and tempt others to the same excess of riot, and by all means draw them to drunkenness. 5. Men by their intemperance do not only draw on the guilt of mis-spending time, and abusing the good creatures of God, but of self-murder and abusing their own bodies also. 6. Days of feasting and intemperance do also ordinarily prove days of great insolence and boldness in other sins. 7. It is also the great sin of drunkenness, that by their sensuality they deprive themselves of the use of reason, and render themselves contemptible, and like beasts, that they can neither know their place nor duty. The king debased himself to keep company with lewd persons and look like them. (*George Hutcheson.*)

Ver. 8. **Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people; Ephraim is a cake not turned.**—*Moral declension*:—Much real pain is caused, to a rightly constituted mind, by the failure of fondly cherished anticipations. To trace the causes of moral declensions is a most important exercise. As these are discovered, we are put on our guard. I. **THE CONDUCT OF EPHRAIM.** 1. The persons with whom he associated. Described as “the people,” that is, the idolatrous remnants of the nations originally possessing the land. The separation of Israel from other nations was a type of the separation into which God has ever called His believing people from persons of sinful and worldly principles and character. Scripture injunctions, in relation to this, are far from being regarded by professed Christians as they should. 2. The character of Ephraim’s association with these parties. “Mixed himself among them.” Friendly and intimate association. It is such intercourse the Christian ought to avoid. We are not required to abstain from all intercourse, but from such intimacy as would bring us into evil influence. In unrestrained intercourse with the world, a Christian is often led to go farther than consistency sanctions. A Christian too much mixes himself with the world—(1) When his chosen associates and most intimate friends are selected from the world. (2) When he allows himself to participate in the dishonourable principles or pursuits of worldly men. (3) When he is found frequently mingling in the pleasures of the world. 3. The voluntary and spontaneous nature of this association. Ephraim was not forced into, but he “mixed himself” among them. To a certain extent, the Christian not only may but must mingle with the world. That is a very different thing from courting the society of men of the world. II. **THE CHARACTER OF EPHRAIM, AS THE RESULT OF HIS CONDUCT.** “A cake not turned.” The figure intimates—1. The undecided character of his religion. 2. The worthlessness of such religion. (1) As the ground of personal safety. (2) As a source of personal enjoyment, and as the means of support and consolation under trial. (3) As a means of security against danger and temptation. (4) In exerting a beneficial influence on the minds of worldly men. III. **THE PERSONAL INSTRUCTION WHICH THE CONSIDERATION OF SUCH A CHARACTER MAY SUPPLY.** 1. How important that worldly minded men and undecided persons should correctly understand their real position. 2. How needful that they who have any regard to their spiritual interests should exercise great circumspection as to the characters and habits of those with whom they familiarly associate. 3. How desirable that Christians, by a more decided and elevated tone of spirituality in feeling and conduct, should make the line of separation between the Church and the world more apparent. This is required in view of your own spiritual well-being, and in order to the graciousness of your influence on others. (*H. Bromley.*) *The sin of Ephraim*.—I. **EPHRAIM’S UNHAPPY MIXTURE.** He hath joined himself with the nations in their idolatrous and profane conversation. There was a threefold mixture. A local mixture, of place and company. A civil mixture, of affinity and alliance. A moral mixture, in regard of manners, religion, and conversation. For God’s people to comply with those who are wicked and ungodly in their practices, and to conform themselves to their customs and manners, is a thing very grievous and insufferable. The conformity of God’s people to the world is contrary to their election, and God’s special designation of their persons to eternal life. It is also opposed to their redemption. We are redeemed for another purpose than this. We are called out of the world, and God has thereby distinguished us from other men who are in the world. Our sanctification too is an argument against conformity to the world. It engages us to self-mortification and to spiritual quickening. II. **EPHRAIM’S INDIFFERENT TEMPER.** “A cake not turned.” Take the figure as an amplification of their sin. They were only baked on one side, that is, they were of an imperfect and indifferent temper in religion. This may be an expression of hypocrisy and false-heartedness in religion; of neutrality and indifferency in religion; of deficiency and imperfection in religion. Cakes not turned are mere notion and speculation in religion, which proceed not to practice and operation: purposes and resolution without practice; the practice of some things, but omission of others; extravagance and the following of two extremes. Take the figure as an amplification of their punishment. As a hungry man catches the cake from the hearth before it is baked, so the enemies of Ephraim were hurrying to devour her. There was no respite for repentance and turning to God. No opportunity for escape. (*T. Horton, D.D.*) *Half-baked*:—A strange text, but there are so many strange people in the world that odd words

are sometimes needed to reach them. All can understand about a cake. One that was only half-baked you would say was a deceit. There are people like such a cake. They look beautiful and good when in church, but when you come to try them, they are anything but pleasant. They are cakes not turned. Jesus was once speaking of this kind of thing, and took cups and saucers for His text. He said, "Do not wash the outside only, and make believe about the inside. Do the same with your characters. If you pretend to be good, then be good, inside and out, in your heart and thoughts as well as in your appearance." That is what this cake is meant to teach. Be thorough; do not try to appear what you are not. The best way to seem good is by being good. What is the good of seeming good if your thoughts are bad? God can see when you are only as a cake not turned. No one ever yet lost by obeying God. Be thorough, honest, and God-fearing in and out; do not have a religion like a weathercock that shifts with the wind, or one that can be broken with an *if* or a *but*. God sees you altogether. A great sculptor in Greece, long ago, made a statue that was to be set on a high column, yet he was as particular about the hair on the top of the statue's head as about all the rest. "Why take so much pains about that?" some one said. "Nobody will ever see it." "No," replied the sculptor, "but God will see it." Then be true in heart if you would be true in life. (*J. Reid Howat.*)

One-sidedness in religion:—The figures of Scripture are less ornate than homely and expressive. Even a child knows what will happen if the cake be not turned. It will be ruined on both sides, and be wholly unfit for use. Such a cake denotes a type of character at once distempered and untempered, a character that lacks unity, that is spoiled by defect and damaged by excess, an inconsistent whole. I. THE GROUNDS OF THIS IMPEACHMENT. 1. Ephraim has "mixed himself among the people"; he has missed the practical design of religion, which is entire separation unto God. Many persons seek to combine in themselves contradictory qualities. They would be spiritual on one side and carnal on the other. They have a side that is religiously baked, and a side that is carnally crude. They are religiously blistered and carnally sodden. 2. Ephraim was indisposed to look to God, to call upon Him, to count on Him as the unit of power against the enemy. Religion was kept for ceremonies and state occasions; it was not an everyday working religion. They had a notional knowledge of God, but they did not seek after an experimental knowledge of Him. Jehovah was in their notions, He was not in their trust. Had He been in their trust they would have turned round to Him in their trouble. The cake would have been browned on both sides. And how many now have a name to live and are dead! To a certain extent they have the right notion, but it does not determine their practice, nor lead them to seek the confirmation of experience. Hence the cake is done only on one side. Better never to have known the truth at all, than for the truth never to influence the practice and issue in experience.

3. Ephraim was proud (ver. 10). Pride is always a one-sided and therefore spiritually false thing. Pride is based on fleshly comparison. No one could be proud who saw himself in the Divine light. If self-complacency creeps into our hearts, it is quite time the cake was turned. 4. Ephraim used temporal things inordinately and licentiously. They were carried into intemperate excesses. There is a possibility of ruining the cake through self-indulgence.

II. THE TEACHINGS THAT UNDERLIE EPHRAIM'S IMPEACHMENT. These teachings strongly emphasise—1. The need of a proper balance of character. Zeal is only one side of the cake. Zeal without knowledge, or contrary to knowledge, is a cake unturned. The like applies to fidelity and love, knowing and doing, energy and repose. Faith itself is a cake of two sides; because faith has its waiting as well as its working sides. 2. The need of a proper balance of truth. 3. The general drift of the whole subject suggests to our mind the need of a correspondence between what Christ has done for us, and what He is doing in us by His Spirit. To be well baked we need the Cross of Christ translated into experience. Paul knew Christ's Cross as a means of experimental crucifixion. To him it meant a death experienced within, in which the world became dead to him and he to it. (*James Douglas, M.A.*) *The crude cake*:—In the East it is the custom to heat the hearth, then sweep carefully the portion heated, put the cake upon it, and cover it with ashes and embers. In a little time the cake is turned. It is then covered again, and this process is continued several times, until the cake is found to be sufficiently baked. Ephraim has many representatives at this hour. 1. The man who lives for pleasure alone is a cake not turned. One side

of his nature is unduly baked, the other is entirely neglected. Pleasure has its uses, but pleasure as a business is a very poor business indeed. There are many such persons, both in the lower and in the higher grades of society. The man who lives for pleasure is dead while he liveth. He is a wretched parasite; he is a reproach to his species. One side of his nature is burnt to a crust by the fires of unholy desire; the other side of his nature is raw dough. Both are worthless.

2. The man who lives for business alone is a cake not turned. Business is good. Even though it be honourable, and the methods of its pursuit unobjectionable, the man who lives for this life alone loses this life as well as the life that is to come. The man to whom this world is a god is a wretched idolater. This life is never truly lived except it is used for the good of others and for the glory of God. If a man lives for business alone, one side of his nature is scorched by the friction of the world's cares, and the other is raw dough.

3. A man who lives for culture alone is a cake not turned. No man can claim the honours of culture, portions of whose nature lie fallow. A true culture sweeps across every faculty. Man has earthward, manward, and Godward relations. If lacking in any of these directions, it is a partial, defective, and unauthoritative culture. Tried by this true standard many claimants for the honour of culture will be found wanting. That is not true culture which fails to cultivate the nobler, the Diviner elements of the soul.

4. A man who is half-hearted in religion is a cake not turned. Ephraim, though proud and haughty as a tribe, had been lacking in moral backbone, in loyalty, in consecration, in the service of God. There are such professors of religion to-day. A half and half man is a failure always and everywhere. To-day Jesus Christ calls for men with one heart, and that heart on fire with His love. We want no unturned cakes. We want men with convictions. It is said of some men that they are very pious Godward, and very crooked manward. That is a severe criticism when it is true. That is not Christ's model man. He is symmetrical: he is baked through and through. Christ alone can make such men. (*R. S. M'Arthur, D.D.*)

Modern Ephraim:—Hosea was a shepherd and hewer of wood. There is nothing conventional in his style. His similes are quaint and abrupt. They show that their author was possessed of a quiet vein of broad humour. "Ephraim is a cake not turned" may be said of most men in their relation—I. TO THE SOCIAL CIRCLE. Too often we have—1. Courtesy minus friendship. 2. Appearance of wealth minus money. 3. Claims to "family" and learning. The amount of goods in the shop window is generally in inverse ratio to the amount in stock. This comparison may be applied—II. TO MEN IN THEIR RELATION TO COMMERCE. Too often we have—1. Better goods than "any other house." 2. Tradesmen "retiring from business." The words "from this place" being purposely omitted. 3. Sales at a tremendous sacrifice. There is ever a connection between demand and supply. Half-baked customers create Ephraimitish tradesmen. This comparison may be applied—III. TO MEN IN THEIR RELATION TO RELIGION. Too often we have—1. Profession without practice. 2. Letter without spirit. Profession is valueless without practice. So also is letter without spirit. So far as we have either without the other, we are as "cakes not turned." Christ ruling in our hearts adjusts all human relations. (*J. S. Swan.*)

The spoiled cake:—Hosea's composition epigrammatic and figurative. He compares Ephraim to "a silly dove," easily enticed into the net. When frightened, will not stay in the cot where she is safe. To "a wild ass alone"—foolish, headstrong, wilful. "An empty vine"—fruitless and useless. "A child" tenderly brought up, who turns out rebellious. "A merchant," deceitful in his balances. "A cake not turned," which, for want of turning is burnt on one side, and dough on the other side, but good for nothing on either side. Israel was not completely consecrated to God. I. GOD DEMANDS THE CONSECRATION OF MAN'S ENTIRE BEING. The cake should have been baked on both sides. Body, soul, time, possessions, should all be devoted to God. He claims it. The claim is based on—1. What God is in Himself. 2. What He is relatively to us. 3. Our highest interests. The example of the best beings. II. SOME CONSECRATE TO GOD ONLY A PORTION OF THEIR BEING. Baked on one side only. This indicates—1. Self-will. 2. Lack of supreme love to God. 3. Aversion to submission. 4. Love of present pleasure. 5. Ignorance of the ease of religious service. 6. Indecision of character. III. THE CONSECRATION OF ONLY A PORTION OF OUR BEING TO GOD WILL END IN DESTRUCTION. It is destructive of—1. Complete devotion. 2. Force of character. 3. True usefulness. 4. Thorough enjoyment. 5. Final perseverance. 6. Future glory. (*B. D.*)

Johns.) The unturned cake.—The text forms part of the energetic remonstrance addressed by the Spirit of God to Israel at a period of national degeneracy. They embody a reproof; but the homely figure must be deemed most appropriate in the circumstances of the case. What is the exact point of resemblance betwixt Ephraim and the unturned cake? At what stage in the process of baking, or in what circumstances are we to contemplate the cake? Is it when but for a while exposed to the heat of the oven, and therefore when the cake is partly cold and partly hot—exhibiting a vivid representation of that religious lukewarmness and indifferency which is so distasteful to God? Or is the allusion to the cake removed from the oven while yet only partially baked, the lower portions, or the outside, having been converted into bread, while the remainder, or the interior, is still dough, thereby pointing to persons who seek to make a composition betwixt their inclinations and sense of duty, by sometimes yielding to the one, and sometimes striving to fulfil the other? Or is the allusion to the position of the cake, and its state as thence to be inferred—cold upwardly and warm beneath—betokening coldness or disregard to things above, and warmth of affection exclusively to things below? Or is the allusion to a cake left behind in the oven till it is scorched, blackened, and altogether destroyed; representing the condition of those who, being given up and let alone of God, gradually become worse and worse? I. A REBUKE TO LUKEWARMNESS AND INDIFFERENCY WITH REGARD TO THE THINGS OF GOD AND ETERNITY. In the Christian community there are numbers who are neither bread nor dough. They have enough of Christian profession to exclude them from the designation of heathen, not enough of heart-felt godliness to entitle them to the name of disciples indeed. They have the name, but want the reality. The Christians of the unturned cake are very skilful in evading all impressions of sacredness. It is not enough to profess Christianity, we must also feel and live it. II. A REBUKE TO THOSE WHO VAINLY IMAGINE THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO SECURE THE SOUL'S SALVATION AND YET GRATIFY TO THE UTMOST THE SINFUL PROPENSITIES OF THE FLESH. There are some who occasionally feel, and that profoundly, the claims of Gospel truth and righteousness. But wait a little. Swiftly passes the morning cloud. The world and the flesh soon resume their ascendancy. There are some whose entire life is a uniform and sustained effort to keep up an alliance betwixt the spirit and the flesh; betwixt God and the world; betwixt duty and carnal inclination. They will not follow the Lord fully. God will not tolerate a rival. We must either serve Him altogether or not at all. III. A REBUKE TO THE COLDNESS AND UNSPIRITUALITY OF PROFESSED BELIEVERS. A cake cold upwards and warm underneath. Its baking may be so conducted that while the under side is intensely heated, the upper part is as cold as when first placed over a fire. So many professors. To the heavens they are cold, to the earth only are they warm. IV. AN INTIMATION OF THE CONDITION AND DESTINY OF THOSE WHO ARE GIVEN UP AND FORSAKEN OF GOD. Cakes left in the oven to be burnt and destroyed there. (*James Cochrane, M.A.*) *Religious indecision.*—I. WHO ARE EPHRAIMITES? Three classes. Real Christians, who are entirely for God. The profligate, who make no pretension to religion. Some stand between both, and seem to partake of each. These are the characters we search for. II. EXPOSE THEIR CONDUCT AND THEIR CONDITION. 1. This indecision is unreasonable. 2. It is dishonourable. 3. It is wretched. 4. It is peculiarly dangerous. III. ENDEAVOUR TO BRING MEN TO DECISION. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve." (*William Jay.*) *Half-hearted religion.*—I. Half-hearted men NEVER ATTAIN TO LOFTINESS OF CHARACTER. II. Half-hearted men NEVER ACCOMPLISH ANY GREAT WORK. III. Half-hearted men FAIL TO SECURE LIFE'S GREATEST BLESSING. (*A. Hampden Lee.*) *Inconsistency and incompleteness.*—The description is applicable—I. TO MEN WHOSE CONSCIENCES ARE THUS CONSTITUTED. Scrupulous in some things, they are frequently overscrupulous, and sometimes unscrupulous. The evil is aggravated when little things are its subjects, and when the weightier matters of the law are omitted, or when others' sins and not our own are considered. II. TO THOSE WHOSE ZEAL IS PECULIAR. Like thorns under a pot, it smokes and crackles to-day and to-morrow is extinct. The religion of those who blaze forth with transcendent glow for a time, and then disappear, is "a cake not turned." III. TO THOSE WHO CARRY THEIR RELIGION ONLY TO CERTAIN PLACES. To the sanctuary, the prayer-meeting, and the communion-table, but not into the family, the store, the bank, the senate. Or they may be outwardly consistent amidst home environments, but abroad, or at fashionable

watering-places, they follow the multitude to do evil. (*Homiletic Review.*) *The unturned cake* :—Ephraim had been “mingled,” steeped, kneaded up into a cake, as it were, with the heathen, their ways, their idolatries, their vices. God would amend them, and they withholding themselves from His discipline, and not yielding themselves wholly to it, were spoiled. The fire of God’s judgment, with which the people should have been amended, made but an outward impression upon them, and reached not within, nor to any thorough change, so that they were but the more hopelessly spoiled through the means which God used for their amendment. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *Unturned cakes* :—“Ephraim is a cake not turned”; that is, overdone on one side, and undone on the other. Excellent and apt symbol of much which we now see all about us !

I. ORTHODOXY WITHOUT LIFE. It is the most serious temptation to which Christians are exposed to substitute creed for conduct. If one is sensibly weak in his spirituality, he will try to make up for it by redoubled emphasis laid upon his orthodoxy. It is as though a soldier should plant his flag upon a high position, and then go to sleep under its folds, trusting to his standard to win the battle, instead of to his own vigilant and energetic fighting. Creeds are the flags of the Church—very necessary as symbols and summaries of faith, but worthless as a substitute for Christian living. When I see a Christian growing more and more zealous for every punctilio of his creed, while he is growing more and more selfish and worldly in his life, I say he is going forward by the wind, and going backward by the tide ; when I see a Christian very unctuous in his prayers and exhortations in the Church, and very bitter and harsh in his conduct in the family, I say he is going forward by the wind and going backward by the tide. There is a constant need that we re-adjust our conduct to our creeds, not that we should believe less, but that we should live more. To avoid inconstancy, some people contract their belief to the size of the life, as a tailor takes in the seams of a coat which is too large, in order to make it fit the wearer. This is a bad method. Most of the heresies and false doctrines which have sprung up in the Church have resulted from the fitting over of theology to conform to a shrunken spirituality.

II. PIETY WITHOUT PRINCIPLE. It is a fearful proof of the deceitfulness of sin, that one may be at the same time very zealous for God and very dishonest towards men, lifting up hands of prayer and exhortation on Sundays and stretching out hands of fraud and peculation on week-days.

III. MORALITY WITHOUT RELIGION. It is a saying very hard to be received that morality and holiness are entirely different qualities. Morality is the religion of the natural man ; holiness is the religion of the renewed man. The one grows on the stock of Adam ; the other grows on the stock of Christ. Morality, even at its highest pitch, is not holiness ; for holiness is something of God, wherever found, like the sunbeams which inhere in the sun and are inseparable from it, even while resting on the earth. Honesty, sobriety, purity,—these are the highest qualities of morality ; and noble qualities they are. But love to God, communion with God, consecration to God,—these are the attributes of true religion. Let us look to it that our cake is evenly done ; that our orthodoxy has life as well as soundness ; that our piety has principle, honest and square and straightforward, as well as unction ; that our morality has holiness as well as uprightness. (*J. A. Gordon, D.D.*)

Sad aspects of character :—

I. WRONG COMPANIONSHIP. What is a wrong mixing with people ? Not intermixture in marriages. Not intercourse in business. Not associating with men for spiritual usefulness. It is doing as the Ten Tribes did, mixing with others for worldly advantage and unholy gratification. It is said that Pythagoras, before he admitted any one to his school, inquired who were his intimates, justly concluding that they who could choose immoral companions would not be much profited by his instructions.

II. MORAL WORTHLESSNESS. Ephraim had become as useless, in a spiritual sense, as a half-baked cake. It no longer fulfilled its Divine mission, maintaining and promoting the worship of the one true and living God. Usefulness is the grand purpose of our being. The man who does not make the world better than he found it, must be accursed.

III. SOCIAL DESPOILMENT. “Strangers devoured his strength.” How many souls lose their strength under the influence in which they mingle ! Their intellectual power, social sympathies, moral sensibilities got used up, and they become the mere creatures of circles and circumstances.

IV. UNCONSCIOUS DECAY. Moral strength goes so slowly from men that they are often not conscious of its loss until they are reduced to the utmost prostration. Look at these aspects of character, and learn practical wisdom. Form no friendship with sinners. Avoid a worthless life. Allow not

the social influences of your sphere to steal away your strength, to eat up your manhood. Do not think that decay cannot be working in you merely because you are unconscious of it. (*Homilist.*) *The evil of a one-sided character*.—The Sierra Nevada Mountains condense the cloudy moisture upon their slopes, and leave the plains beyond them arid deserts. So some great passion or ambition absorbs into itself all the force of the soul, and leaves us without any energy or inclination for other and equally important things. This will account for the moral sterility of many of us. Says Cicero to a young man: "Hold off from sensuality or soon you will be unable to think of anything else." Vicious thinking seems to rot the tissue of the brain itself. It is so also with less degrading traits of disposition. Thus the passion for money-getting dries out from the soul the more gracious impulse of helpfulness toward others and even the desire for self-culture. Under the spell of greed a man possessed of really brilliant talents becomes content to be a mere "grind" in the counting-house or factory. Similarly, the passion for repute prevents many from obtaining that celebrity which their natural talents might otherwise readily win for them; their souls are so intent on listening for outer applause that they do not concentrate their attention upon the work that is to win the reward. Scores of literary reputations are thus annually wrecked through over-haste in the making. (*J. M. Ludlow, D.D.*)

Ver. 9. *Grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not.*—*Neglected warnings*.—I. GREY HAIRS ARE A SIGN OF DECAY. God has for wise purposes given distinctive features to the different periods of human life, from the cradle onwards to the grave. Human life between the ages of forty and fifty is a sort of tableland. Growth has ceased, but decay has not begun. After that time decay begins. In this text grey hairs are not associated either with parental honours, or with the ripe wisdom of age, or with the piety of the venerable Simeon. They are here but the tokens of decay, marks of age, the premonitory symptoms of dissolution. The truth it announces is, that men may live in ignorance and act in disregard of signs that should warn and alarm them. II. THIS APPEARS IN THE HISTORY OF STATES. The words were first spoken of the kingdom of Israel. In the oppression of the poor and the sighing of the needy, in the corruption of morals and the decline of true religion, the prophet saw the signs of his country's decay—these the grey hairs that were here and there upon them, which they knew not. Nor is that uncommon. III. THE TEXT APPLIES TO THE FALSE SECURITY OF SINNERS. Be our profession what it may, if we have habits of sin—these are the grey hairs that, unless grace convert and mercy pardon, foretell our doom. Thick as those grey hairs on the head of age, some men's lives are full of sin. They are going to hell as plainly as one whose form is bent and whose head is hoary is going down to his grave. IV. THIS APPEARS IN MEN'S INSENSIBILITY TO THE LAPSE AND LESSONS OF TIME. Our minds are formed to adapt themselves to the circumstances of advancing years. Indeed, we often glide down so gently as to be little disturbed with the premonitions of life's close. Men with furrows on their brow, and grey hairs on their head, often find it difficult to remember that they are old. Death seems to flee before us, like the horizon which we ever see, but never reach. Where then is the hope of those who have trusted to turning religious when they become old, and attending to the concerns of a better world when they have ceased to feel any interest in this? Death and a man, so runs the story, once made a bargain—the man stipulating, lest he might be taken unawares, that death should send him so many warnings before he came. Well, one day, years thereafter, to his great amazement, the king of terrors stood before him. He had broken the bargain, so said the man, who clung to life. Death, he alleged, had sent him no warnings. No warnings? His eyes were dim; his ears were dull; his gums were toothless; and sparse and thin were the hoar locks on his bent and palsied head; these, death's heralds, had come, not too late, yet all in vain. Amid warnings which were, however, unnoticed or despised, his salvation was neglected, and his soul lost. And every setting sun, every nodding hearse, every passing Sabbath, warn us that days of darkness come, and opportunities of salvation go. Time has but one lock of hair on his forehead. If we would seize time, we must seize him by the forelock. (*T. Guthrie, D.D.*) *Thoughts for autumn*.—If we come really to know and to think seriously upon the fact that there are grey hairs here and there upon us, and that they tell us in a very simple and truthful and straightforward way that not a little of our work is done, and that many of

our earthly days have passed from us, we cannot but ask ourselves, what then? We are not to sink towards nothingness by reason of feebleness increasing by the speeding years; we, if at least we have life in Christ, are not to sink gradually towards natural decay. If waning strength must sooner or later be ours here, if grey hairs here and there upon us tell us of the swift approaching drying up of the springs of natural activity, is there no prospect of any restoring power by which unfading and deathless bloom may yet be ours? Revelation declares to us those things which the speculations of earthly knowledge, or the guesses of human science, or even the certainties of human observation fail to supply us. Faith in the future; faith inspired and made intelligent by the teaching of God; faith in the unseen and eternal tells us that the future is real and truly abiding, and that it is only the extension, the carrying on or forward of our experience of the present. Time will pass on, our work will tell on us, whether we like it or not. If we will not listen to the teaching of the grey hairs, it may be so much the worse for us both in time and in eternity. We are now under a course of education. How to become fitted for another stage of life is the question of supreme interest now. If the passing seasons remind us that here we cannot abide for ever, our walk with God should be more constant than it is. (*W. M'Intosh Arthur, M.A.*)

Imperceptible change :—A grey hair? It is the signature of time. It is the beginning of the end. It is a ticket which entitles you to a seat amongst the elders. Yet you did not know of that grey hair. This is the point to keep in view. We are all undergoing imperceptible change. What is true of grey hairs is true of many other changes in human life. To what practical uses can we turn the fact of man's imperceptible decay? I. DO NOT SUCH CHANGES REMIND US IN THE GENTLEST POSSIBLE MANNER THAT THIS IS NOT OUR REST? We go gradually down the steep, and as a general rule time is given for reflection. What indeed is all life, from the sunny laughter of childhood to the mellow solemnity of old age, but a succession of reminders that our days are few and our strength a bruised reed! II. OUGHT NOT THE IMPERCEPTIBLE CHANGES OF LIFE TO MODIFY THE ESTIMATE WHICH WE FORM OF OUR OWN POWERS? Other people could see the grey hairs upon Ephraim, but Ephraim himself could not see them. Application of this may be made—1. To ministers who are unconscious of the decline of their powers. 2. To men who are officially called upon to adapt old agencies to new circumstances. III. OUGHT NOT SUCH CHANGES TO SUGGEST SERIOUS INQUIRY AS TO THE POSSIBLE DECLINE OF SPIRITUAL POWER? It does not follow that physical decline necessitates spiritual decline. But—1. The spirit must resist the decay to which it is drawn by the flesh. 2. A beneficial moral influence is exerted by such resistance. The grey-haired Christian should be a tower of strength to the Christian cause. No beauty should exceed the beauty of his charitableness and hopefulness. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

The punishment of Ephraim :—I. THE SAD AND MISERABLE CONDITION OF EPHRAIM CONSIDERED SIMPLY IN ITSELF. 1. The good they are deprived of. "Their strength." God fits the punishment to the sin, in the old dispensation. What a sad and lamentable thing it is for men to spend their youth and the strength and prime of their time in the ways of sin. It is—1. Very disingenuous. 2. Very hazardous. 3. Very grievous and uncomfortable in the reflections upon it, when men shall call themselves to a serious reckoning and an account about it. Take the words in their notional signification, as setting forth the condition of Israel at this time. "Strangers" may mean strange gods, strange women, strange enemies. Strange gods include strange worship and strange doctrine. II. SYMPTOMS OF RUIN APPROACHING. 1. Unfruitfulness under powerful means and dispensations of grace. 2. Strange sins, which do abound and increase in it. 3. Plagues as forewarnings. The aggravation lay in Ephraim's senselessness under all this. This proceeded from the deceitfulness of sin and the blinding of Satan. All this teaches us two lessons—pity for others and caution for ourselves. (*T. Horton, D.D.*)

Signs of decay :—Two great unchanging, compensating laws are eternally at work in the universe—the law of growth or progress and the law of decay. They are compensating laws, because it is the function of the one to correct and balance the action of the other. When growth reaches its limit, then decay begins. This may be illustrated in the tides, the sunshine, the seasons, the trees. The process goes eternally on, growth and decay; a period of infancy and tenderness developing into full growth and maturity; these in turn giving way to decay and death. That which is going on in the world is going on in ourselves. As in our bodies there is going on every day a steady process of supply

and loss, so is it also in the longer day of a lifetime. Time does not stand still with any of us, though he seems to deal more gently with some than with others. But when we have reached middle life, we all begin to descend. This does not mean a sudden and total break-up. It is a gradual process, but there are not wanting signs to show us that it has begun. The commonest sign is the silvery streak, the grey hairs. There is something saddening about decay in any form. So this herald of the coming end, the grey hair, is often an unwelcome one. It is in the white heat of the furnace of affliction that the first grey hair often appears; and it may soothingly speak to us of the better life beyond the grave. There are some people who "never grow old." There are those who, however age may creep on, are always young in heart, whom the world has not been able to spoil. Then there are those of whom we should not say "they never grow old," but "they will not believe that they ever can grow old." The mere thought of life's end is a horror; with decay fast taking hold on them, they will not believe it, and indulge in a miserable burlesque of youthfulness. It was of such people that Hosea was speaking. He lived in gloomy times. National magnificence was dazzling; but never had national sin been so general and so abominable. Hosea lived ahead of his times. He saw the rocks ahead; but he could not persuade his countrymen to see them, or to believe that they were there. Hosea's prophecy is one long wail for the unhappy people whose day was over and they knew it not. What was true of Israel has been true of many kingdoms, greater and mightier than it. Did we see ourselves as others see us, we might even discern grey hairs here and there upon us. Is there no falling off in our commercial integrity? Is not the Bible dishonoured by a relentless and destructive criticism? Think of the moral plague-spots of licentious literature. These are "grey hairs here and there upon us." What are we to do? We cannot put the wrong right. This you can do. Never countenance what is wrong. Never consent to any lowering of the standard of Christian morality. Never sacrifice right to expediency. Never condescend to call things by wrong names. Sin is sin. (*J. B. C. Murphy*.)

Unconscious deterioration.—Sin in its worst forms was prevalent among the people. Their strength was consumed by their indulgence in kinds of wickedness which strangers had introduced among them; and everything betokened, to those who could read the signs aright, that they were rapidly hastening to national extinction. They were already in the old age of their history, and they knew it not. This unconsciousness of deterioration marks the distinction between the common backslider and the open repudiator of the faith. In ordinary backsliding the most dangerous element is that the man is largely unaware of the change that has come over him. We attempt to account for the fact that a man may have largely fallen away from Christian rectitude of heart and life without being aware of his defection. I. WE ARE ALL INCLINED TO LOOK MORE FAVOURABLY ON OURSELVES THAN ON OTHERS. This is especially true in spiritual matters. A man's self-love, or self-conceit, or self-security, prevents him from coming to an impartial decision, and he may be far gone in a course of backsliding before he takes note of the fact. Matthew Henry says, "Apostasy from God generally begins in the place of prayer." There we are set in the white light of God's own purity, and every spot in ourselves is revealed to us. We are afraid of such self-revelations. II. BACKSLIDING STEALS GRADUALLY UPON A MAN. If hair changed from raven blackness to snowy whiteness in a single night, we should be struck by the change. But because the grey hairs come one by one, the transformation is little noticed. Backsliding is a gradual motion; it is a sliding rather than a stepping. How may we counteract this tendency and discover our true position? We shall know where we are if we test ourselves by the Word of God, as that has been vindicated for us by the example and the Spirit of the Lord Jesus.

III. BACKSLIDING MAY BE ACCOUNTED FOR BY THE FACT THAT THE INDIVIDUALS ARE ABSORBED IN OTHER MATTERS TO SUCH AN EXTENT THAT THE STATE OF THE HEART IS FORGOTTEN. It may be thus with the successful merchant. This danger is to be obviated, either by curtailing the business, or by consecrating it as a whole to God. He who in his daily calling is consciously and deliberately seeking to do the best for his Lord, and is trying to serve Him in the store as really as in the closet, has most effectually "overcome the world." If, then, any one among us has to-day discovered his deterioration, let him not wait a single moment for restoration. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*)

Causes of declension in religion.—A nation has often exhibited every outward mark of prosperity, while the elements of decay had already begun their silent work, and were hastening forward the

period of its ruin. Illustrate by Rome, in the reign of Augustus. So with Ephraim. The land was wrapped in fatal security, and indulging visions of prosperity, which hindered them from seeing the decay, already visible to the eye of God and His prophets. A wise and skilful physician often discovers symptoms of disease, and even of approaching death, of which the patient himself may have no suspicion. So there may be already much spiritual declension; the evil heart of unbelief may have begun to depart from the living God, and yet the man may be unconscious of his peril. It has been said that "where a man hath real grace, it may be part of a dispensation towards him that he is suffered to decline. He walked carelessly; he was left to stumble and fall that he might be brought to feel his need of prayer, vigilance, and the help of almighty grace." The causes of declining religion are—I. AN INCREASING ASSOCIATION WITH THE WORLD. The people of Israel had fatally identified themselves with the sons and daughters of idolatry around them. The disciples of Jesus are not of the world; and to them He says, by His servant, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." The love of Christ burns purely and brightly in the heart, when Christ is all in all; but bring it into contact with the world, and gradually but surely it declines, until it becomes insensible. II. INCREASING ZEAL FOR PARTIAL VIEWS OF RELIGION. As bread exposed with one surface to the fire would feel the influence of the heat on that side, while the under portion was only partially acted upon, so was it with the divided heart of this people. Some acknowledgment of God was outwardly made, but His fear was not in their hearts. They were a nation made up of contradictions; always in one extreme or the other. Such partial views of religion are common among professors, and they will be invariably found to mark a declining state of heart. Partial views of religion lead to partial and reserved instead of entire and willing obedience. III. INATTENTION TO OUR SPIRITUAL CONDITION. Israel gave a double proof of this dangerous symptom. 1. By an external weakness, which, however hidden from others, might have been observable by themselves. 2. Ephraim also exhibited external manifestations of weakness, which all around might see, though they were hidden from his own knowledge. Do our exertions to promote the Divine glory relax and become faint? This is a sign which we may disregard, but which others well understand, and they place it as it ought to be placed, to the account of declining religion. (*R. P. Buddicom, M.A.*) *Unconscious decay*.—In comparing physical and spiritual decay, attention is confined to the common element of unconsciousness. The decline of the body, and the decline of the soul are alike in this, that both may proceed imperceptibly. Unawares, a man grows older, and, unawares, too, a man may grow worse. Notice the representation of true soul-prosperity. It is a state of perpetual youth. It should be characterised by incessant development, untiring energy, and ever-brightening hope. Whatsoever be the case with nature, grace should know no old age. Old age may crown the life that precedes it with the calm and the fruitage of a mellow autumn. The text shows the believer's ideal, but it also reminds of the possibility of falling short of it; and it tells us of the real source of danger. That consists in association with the world—contact with its ungodly practices, fellowship with its ungodly men. In communion with God lies the well-spring of exhaustless refreshment, of tireless and immortal youth. The unconsciousness that accompanies spiritual decay is illustrated by the ignorance so often exhibited as regards the advances and infirmities of bodily old age. As with the decays of nature, so with the decays of grace. The waste goes on; the chill steals round; the corroding process makes sure and certain headway; faithlessness in duty, indulgences in sin, conformity to the world, may be making their havocs in the soul, and printing their tokens in the life. And all the time, while God is grieved, the man himself lives in complete unconsciousness of his state. Content with its weakness, accepting its humiliations, and heedless of its ultimate issue. I. AS TO THE EVIDENCES OF IGNORANCE CONCERNING SPIRITUAL DECLINE. 1. It proves itself by the views which the backslider often entertains as to others. Men are far more alive to the ravages of time in their friends than in themselves. And so men who are themselves inconsistent very frankly and pointedly remark on the alterations they perceive in others. Men lay their fingers so readily on those faults of a brother which society, by common consent, has set down as their own. In laying charges at other men's doors, men too often lay them at their own. The man is ignorant of his own condition, and because ignorant, he is at peace. 2. It is proved by the back-

slider's views of sin. As men decline in years, it is not infrequently the case that they show their unwillingness to believe the fact by the notions they hold as to what old age really is. The boundary line is always receding; as they move, it moves, always away from them and always ahead. So in the case of spiritual decline. What would once have been regarded as a symptom, is looked at as a symptom no longer, while the decay it betokens is actually going on. Men thus learn to palliate omissions of duty, excuse indulgences in sin, and accustom their consciences with acts which at one time they would have shrunk from. 3. It is proved by the backslider's views as to circumstances. It is often the tendency of the old to complain; and their discontent is directed against the particular surroundings where their lot for the time being is cast. They blame the rigours of the weather, the fastenings of the house, the texture of their garments, for the feelings which distress them. But the true reason is that they themselves are feebler; the quantity of life in them has gone down. It is so with the decays of the soul. Some men are constantly telling us that religious character and religious agencies around them have changed for the worse. According to them, everything is against them in the situation they occupy; they have neither the Christian fellowship that will suit them, nor the Christian ministry that will profit. But the fault is nearer home. It is this, the eye that discerns things is dim. 4. It is proved by men's views of truth and duty. Old age painfully betrays its unconsciousness by tricking itself out in the dress and aping the manners of a youth-time that has long gone by. And does not the ignorance of the backslider betray itself in the same self-willed way? Men in whom the paralysis of a religious decay has begun, continue to use the language, and engage in the services, and involve themselves in the responsibilities that are proper only to those who are in possession of grace,—strong with the strength and bright with the bloom of a youth which their God maintains. II. THE CAUSES OF THIS UNCONSCIOUS DECAY.

1. This spiritual deterioration is usually so very gradual. If the infirmities of old age leapt forth at a spring, the reality would be plain and undeniable enough. So with the soul. The lapse of strength is so gradual, the progress of decay is so subtle and so slow. Spiritual decline is like physical decline. 2. While the process is gradual, it is sometimes general, affecting others than ourselves. One reason why so many are unconscious of the havoc of old age lies in this, that their companions are getting old round about them. In the spiritual sphere, let a man surround himself with the society of the irreligious and the worldly, let him live where, on every side of him, he sees habits of life and standards of thought that are all but the counterparts of his own; is it so strange that he should be unconscious of his state? It is just such society a backslider seeks, to the silencing of his better nature, and the confirmation of his own self-deception. There is no human standard he can judge by, no human contrast that can rouse him. 3. As the unconsciousness of old age is always associated with the wish to believe one's self young, so the unconsciousness of spiritual decay is produced by the desire to believe one's self prosperous. With the man who tries to minimise his shortcomings, and persuade himself that his life and his creed are in harmony, self-examination is neglected, the plain speaking of faithful friends is resented, the home-thrusts of a Gospel ministry are parried, the testimony of the revealing Word is avoided. All the time the decay is going on. The man is *unfeeling* and in danger of becoming *past feeling*. What of ourselves, brethren?

(W. A. Gray.) *The blindness of a people to their own degeneracy*:—Gray hairs on Ephraim denoted his moral degeneracy, or spiritual declension. He is described in this chapter as very immoral, corrupt, and profligate. But he was so stupid in his degenerate and languishing state that he took no notice of the visible and mortal symptoms upon him. When a degenerate people are blind to the marks of their degeneracy, they are in a dangerous condition. I. WHEN DO A PEOPLE BEAR MARKS OF MORAL DEGENERACY? 1. When they neglect the religious duties which they once practised. The children of Israel were once a very religious people. After a while they began to degenerate; forsook the house and worship of God, cast His laws behind their backs, and did what was right in their own eyes. They became formal, insincere, and hypocritical. In the time of Hosea they were covered with grey hairs, the sad marks of religious degeneracy. 2. When they dislike, oppose, and reject the plain and important doctrines of true religion, which they once professed to love and believe. A people generally become corrupt in practice before they become corrupt in principle. God's people soon became unsteadfast in their covenant, and as corrupt in sentiment

as they had been in practice. They took up with the doctrines and delusions of the grossest idolaters. 3. When they run into such irreligious and vicious practices, as they once hated and avoided. This was the case of Israel in the days of their declension. They fell into every species of vice and dissipation. A sure sign of degeneracy. 4. When they justify themselves and others in the evil courses which they once condemned. When Israel became degenerate, they justified unholiness, unscriptural, and ungodly conduct in themselves and others. A people often become very wicked when they presume to justify one another in their wickedness. This is one of the most visible and striking signs of a general and gross degeneracy. II. WHY ARE A DEGENERATE PEOPLE SO BLIND TO THE VISIBLE MARKS OF THEIR DEGENERACY? 1. Because they have degenerated gradually. This the metaphor of the text intimates. They neglect one religious duty, then another and another, until they neglect them all. They countenance and justify one sinful course after another, and finally justify all evil and condemn all good. 2. Moral degeneracy is of a blinding nature. It flows from a corrupt heart, which blinds reason and conscience. 3. They choose to be blind, because they are loath to see their own criminality. When they review their past, they feel self-reproach and self-condemnation: so they avoid reviewing. They hold fast deceit and refuse to return. III. THEIR VOLUNTARY AND CRIMINAL BLINDNESS TO THEIR DEGENERACY EXPOSES THEM TO PECULIAR DANGER. 1. It prevents them from using the proper means of reformation. So long as people think they are pursuing a right course, they will have no thought or desire of reforming. A great politician says, "It was never known that any degenerate nation ever reformed themselves." If reformed, it was owing to some foreign superior power. This is as true of religion as of civil government. 2. It disposes them to resist all means that are used to reform them. Such persons may fear that God will say, Let them alone, and use no more means with them. Improvement—(1) A people may degenerate in religion while they are making great progress in other respects. Success in their secular concerns naturally tends to make them worldly-minded. They ardently desire temporal prosperity, and prefer it to religious attainments and growth in grace. (2) It is a favour to a degenerate people to have the marks of their degeneracy plainly pointed out. For though they are so visible, yet they are willingly blind to them. The more unwilling they are to see the disagreeable marks of their degeneracy, the more necessary it is that they should be made, if possible, to see them; for without the sight of them, God Himself cannot reform them. (3) Have you not degenerated in respect to the religious duties which you once practised? (4) Manifestly the people referred to in the text were in a very dangerous state. (5) There is peculiar need of special Divine influence to revive the languishing state of religion, over which we may have to mourn. (6) A time of religious declension is a time for all the sincere, faithful friends of God to seek unto Him for His gracious, renewing, sanctifying, and quickening influences. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *Grey hairs*:—The wise man has said, "A hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness." It is so, as a symbol of honoured age, bringing deserved veneration; a type of wisdom; a sign of long and faithful service to God and man; and is thus deserving of honour; while the fresh young heart is always moving with its own enthusiasm, though sometimes fettered by increasing infirmities. Over such a grey head no one has need to mourn. Why then does Hosea speak in these terms of Ephraim? Because, as drivelling dotage and decrepitude are the result and penal consequence of a misspent life, and as old age to such is "the sere and yellow leaf," so its near approach is to be dreaded and shrunk from. Ephraim's was an ungodly, immoral, irreligious dotage. "Grey hairs" is simply a typical phrase setting forth the loss of the promise of early youth, through a prodigal disregard of Divine favour and support. I. THE TWOFOLD SIGN OF RELIGIOUS DECLENSION. "Grey hairs," and ignorance of their existence. The symptoms by which it is manifested. 1. Decline of interest in Divine things. When a man's enthusiasm cools down, and he forgets the freshness and vigour of his spiritual youth, he exhibits the grey hairs—the first streaks of silver whiteness which betoken spiritual decrepitude. True, there are many godly Christians who, marking that their interest is not so deep and fresh as in the past, are under a constant cloud of dread. Now this concern is not a symptom of real decline, but of intensified and increased anxiety and desire for the things an interest in which we fear to lose. It is not the issuing forth of the verdict of conscience; but such dissatisfaction is similar to that of the apostle Paul: "Not as though I had already attained," &c. Such concern is

salutary and preservative—a sign of watchfulness and vigour, and it will succeed in averting the evil it dreads. It is a great blessing when a Christian's conscience is sensitive and active. But what I mean is, that listless indifference to the blessings of Christian privileges, that indolent abstinence from the performance of Christian duty which marks the conduct of so many in our churches. 2. Too great a love of worldliness. "Ah!" say you, "there you are again! 'Worldliness!' just one of the counters you ministers play with, words which mean anything or nothing." Well, so long as the New Testament stands it will be the duty of every minister of Christ to repeat these words: "Love not the world, neither the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." It is all very well to reply "this was said of the heathen world, but times are different now." Talk about pagan Rome! What about London? What about Oxford? Are our streets so pure that we can dispense with the exhortation, "Love not the world," &c.? There may be, *e.g.*, too much absorption in permissible things. No man has a right to forbid us to devote a due portion of our time to lawful business; but it is so easy for a man, when he at first becomes lawfully absorbed, to glide insensibly into too much absorption. I value no man's manhood who is not anxious about his worldly position and reputation; but when this becomes all in all; or when he longs for the condiments and stimulants of worldly pleasure; when a man yawns and looks about him and feels there's nothing in life worth living for; when Christianity does not satisfy his desires, and so he goes in search of objects which gradually usurp the position of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that the whilom Christian begins by giving undue prominence to worldly things and ends by substituting them for the Divine; then let him beware—"Grey hairs are here and there upon him," though perhaps he knows it not. 3. Loss of power: for Christian work and for spiritual conflict. You ask a man to undertake some Christian duty, and he says he cannot do it. He means it, and it is true! for it is, alas! very possible for a Christian man to lose not only inclination, but power. Watch that man, and as time goes on his powerlessness is more and more evident, till he becomes a mere creature of circumstances, a waif on the current, a piece of thistle-down, the sport of contrary winds: instead of placing his heel on the neck of his lusts. Your indisposition and incapacity for work have this awful other side: you are unable to resist the power of temptation. You can do nothing for God, and have no power to strive against evil. Beware of loss of energy: your enfeebled state, the result of "wasted substance" is a sure sign that "grey hairs are here and there upon you." II. ITS CAUSES. 1. Indolence: this always ends in inability. 1. First and foremost the Christian has to cultivate the grace of industry. With activity and watchful earnestness, there is no fear of inability and decrepitude. 2. Neglect of wholesome spiritual food—God's appointed ordinances and means of grace. 3. Unchristian society. "Strangers have devoured his strength." Descending to the level of such society makes us feel we are fit for no higher, and disinclines us for the work of God. And with it all, the saddest thing is, "he knoweth not." "Because thou sayest, . . . and knowest not," &c. (Rev. iii.). Awful ignorance, accompanied by a senile conceit. Haven't looked in the glass of God's Word. III. THE CURE. Not a mere nostrum. You will never get rid of the deep-running evil by cleansing the surface of the stream. 1. Through self-examination. Let us be candid with ourselves. The first result may be panic and shivering dread; but don't be afraid of the mirror: take it in your hand on bended knees. There must be fair dealing with conscience: let it speak out! If it condemns, well and good! Better to know now than through all eternity what fools we have been. Know the best, or know the worst. Be thankful to God if the best be; be thankful, too, if the worst leads you to return to Him with broken heart. A hearty, humbling sense of sin means sanctification and salvation. 2. Humble application to the Great Physician. He has had many such cases. Poor David became exceedingly grey-headed, but under the bracing remedies of the Great Physician he went forth once more the man after God's own heart. (*J. Dunn.*) *Grey-haired unawares*:—Among the reminders and remonstrances which it was the mission of the prophet, the son of Beer, in the days of Ahaz and Hezekiah, to deliver to Ephraim, there was this significant passage, expressive of a reckless people's unconscious decline, whose lapses were taken account of on high, and Ephraim knew it not—"Yea, grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not." Who, asks Hartley Coleridge, ever saw their first grey hairs, or marked the crow feet at the angle of the eyes, without a sigh or a tear, a

momentaneous self-abasement, a sudden sinking of the soul, a thought that youth is fled for ever? "None but the blessed few that, having dedicated the spring of their life to heaven, behold in the shedding of their vernal blossoms a promise that the season of immortal fruit is near." Grey hairs, in an advancing stage of the plural number, may be here and there upon us before we know of it. But the actual discovery of the first is a bit of an epoch in one's life; and if one exclaims, Eureka! it is hardly in the most jubilant of tones, or the most exultant of tempers. It is among the graver of his recreations that a clerical essayist pictures to himself, man or woman, thoughtful, earnest, and pious, sitting down and musing at the sight of the first grey hairs. Here is the slight shadow, he puts it, of "a certain great event which is to come"; the earliest touch of a chill hand that must prevail at length. Here is manifest decay; we have begun to die. (*Francis Jacob, B.A.*)

Signs of spiritual declension :—We note such as may be found in the individual life. I. SOME OF THE SIGNS OF SPIRITUAL DECAY. They are not numerous and obtrusive, betokening one ripe for the grave, but the grey hairs are "here and there," requiring some attention ere we are aware of them. 1. There is the growth of the critical temper. There is a critical temper which is no sign of health. It is a ready fault-finding. Hosea accuses the people of outspoken and defiant unbelief; "he stretched out his hand with scorners." That was the ending and consummation of apostasy; but the beginning was the hinted dislike, the cool acquiescence, the captious criticism, the inclination to see spots in the sun, to pick holes in sacred things. The habit of criticism grows as faith declines. 2. An abatement of feeling. A sincere, consecrated soul is full of feeling, emotion, intensity. It regards the good and beautiful with enthusiasm, the evil and ugly with abhorrence. But it is possible for the most intense Christian soul to lose its sensibility and to become callous. And such a process of hardening may be very gradual. There is a creeping moral paralysis. 3. A relaxed conscience. Hosea saw in Ephraim luxury, profligacy, license, idolatry—things they had learned from the pagan. In this direction we too must watch for signs of degeneration. There may be no overt act of iniquity whilst the process of deterioration is still going on. We hear it said of a Christian man, "he is not as particular as he used to be." That often means that "grey hairs" are seen upon them. Any practical antinomianism is a sure sign of spiritual decay. 4. An increased leaning to the worldly side of life. The world grows upon us, its interests, its friendships, its pleasures. Men choke the higher life with the lust of gold, they strangle it with silken cords of fashion and pleasure; and the gold that chokes is taken in small doses, the cord that strangles is woven a thread at a time. Grey hairs have a tendency to multiply quickly, and secret venial weaknesses may precipitate flagrant backsliding. II. WE MAY BE QUITE UNCONSCIOUS OF THE MISCHIEF. The complaint, "he knoweth it not," is repeated with an air of surprise. Men are often unconscious of the decay of their physical powers and mental faculties. It is the same with men morally and spiritually—conscience, faith, feeling, hope, and aspiration decline, and yet they go on as confidently as ever. How do men resist the teaching of the grey hairs? 1. They make light of them. It is quite a humorous event, those first grey hairs. But for all the merriment it is a pathetic signal. So men talk away and smile away the first signs of spiritual declension. 2. They pull out the grey hairs; resolutely refusing to look at the fact of growing weakness and age. There is a corresponding mood to this in the spiritual life. Whenever disquieting signs appear, we absolutely decline to give them a place in our thoughts. 3. Sometimes the grey hairs are hidden. People are very clever in hiding the warning hints of nature. So we have ingenious ways of hiding from ourselves and passing over the ominous signs of a weakened faith, an impaired conscience, a declining spirituality, a less strenuous Christian life. We enlarge upon our excelling good, instead of noting the exceptional and unusual evil which, spreading, may spoil all. 4. Perhaps we give the grey hairs another colour. We are masters in these days of capillary chromatrics. The tokens of decay are turned into things of beauty and pride. And we often give to the signs of spiritual decay another colour. We do not call our carping criticism of revelation unbelief; we dub it "an open mind." We do not brand our coolness and insensibility as indifference; we know it as "the philosophic mind." We do not call our carnal compliances walking after the flesh; we are getting rid of puritanism. Christian men transfigure the very signs of their backsliding, and glory in the things which ought to fill them with concern. (*W. L. Watkinson.*)

The unobserved grey hairs :—Take the text—I. LITERALLY. 1. Grey hairs excite our

admiration. Beautiful arrangement of Providence—that old age should be spent in sitting still and taking life easily. The first years of a man's life are spent in weakness. Why? That he may prepare himself—physically, mentally, morally, and spiritually—for the life that lies before him. So also the last years. Age resembles childhood as sunset resembles sunrise. 2. Grey hairs are matter for gratitude. Life is like a table-land: many die in descending the slope from birth to the age of thirty; many more in walking along the level plain from thirty to fifty: few live to descend the slope on the other side. 3. Grey hairs are matter for serious contemplation. "It is an awful pity," said Sir Thomas Smith, Queen Elizabeth's Secretary of State, "that so few men know for what purpose they came into the world until they are ready to go out of it." 4. Grey hairs are matter for searching of heart. Opportunities wasted; the final opportunity almost gone.

II. FIGURATIVELY. The folly of neglecting life's warnings. 1. We ought not to need special warnings. (1) Reason speaks to us. We know that as surely as night comes after day and autumn follows summer, so death follows life and eternity time. (2) Observation and experience speak to us. The noise of weeping is in palace and hovel: old and young, good and evil, fair and frail go in steady procession to the grave. (3) Revelation warns us that it is appointed unto man once to die, &c. 2. Yet the gradualness of life's transitions renders these special messengers acceptable. And experience proves them necessary. "Our clock," says Carlyle, "strikes when there is a change from hour to hour; but no hammer in the horologue of time peals through the universe when there is a change from era to era." The transitions of our lives from one stage to the next are wrought in similar silence. They are hardly perceptible. And yet—to-day, to-morrow, and the next day, and in all its vivid reality, the sea of glass and the eternal shore will burst upon us. In view of the gradualness of this progress to eternity, and the certainty of our destiny, we may be grateful for the reminder of grey hairs. 3. The angels of God come to us with silent footsteps. Grey hairs are "the first faint streaks of the morning"; but then, what will that morning mean to us? III. SPIRITUALLY. A neglected Bible, listlessness in prayer, coldness towards the Master, indifference towards sin, the shunning of Christian companionships, carelessness as to attendance at the house of God, callousness as to the eternal welfare of others,—these are grey hairs that appear upon us, but we neither notice them, nor the fearful declension of which they tell. One day I met a man of eighty. I said: "My friend, will you not trust the Saviour?" "No, no," he answered; "I'm too old, too old!" The very next day I met a youth of sixteen. "My friend," I said again, "will you not trust the Saviour?" "No, no," he answered; "I'm too young, too young!" And betwixt that "too old" and that "too young" we all go dancing to our everlasting doom. What a strain on the mercy of God! (*F. W. Borcham*). *Hoariness was upon man*:—Some understand by this that the Israelites were not improved by long succession of years, by advance of age. But the prophet rather expresses the greatness of their calamities, when he says, "hoariness was sprinkled over him." When any one is grievously pained and afflicted, he becomes hoary through the very pressure of evils. Israel had been visited with so many evils that he was worn out, as it were, with old age; the prophet intimates that the diseases which prevailed among the people of Israel were incurable, for they could by no remedies be brought to repentance. (*John Calvin*.)

Ver. 10. They do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek Him for this.—Our sin:—I. THE DUTY OF SEEKING GOD. In the Scriptures this stands for the whole of religion. Religion is thus substantially expressed for two reasons—because it is with God that we have principally to do. Our principal dependence is upon Him; our principal expectations are from Him; our principal connections are with Him. And because, before we can have anything to do with Him, we must find Him. Morally and spiritually considered, we are away from God, and God is away from us. We have left Him criminally, and He has left us penally. Our first concern, therefore, is to find God, and for this purpose we are to seek after Him. See four purposes for which we are to seek God, and which enter essentially into genuine religion. 1. We are to seek to know Him. Here genuine religion begins. 2. We must seek to enjoy Him, and in order to this we must be reconciled. Till His anger is turned away from us, He cannot comfort us. 3. We are to seek to serve Him. He is our Master to obey and to wait upon. 4. We must seek to resemble Him. It is the essence of religion, to

be like Him whom we worship. You cannot resemble His natural perfections; you can His moral perfections. II. **THE NEGLECT OF THIS DUTY.** "They do not seek the Lord their God." Are there no exceptions? Yes, God always has His remnant. But the language of Scripture is awful upon this subject. Its language implies generality, if it does not imply universality. Glance at five classes of delinquents. 1. Infidels. Who deny, at least, the moral providence and government of God, and also a future state. 2. The profligate. These hide not their sin as Sodom, but publish it like unto Gomorrah. 3. The careless. Who are indifferent to everything of a religious nature. 4. Formalists. Who have a name that they live, but are dead. 5. Partial seekers. Whose goodness is like the morning cloud. Not always insincere at the time. Their religion is dependent upon external excitements. This is enough to refute the lies you find in all our churchyards, where every tombstone and every headstone tells you that all the parish has gone to heaven, or is going there. III. **THE AGGRAVATION OF THIS NEGLECT.** "They seek not the Lord their God for all this." All what? How various and numerous are the means which God is providing, and which He perpetually employs as the prevention of sin and the excitements to holiness; or to induce men to seek the Lord their God. What are they? Profusion of benefits in nature, providence, and grace. The Scriptures, which men have in their own hand, and in their own tongue. Sending His ministers, so that men can hear the words of eternal life. The power of conscience. The various addresses, reproofs, admonitions, encouragements, derived from their various connections, father, mother, &c. Afflictions. Public calamities. The Jews were threatened with four very sore judgments. 1. From wild and noisome beasts. 2. From war. 3. From famine. 4. Pestilence. Here we recently have awfully resembled them. The sermon was preached on the day of national humiliation on account of the cholera. But repentance is never produced by unmixed terror. Terror may drive, but goodness alone leads to repentance. You are not to yield entirely to the seducements of croaking and brooding. Close with a reflection, turning on the goodness of God and depravity of man. The goodness of God, who sees all sins, and yet forbears. The depravity of man, in that the beneficiaries are constantly neglecting and opposing their kind Benefactor. How the goodness of God and the depravity of man have been displayed in our country. Apply to individuals. Individualise you in your gratitude, your penitence, your danger, and your hope. (*William Jay.*) *Will not be humbled*:—1. God expects we should turn upon affliction. 2. Afflictions, if not sanctified, will never turn the heart. 3. It is a great aggravation of men's sins not to turn under afflictions. 4. Though afflictions may work repentance, yet such repentance is seldom true; it will not often sustain the trial. 5. True repentance is rather a seeking of God's face than our own ease from afflictions. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*)

Ver. 11. **Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart.**—*A silly dove*:—The race of Ephraim is not extinct. Men are to this day very much like what they were in the days of the prophets. I. **A SAINTLY SIMILITUDE.** "Ephraim is like a dove." The dove is the figure constantly chosen to set forth the beauty of holiness, the believer, the Church, and the Holy Spirit. In all congregations there are those who are like doves, but not Christ's doves. You cannot tell them from genuine believers. They are quite harmless. They do no mischief to others in their lives. They are amiable, admirable. They are like doves for loving good company. They have the same meekness, apparently, as distinguishes the dove. They are not sceptics: they frequent the house of God, behave in a seemly manner, and with meekness receive the Word. The dove is a cleanly feeder, and we have many who get as far as that. They have come to know the doctrines of the Gospel. But, while they have an orthodox head, they have a heterodox heart. As a dove is molested by all sorts of birds of prey, so these persons do, for a time, share the lot which befalls the people of God. II. **A SECRET DISTINCTION.** "A dove without heart." This implies a lack of understanding. The dove knows but little, and is easily snared. It does not seem to possess the wits and senses of some others of the feathered tribe. So there are many who have no real knowledge of the truth. They rest in the letter, and think that is enough. They also lack a decided heart, and a bold heart, and a powerless heart. III. **A SEVERE DESCRIPTION.** "A silly dove." There may be some sort of dignity in being a fool, but to be silly—to attract no attention

except ridicule—is so utterly bad, that I do not know how a more sarcastic name could be applied. **IV. A SERIOUS CONSIDERATION.** It is no rare thing to find the attendant of the sanctuary an unbeliever. Be not deceived; the Gospel will harden such people as now are. Some of the grossest men were once credulous and apparently meek-hearted hearers of the Word, but they sat under the preaching of the Gospel till they grew ripe enough to deny God and curse Him. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Simplicity may be unworthy*:—The prophet blames Israel for foolish credulity, and compares them to a dove, for they had invited the Egyptians and sent to Assyria for help. Simplicity is indeed a commendable virtue when joined to prudence. But as everything reasonable and judicious in men is turned into wickedness, when there is no integrity; so when men are too credulous and void of all judgment and reason, it is then mere folly. And this folly is opposed to the knowledge which God had offered Israel in His law. It was not that they sinned through ignorance, but that they were destitute of all judgment. Men are not to be excused by the pretext of simplicity, for the prophet condemns this weakness in the Israelites. We ought to attend to the rule of Christ, “to be innocent as doves, yet to be prudent as serpents.” When we despise the Word and neglect the Spirit of God, and follow our vagrant imaginations, we despise and quench the light of the Word, and we also wilfully perish, when the Lord would save us. (*John Calvin.*) *The silliness of sin*:—When pursued by a bird of prey the dove trusts to the rapidity of its flight, instead of at once throwing itself into the nearest recess, where the interference of man, or the narrowness of the place might render it secure from molestation. So Ephraim, instead of trusting God, rested his hope of defence on negotiations with Assyria or Egypt. What do naturalists say about the dove? **I. IT IS TOO SILLY TO DEFEND ITS OWN.** Most creatures will stand by their young and defend them to the last; but the dove allows them to be captured without resistance. Ephraim had sunk into this state: his most distinguished blessings were going from him, and he did not struggle to retain them. The sinner will not battle with the devil to defend his own—his force of thought—his sensibility of conscience—his freedom of will—his purity of love—he allows these precious things to be taken from him without a struggle. **II. IT IS TOO SILLY TO FEEL ITS LOSS.** The dove will lose its nest, and not feel it. Men under the influence of sin do not feel their loss. Whatever is taken from them, they still cling to earthly things. **III. IT IS TOO SILLY TO ESCAPE DANGER** (Prov. vii. 23). So sinners will not flee to the right place of safety. They are too silly to be calm under trial. The dove has not the courage to stay in the dove-house when frightened, it flutters and hovers round, and so exposes itself to new and greater dangers. So Ephraim hurried forth in quest of foreign help, and was the more exposed to calamities and ruin. And it is thus with souls under the influence of sin. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 12. I will spread My net upon them; I will bring them down as the fowls of the heaven.—*The fowler of retribution*:—Trans. “As they go, I spread My net over them, I bring them down as fowls of the heavens.” As they go to Egypt or Asshur, seeking help in their difficulties. Here the work of retribution is spoken of as the work of the fowler. It includes two things. **I. ENTRAPMENT.** The retributive providence of God employed the Assyrians as a net, which so ensnared the Israelites that they could not escape. How often in the history of the world is this retributive entrapment witnessed! Illustrate—Joseph’s brethren. Crucifixion of Christ. Luther at Watzburg. Bunyan at Bedford. The net that entangled sinners is not manufactured in heaven, it is made on earth, made by themselves. **II. ABASEMENT.** However high up they may tower in their ambitious work, retribution has missiles to bring them down. There are men who, in their worldly prosperity, pride, and ambition, soar like the eagles high up in heaven above all the rest. An ancient philosopher, being asked what Jupiter does in the highest heaven, replied, “He pulls down the haughty, and exalts the humble.” (*Homilist.*) *Self-dependence humiliated*:—The dove brought down from its almost viewless height, fluttering weakly, helplessly, and hopelessly under those same meshes, is a picture of the self-dependent spirit humiliated, overwhelmed by inevitable evils, against which it impotently struggles, from which it seems to see its escape, but by which it is held as fast as if it lay motionless in iron. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*)

Ver. 14. They have not cried unto Me with their heart, when they howled upon

their beds.—*Death-bed repentance*.—When called to encounter dangers, every possible precaution should be taken beforehand. Seasons of peril and distress often wring from the most hardened expressions of sorrow and remorse. These are to be attributed, for the most part, to the alarming perplexity in which they are involved, and differ widely from the heart-felt supplications of the humble and contrite. The procrastinating sinner cannot delude the all-seeing God by his selfish attempt to palm off these shrieks of a terrified soul for the sincere sorrow of the penitent. There are few persons so hardened in guilt as not to promise themselves some season of amendment; and, strange as it may appear, a death-bed repentance is that upon which they rely. 1. The grand motive which should influence the sinner in turning to God is love to the kind and gracious Father, who has so long borne with his waywardness, and a sincere desire to promote His glory. 2. A reliance on a death-bed repentance implies a doubt of the declarations of the Bible, that God expects us to walk before Him during the days of our earthly pilgrimage in holiness and righteousness. God commands us, most explicitly, to work while it is day, and reminds us of an hour when the Master of the house, having closed the door, all applications for admission, no matter how loud or importunate, will be in vain. 3. It is a prominent feature in the great plan of redemption that we should openly acknowledge our allegiance to God by becoming a member of His Church; and by a holy life and heavenly conversation “adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.” If all should look to a death-bed repentance to fit them for heaven, what a prospect the world would present! 4. In these enlightened days, it would be difficult to find one within the limits of civilised life, who had not repeatedly heard of the offers of mercy, through the merits of a crucified Saviour. The world, however, has presented too many charms; business completely engrossed his thoughts; the care of providing for the mere earthly wants of a family engaged too much of his time to leave any for the concerns of his soul. If the thought arises, When shall I prepare for my final account? the devil stands ready to suggest that a few hours of prayer on a death-bed will be preparation enough. And the careless worldling listens most readily to the sly tempter’s advice. (*John N. Norton.*) *Insufficiency and hypocrisy of death-bed remorse*.—That religion can never be genuine and saving, lasting and happy, which is not the religion of the heart. By the heart is meant that which universal custom has attached to the term, namely, the choice, the affections, the pleasures, the sincerity of the soul. Religion must be our chosen portion, our beloved employ, our chief delight, our sincere and real character. There is a radical deficiency, an utter worthlessness in the religion that does not reach and possess and penetrate the heart. It is a mere name, a mere form, a mere pretence, a mere delusion. Nothing short of Divine grace can plant religion in the heart. There is in the carnal mind of man an aversion to genuine religion. The renewing of the mind is therefore plainly essential to true godliness. All means must in themselves be insufficient to produce genuine religion. I. THE DEEP AND AWFUL IMPRESSIONS OFTEN PRODUCED ON THE MINDS OF SINNERS BY THE APPARENTLY NEAR APPROACH OF DEATH. “They howled upon their beds.” The word “howled” imports the violence of all their emotions and cries and protestations; rage mingled with their terror. 1. At such a time the soul is awakened. 2. As the natural result of the awakening of the soul, it is filled with terror. 3. Now the soul of such an awakened sufferer is filled with tormenting regrets and self-upbraidings for past folly, neglect, and wickedness. 4. Resolutions of repentance and reformation, if life should but be spared, are often most violently expressed; and no more perhaps is said than is at the moment meant. But such resolutions often betray the sufferer’s ignorance of the treachery, corruption, and weakness of his own heart. II. FREQUENTLY SUCH TERRORS ARE UNACCOMPANIED BY ANY CHANGE OF HEART, AND THE PROFESSIONS AND RESOLUTIONS MADE UNDER SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES ARE OFTEN HYPOCRITICAL. Afflictions are, indeed, the established means by which God awakens the careless, slumbering souls of men to an effectual saving sense of Divine things. The man who makes death-bed professions is often more deluded than those whom he addresses. III. FOUND ON THESE CONSIDERATIONS AN ARGUMENT TO ENFORCE SERIOUS ATTENTION TO THE SOLEMN AFFAIRS OF THE SOUL DURING THE PERIOD OF HEALTH AND EASE. Man is a being so constituted and circumstanced by his Maker that it becomes his duty and interest to carry forward his views to the future, and to make a timely provision for it. Religion makes great use of this reasonable principle of our nature. Here is the greatest need, the highest

exercise for a wise providence in preparing for futurity. We must die. Take that statement to include all that inseparably attends and follows death. With such a prospect before us can we with any wisdom, with any safety, defer to the last critical hour the great work of preparation for an event so awful and momentous? (A. W.)

Ver. 15. **Though I have bound and strengthened their arms, yet do they imagine mischief against Me.**—*Divine dispensations abused*.—I. GOD'S DISPENSATIONS WITH MEN ARE CHARACTERISED BY VARIETY. The events of human life are of a mixed and conflicting character. But all are under the direction of the Great Father. As the soil to be fruitful requires the frosts of winter as well as the sunbeams of spring and summer, man requires trials as well as joys to make his spirit fruitful in good works. II. WHATEVER THE CHARACTER OF THE DIVINE DISPENSATIONS THEY ARE OFTEN PERVERTED. "They imagine mischief against Me." It matters not what the treatment, they continue to rebel. They are like the sterile ground, to which all seasons, all weathers are alike. Observe—1. The force of the human will. It can oppose the influences of God, and turn what He designs for good to ill. Man is a voluntary agent. This links him to moral government, makes him responsible for his actions, and invests his existence with a momentous solemnity. 2. The depravity of the human heart. This force of will explains not man's rebellion, for regenerate souls and holy angels have it, and they run in the way of the Divine commandments. The reason of the rebellion is the depravity of the human heart, which is desperately wicked. Then open your hearts to the various dispensations of heaven; and be thankful for their variety. (*Homilist*.)

Ver. 16. **They return, but not to the Most High.**—*Partial repentance*.—Sin, in its worst forms, was rampant in the land, and the very rulers rejoiced in the wickedness of their people. The cause of all this social and national decay was in their original departure from the fear of the Lord. That was the root of the tree which bore such poisonous fruit. A melancholy description of character is given in this chapter. Warned by God's servants of the dangers that were before them, the people were for a time startled into a kind of thoughtfulness and reformation. But they soon became worse than before. The nation was, by turns, very religious and repenting, and very wicked and iniquitous. In the text we are shown what in them was defective, and led to the disastrous consequences of their ultimate captivity. It was their partial, unspiritual repentance. They returned, but not to God. They returned, and so imagined all was well with them, but not to God, and so, at length, destruction overtook them. Their repentance was a godless thing. So often, when men are aroused from their carelessness, they go a little way, but not the whole way; they retrace their steps, but they do not return to God. I. THINGS WHICH INDICATE THE PRESENCE OF IMPERFECT REPENTANCE. 1. The grounds on which sorrow is felt by such a penitent for sin. There is nothing of God in the sorrow. The regret has the character of remorse and not that of repentance. It is grief for the consequences and punishment of sin, and not for the guilt of it in the sight of God. Of such worldly sorrow there are not a few painful instances in the Word of God. Saul, Pharaoh, Ahab, &c. 2. The character of the reformation which such a penitent makes. He returns to what he was before he fell into heinous sin; or, at least, to the worldly standard of respectable morality, but not to God. It is all external, not internal. It makes the man for the time a Pharisee, but not a Christian. This is very common in our times. A man has been addicted to some vice; he is prone to consider that repentance for him just means abstinence from that sin; and so he rests in that as if it were all that is required. He mistakes the laying aside of his besetting sin for the laying aside of every weight. Another form of this partial reformation is to be found in the external formalism of those who imagine that to repent means simply to attend church, take the communion, &c. When a man rests in that, as if it were reformation, he is not returning unto God. 3. The nature of the motive from which this reformation is set about. It is not for God's sake, but their own sake, and that very much as restricted to this life that they seek to return. It is of the nature of a bargain, in which the sinner covenants to give so much, if God will give so much, and not at all of the nature of a return for many favours received at the hands of God. It is repentance for the sake of his own interest, not for God's

glory, and the work of Christ has had no share in it; it is done without God's Spirit. **II. DANGEROUS CONSEQUENCES THAT RESULT FROM THIS PARTIAL REPENTANCE.** 1. It leads to self-deception. The man thinks that all is right with him because he has come so far, while, in point of fact, everything is wrong. He becomes thus in a manner proof against all expostulation, and dexterously turns away from him every appeal that can be made. There is no form of self-deception more common and more dangerous. 2. It leads to self-conceit. The man has done it all himself, and is very well satisfied with the doing. He carries his head higher than his fellows. He is even led to cavil at and decry many of the most important principles of the Gospel. It exalts man into his own saviour, and that is tantamount to saying it leaves a man unsaved. 3. It leads to repeated fallings away. This is a corollary from the last. "A proud look goeth before a fall." Christians who have true repentance do sometimes fall. But it is when they too have become heady and high-minded. The falls are not legitimate consequences of their repentance. But in the case of partial penitents nothing else could be expected. 4. It leads to the hardened heart. Nothing so tends to indurate the soul as the frequent repetition of such imperfect turnings. 5. It leads to swift and sudden destruction. **III. INDICATE WHAT TRUE REPENTANCE IS.** There is—1. A proper sense of sin. It is a departure from God. 2. A proper idea of God. That reacts upon the sense of sin, making it more intense and powerful. God now is viewed as the God of love. At the foot of the Cross the revelation comes of what sin is, and of what God is. 3. A genuine reformation. It is a return of the whole man to God. The word implies a new heart as well as a new life, or rather, a new heart in order to a new life. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) **Defective repentance:—I. THEY RETURN.** Some change is effected in their conduct, and perhaps in their disposition. 1. There is a moral distance from God, which is the state of all men by nature. They do not seek Him as the supreme good, nor serve Him as the Sovereign Lord. 2. A sinner's return, if feigned, still supposes a sense of this distance to be impressed upon the mind, sufficient to warn him at least of his danger. 3. Ephraim's return supposes some partial change both in the disposition and in the outward behaviour. Some sins are avoided and some duties performed in order to satisfy conscience and appease present convictions. The power of conscience and self-love may carry men a great way in religion, but leave them short of eternal life. Be not content with engaging in this or the other duty, or with making a profession of religion; but let there be a thorough and effectual change, a total renunciation of sin, and a surrender of the whole soul to God. **II. THEY RETURN, "BUT NOT TO THE MOST HIGH."** Instances of defective repentance in persons who are under religious impressions. 1. There are some who rest in their convictions, as others do in their sins. 2. Some become satisfied with a mere negative religion. 3. Some are confident of their salvation merely because of their imaginary joys and comforts. 4. Some rest satisfied with Gospel privileges in having a name and a place among the saints, and thus deceive their own souls. (*B. Beddome, M.A.*) **Counterfeit repentance:—**Conscience daily condemns; but the Spirit is ever at hand suggesting godly and penitent thoughts and drawing our hearts to God. Men in general are extremely anxious to pacify and still the upbraiding voice of conscience, but real and heartfelt repentance is the last method which they will make use of for this purpose. Sinners take every way but the right one for quieting their guilty fears. If we could look through the world, and dive into men's secret thoughts and motives, we should find self-deception prevailing under an immense variety of forms. There is but one kind of repentance which is acceptable to God. There are a thousand ways of stifling the conscience and deceiving ourselves with something like repentance. 1. One of the most common errors on this subject is, when a man imagines that he has repented and forsaken his sin, although the truth is, that he is no longer tempted strongly to the indulgence of that particular sin. He is conscious of an alteration in his life, and this makes him think that he has amended his life. Illustrate by a young man's giving up his vices, and by the aged man who is become old and infirm. Their hearts may be quite unchanged. You have not repented because you are no longer guilty of certain sins which you once habitually committed. 2. Some persons are alarmed by the voice of conscience to such a degree that they can no longer continue in the unrestrained course of sin and folly which hitherto they have pursued. The Spirit of God strives with them very earnestly in order to bring them to His fold. After many severe struggles with their convictions, they set about the work of

repentance and reformation. But these persons, after the first alarm has subsided, grow weary of well-doing. The outward amendment goes as far as a certain point, but no further. Different men will carry it to different lengths. But in all these cases something is kept back. The heart is wrong. There was some selfish end in view. The love of sin still reigns in the heart. Men cast off some outward sinful practices without returning to God. 3. There are some whose repentance consists, not in forsaking sin, but in performing some outward religious duties. They are religious on Sundays only. To lay unpleasant thoughts to sleep they become strict and regular in their attendance at the house of God. Some persons, in order to quiet their consciences by a decent show of religion, will go very far in outward acts of devotion. But the evils in their lives are not put aside. 4. Our Lord has described another description of persons, who lull their consciences to sleep by a false repentance, in the parable of the sower. "Some seed fell among thorns." They begin well, but their ardour and earnestness soon fall off, they lose their first love. The principal part of their religion consists in right notions and accurate views, but their hearts are still unchanged. It is easier for such persons to learn their own state by serious and honest self-examination, than it is for others to discover it for them. The work, then, must be done by yourselves. (*J. Jowett, M.A.*)

CHAPTER VIII.

VER. 1. Set thy trumpet to thy mouth.—*The Gospel trumpet*.—1. By sounding the Gospel trumpet the mind of God can alone be communicated to man. The voice of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost must be heard from the Scriptures. To the whole Christian priesthood the command is given, "Preach the Word." 2. It is the purpose that all shall hear and obey the Gospel trumpet. The silver trumpet of the wilderness was for the entire encampment. "Preach the Gospel to every creature." 3. In setting the trumpet to the mouth, we must give no uncertain sound. In the ordinance of the silver trumpet the greatest care was taken to instruct the sons of Aaron in its proper use. What is the Gospel? Is it not this? (1) Man is a sinner, and responsible for his own salvation. (2) Jesus Christ is the only Saviour. (3) Man's part in his salvation is faith in the Lord Jesus. The faith must trust wholly in God, and produce a pure life. (4) In the Gospel trumpet is Divine power; hence hope of victory over every spiritual foe. Intemperance, infidelity, Sabbath desecration, indifference, sin in the heart—these are the Jerichos of our day. Where is the hope of taking these strongholds of Satan? The preaching of the Cross as the power of God. Then set this Gospel trumpet to thy mouth! (*A. H. Moment.*) **As an eagle against the house of the Lord, because they have transgressed My covenant, and trespassed against My law.**—*The conventional Church*.—These words are singularly abrupt, and indicate the suddenness of the threatened invader. By "the house of the Lord" we are to understand Israel as a section of the professed people of God. I. **AS ENDANGERED.** How comes the eagle? Ravenously, suddenly, and swiftly. A conventional Church is in greater danger than any secular community, because—1. Its guilt is greater. 2. Its influence is more pernicious. Whose influence on society is the most baneful—the man who denies God, the man who ignores Him, or the man who misrepresents Him? The conventional Church gives society a mal-representation of God and His religion. II. **AS WARNED.** Blow a blast that shall thrill every heart in the vast congregation of Israel. Why sound the warning? 1. Because the danger is tremendous. 2. Because the danger is at hand. 3. Because the danger may be avoided. What is wanted now is a ministry of warning to conventional Churches. III. **AS REPENTANT.** "Israel shall cry unto Me, My God, we know Thee." Oh hasten the day when all conventional Churches shall be brought to a deep and experimental knowledge of God and His Son! When this transpires the dense cloud that has concealed the sun of Christianity shall be swept away, and the quickening beam shall fall on every heart. (*Homilist.*) *God coming in judgment*.—Whatever be the local and particular references as to the eagle, the great principle remains from age to age that God comes to judgment in various forms, always definitely, and always, as we shall see, intelligibly, not

only inflicting vengeance as a Sovereign whose covenants have been outraged, but condescending to explain the reasons upon which His most destructive judgments are based. Thus we read, "Because they have transgressed My covenant, and trespassed against My law": the covenant had been broken by idolatry, and the law had been violated by social sins. It is needful to mark this distinction with great particularity, because it shows the breadth of the Divine commandment. God is not speaking about a merely metaphysical law,—a law which can only be interpreted by the greatest minds, and put into operation on the sublimest occasions of life; He is speaking about a law which had indeed its lofty religious aspects, but which had also its social, practical, tender phases, in whose preservation every man, woman, and child in the kingdom ought to be interested. God has made it clear that sin is always a crime. Whoever sins against God sins against his own soul. Once let God's beneficent laws be violated, and the man does not only suffer metaphysically, or go down in some practical quantity or quality, but he actually suffers in body and estate, sometimes apparently, always really. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 2. My God, we know Thee.—*Agnosticism*:—An agnostic is not one who knows nothing, for some men who are embraced by this term are men of unusual mental attainments and ability. He is one who neither denies nor affirms. The term is applied to those who hold that there are matters pertaining to religion which we not only do not know, but have no means of knowing. An agnostic does not simply assert the incompleteness of human knowledge upon things Divine, but that real knowledge concerning such things is an impossibility to man. An agnostic is not an atheist. He does not deny the existence of a God. He is not a sceptic or doubter. He is positive in affirming that we neither have nor can get any knowledge of God, or of the unseen world. Mr. Herbert Spencer's views have been thus summarised: "1. The proper object of religion is a Something which can never be known, or conceived, or understood; to which we cannot apply the terms emotion, will, intelligence; of which we cannot either affirm or deny that it is either a person, or being, or mind, or matter, or, indeed, anything else. 2. All that we can say of it is that it is an inscrutable existence, or an unknowable cause; we can neither know nor conceive what it is, nor how it came about, nor how it operates. It is notwithstanding the ultimate cause, the all-being, the creative power. 3. The essential business of a religion so understood is to keep alive the consciousness of a mystery that cannot be fathomed. 4. We are not concerned with the question what effect this religion will have as a moral agent, or whether it will make good men and women. Religion has to do with mystery, not with morals." Agnostics reverence the phenomenal and the Great Unknown above and behind it; but, holding that the senses are the only source of knowledge, they do not know, and say we never can know, that the eternal energy behind all phenomena can think, feel, will, and contrive. Agnosticism is open to three objections. I. IT IS PRESUMPTIVE. The agnostic begins by a confession of human ignorance, and then proceeds to make a universal assertion which implies the possession of universal knowledge. To assert that the unknown cause "can never be known, or conceived, or understood" is to assume that the speaker is acquainted with the constitution and calibre of all mind in all ages. To say that the inscrutable existence will never be known by man is to say we know what will be the extent of all men's knowledge in the future. We cannot measure all possible knowledge with our finite minds. He who says that God is "unknowable," takes a self-contradictory attitude, and assumes such knowledge as can be attributed only to a Divine Being. II. AGNOSTICISM IS PARALYSING. The great mainspring of human activity and basis of human happiness is faith. The three steps taken by every man who has achieved ought worthy of remembrance have been these—conception, conviction, and action. The conviction was the faith which stimulated to and sustained the action. United to faith, but distinct from it, is hope,—that vigorous principle which enlists in its service both head and heart. Agnosticism bows these two fair angels out of human society. It tells us that we know only the phenomenal; we have no spiritual insight. If every man in society were a consistent agnostic there would be a speedy and inglorious termination to all scientific, social, political, and ecclesiastical enterprises. III. AGNOSTICISM IS POSITIVELY PERNICIOUS. It disposes of all true religion. For religion is the linking of a soul to a personal God. Agnosticism defines religion as "devotion

to that which is believed to be best." It has no personal God. Dispensing with religion—1. Agnosticism strikes away one of the chief supports of society. 2. Begets despair. There is nothing left for the heart of man but to settle down into a stony state of utter desolation and despair. Agnosticism encourages pessimism. But we affirm that God is known, though our knowledge is incomplete. We have sufficient knowledge to justify and demand our worship of God, our trust in, and love for, and obedience to Him. That God is known is proved by the Scriptures, by the manifestation of Christ, and by the testimony of Christian experience. (*J. Hiles Hitchens, D.D.*) *The knowledge of God*:—Israel pretended to know God, but in works denied Him. They would cry and say, We know Thee; when in truth they knew Him not, and were only speaking lies in hypocrisy. I. OBSERVE THE TIME WHEN THEY WOULD MAKE THIS PROFESSION. In a season of great affliction and distress, when God would contend with them, when their enemies should be let loose upon them, and everything around them look dark and distressing. When they begin to feel God's wrath they will begin to humble themselves, and profess themselves to be His people. Troubles will often make those pray who never prayed before. But if they leave off prayer when the trouble is over, this shews that it came out of feigned lips. Conviction is often the fruit of correction, but does not always lead to conversion. II. THE MANNER IN WHICH THIS PROFESSION WOULD BE MADE. They would not only speak, but speak vehemently, and "cry" with earnestness and confidence. But they called God their God, though they had no interest in Him, and claimed an acquaintance with Him while they were ignorant of His true character. III. THE IMPORTANCE OF A RIGHT KNOWLEDGE OF GOD. 1. It is a great thing truly to know the Lord. A perfect knowledge of God is unattainable by us. But a true knowledge of God is vital and efficacious, and has a transforming influence. It is the effect of Divine illumination, so that none have it until it is communicated from above. 2. A profession of this knowledge is of great importance. It is no light matter to be able to say on good ground, "My God, I know Thee." With the mouth confession is made unto salvation, but there must first be a believing with the heart unto righteousness. True faith will produce a good confession. Let us see that our acknowledgment of God be accompanied with corresponding affections and dispositions towards Him, going to the grounds of our religion, and tracing it up to its source and origin. IV. SOME OF THE EVIDENCES OF A TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD. 1. All saving knowledge proceeds from God only. All the knowledge we have of Him by the unassisted efforts of reason will come to nothing. 2. Saving knowledge will produce a humble confidence in God. Humility is one of the first fruits of a good understanding. 3. A spiritual acquaintance with God will be accompanied with a conformity of soul to Him. There will be a resemblance of His holy nature, and a subjection to His holy will. (1) It is a great evil to profess to know God, and yet, in works, to deny Him. (2) Beware of the contrary extreme, of withholding an open profession of the truth after we have been brought to understand and receive it. (3) The subject shows the reason why many apostatise from their profession. They have received the truth, but not in the love of it. (4) The enlightening and renewing influences of the Holy Spirit are necessary to form the Christian character. (*B. Beddome, M.A.*) *The claim to know God*:—In the Hebrew the order of the words is, "To Me they shall cry, My God, we know Thee, Israel." This order hints some observations that would hardly arise from our version. In our Bible it is only a speech of God to them. In the Hebrew they seem to remind God who they were; as if they said, "We are Israel, who know Thee, remember we are not strangers to Thee." Observe—1. In affliction men see their need of God. 2. Even hypocrites and the vilest wretches in the time of their distress will claim interest in God and cry to Him. 3. Knowledge and acknowledgment of God in an outward and formal way hypocrites think will commend them much to God in time of affliction. They expect favour from God because they have made some profession of Him. "We know Thee," as if they said, "Lord, we were not as others who forsook Thee; we continued Israel still; we did not turn to the heathens." It is very difficult to take away men's spirits from trusting in formality in outward worship. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*)

Ver. 3. **Israel hath cast off the thing that is good: the enemy shall pursue him.**—*The chastening of them that forsake God*:—In this short sentence we have at once the sin of Israel and his punishment. Consider the various ways in which

Israel may be said to have "cast off the thing that is good." I. BY THEIR MURMURINGS. So long as they trusted God's Word, they continued to walk safely. When they began to murmur, Amalek came upon them. II. BY THEIR IDOLATRIES. When God was arranging for their worship, they made and worshipped the golden calves. III. BY THEIR REBELLION. As in their response to the message of the returned spies. Referring to Israel in their later history, we may say— IV. BY THEIR REJECTION OF CHRIST. Because, when Messiah did come, He did not suit their expectations, they despised and rejected Him. And the enemy was not slow in pursuing them. Their city was destroyed, and they were scattered over the earth. This threat is not confined to Israel. It is equally applicable to nations and to individuals now. (*N. Ashby.*) *Good rejected*:—Him who is good. That which is good. The word *tob* includes both. They rejected good in rejecting God, who is simply, supremely, wholly, universally good, and good to all, the Author and Fountain of all good, so that there is nothing simply good but God, nothing worthy of that title, except in respect of its relation to Him who is good and doing good. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *The abandonment of good, and consequent pursuit of evil*:—I. THE ABANDONMENT OF GOOD. "Israel hath rejected what is good." The good here is the true worship of the true God. 1. True worship is "the good thing" for man. It is good not only because God requires it, but because it is the necessary condition of spiritual life, growth, harmony, and blessedness. 2. This "good thing" man sometimes abandons. Moral mind has the power of abandoning the highest good. 3. The abandonment of this "good thing" imperils the soul. Moral good is the only effective safeguard of the spirit; when this is given up, or "cast off," all the gates of the soul are thrown open to tormenting fiends. II. THE CONSEQUENT PURSUIT OF EVIL. "Set up kings, but not by Me." Reference is to Jeroboam and his successors. From kings of their own making came the setting up of the idolatrous calf-worship. So they went wrong in their politics and in their religion. Let a man go wrong in his relations to God, and he will go wrong in all his relations, secular and spiritual. There is nothing in connection with the human race of such transcendent importance as worship. The religious element is the strongest of all elements, and men must have a god of some sort, and their god will fashion their character and determine their destiny. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 5. *Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off*; or, *Thy calf, O Samaria, hath kicked thee off*.—*Kicking calves*:—The words of the text have a quaint sound. They suggest a ludicrous figure. There is something ludicrous in the notion of a boy trying to drive a calf, and getting kicked by it. When you understand what the words mean, you will soon grow grave enough. Samaria was the centre and capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, as Jerusalem was the centre and capital of the southern kingdom of Judah. Each city was a sacred city, a centre of worship, as well as of business and government. There was a temple in each of them, and in the temple certain symbols of the Divine presence and activity. At Mount Gerizim they had only the golden calf and the emblems of its worship. At first this calf was intended to be a nature-symbol of Jehovah. But it too closely resembled the animal forms in the heathen temples—especially in Egypt—and these animal forms were very apt to breed a kind of worship which gave free play to animal lusts. At best, moreover, the calf was a "graven image," and was therefore a standing and flagrant violation of the law which God had given to Israel. Soon the Ten Tribes sunk into the idolatries of the nations around them, with their degradation of God and man. And they put no more restraint on their carnal passions and lusts than the beasts whose forms they placed in their temples. Men grow like the gods they worship. The animal part of their nature soon prevailed over the spiritual. As soon as a man suffers the beast in him to prevail, he grows worse than the beasts, and sinks below their level. What they do by the law of their nature, he does against the law of his nature. Hosea paints a dreadful picture of the impotence and degradation into which the Israelites had sunk through their false worship. They were consequently so weakened by their strifes and divisions, their loss of manliness and patriotism, as to be unable to resist the foreign invader when he came. And so their calf had kicked them. If they did not speedily return to the God of their fathers, their calf would soon "kick them off." They would find themselves abandoned by their god, in whose foul service they had sacrificed their manhood, their unity, their strength. They would fall before the sword of the

foe, or be led captive by him into a strange land. So there is a principle in Hosea's quaint words. It is this—every sin carries in itself its own retribution, and is sure to avenge itself upon us if we fall into it. Punishment is only the other half of sin. Or every calf we worship is sure to kick us, or even to kick us off. Whatever we love best and pursue most heartily, that, for the time at least, is our god, our “calf.” For the moment we look to it for the happiness or the gratification we most crave, and serve and follow it with our supreme affection or desire. Look at some of these calf worshippers, and mark how their god treats them. There is the greedy boy, who puts no restraint upon his appetite. To gratify his appetite he will do things which are mean, selfish, wrong. What follows? The calf which Little Glutton worshipped has kicked him, and kicked him in his tenderest part, just where he feels it most. Take the case of a vain, foolish girl, who gives herself great airs when she goes to a new school. When she is found out, her fibs detected, or her foolish self-complacency resented and exposed, may we not say that her calf has kicked her, humbled her in the dust, so that she who wanted to be admired is despised? Her sin has wrought its own punishment. But in the mercy of God her punishment is intended to help her to recover herself. And men have made idols of their very sins—drunkenness and licentiousness. They have sacrificed their all to them. And not only our base passions, but even our best affections, our plainest duties, may be exalted into the place of God, and thus be turned into calves which will only too surely kick us, or kick us off, before they have done with us. Young men may be tempted to snatch at business success by taking some mean advantage of their fellows, so straining their integrity and defiling the clear honour of their soul, violating the allegiance they owe to principles, conscience, and God. Or men may suffer mere success in business to absorb all their energies, so that they neglect the culture of the mind, and the purest and best affections of the heart and home. In either case, if you yield to these temptations, you will have turned what was once a clear duty into an idol, into a calf such as that which of old men worshipped in Samaria. And your calf will kick you as it kicked them. Your want of integrity, your meanness and baseness will be detected and exposed. Your punishment will grow out of your sin. And young women need to be told that even love, if it be made an idol, will prove to be but a calf. If in the sacred name of love, you cast away prudence, principle, parental control, and marry a man who has not yet learned to earn his own livelihood, or whose character is dubious, or whose life is bad, you may be sure your calf will kick you for your pains. All these foolish and hurtful idolatries of ours spring from our false conceptions of God, and of what He requires of us. The true ends of life do not lie in mere worldly success, or even in gratified affection. Hosea teaches us to think of God as a wise and loving Father who is ever seeking to make us good. In this light we may see how poor and paltry are many of the aims which men pursue, and how inevitable it is that they should be frustrated of these poor aims in order that they may learn to set the true end of life before them. Our well-deserved falls and failures are parts of the process by which our Heavenly Father is teaching us to walk, and to walk with Him. (*S. Cox, D.D.*)

Idols worshipped:— The gross and debasing idolatry of Israel soon brought upon them the judgments of heaven; and when in their deep distress they discovered their folly, they found that, having cast off Jehovah, they “had no god to go to.” It is to this course of wickedness the text refers. The prophet addresses the people of Samaria in tones of withering irony. Two important lessons. I. THAT EVERY FALSE AND WORLDLY CONFIDENCE IS SUBE IN THE END TO CHEAT AND DISAPPOINT US. Speak to those who are worshipping some other object than the one true God—drink, business. II. THE LORD HIMSELF, AND HE ALONE, WILL NEVER FAIL OR CAST OFF THOSE THAT TRUST IN HIM. Why should He taunt Israel upon the faithlessness and vanity of their earthly idols, if to trust Himself might prove equally vain? Wherefore should He remind you that the golden calves of worldly pleasure, self, and pride will all cast you off, if perchance He will cast you off Himself? It is a curious fact that just as foolish and worldly people generally cherish unfounded hopes, so Christian persons often indulge unfounded fears. The one never imagine that their calf, their idol, will cast them off: the other are constantly doubting and dreading that their God will forsake them. If there is anything that God makes quite plain, it is that this can never be; He never fails nor forsakes. The truth is that God draws nearer and closer to His people in their trouble. (*J. Thwin Davidson, D.D.*)

The world a lie:—

The story of Jeroboam the son of Nebat affords a perpetual warning. Other things besides consumption, and lunacy, and various maladies our flesh is heir to are hereditary. Jeroboam's sin descended to his children; and was transmitted like an entail from sire to son. More than that, it struck like a malaria of a virulent disease to the very walls of his palace; it infected all his successors, and from the throne spread its deadly influence to the poorest and most distant cottages of the land. I. THE SIN OF JEROBOAM. He was hardly seated on the throne, when a political difficulty arose,—and that a very serious one. The Mosaic law required every male to go up three times each year to Jerusalem. An astute and sagacious politician, Jeroboam foresaw how this custom might be attended with dangerous results. But he was not the man to meet the difficulty aright. He did what, no doubt, the world had thought a clever thing. Setting up one calf in Bethel and another in Dan, in imitation of the cherubim in the temple, he sent forth this edict, "Let him that sacrificeth, kiss the calves,"—go and worship these. Jeroboam succeeded, but his success brought down ruin on his house and government. It was followed by results which should teach our statesmen that no policy in the end shall thrive which traverses the Word of God. That can never be politically right, which is morally and religiously wrong. What the "calf" did to the monarch, it did to the people—here called Samaria. Following the steps of their king, they apostatised from God, and turned their backs on His temple. Then judgment succeeded judgment, and one trouble breaking on the back of another, the land had no rest. The commonwealth sank under the weight of its idolatry. The voice of God in providence might have been heard saying, "Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off." II. WARNING FROM THE SIN AND SORROW OF SAMARIA. The sentiment of the text is illustrated—1. By the case of those who put riches in the place of God. The thirst for gold, like the drunkard's, is insatiable. The more it is indulged, the more the flame is fed, it burns the fiercer. 2. The sentiment of the text is illustrated by the case of those who live for fame—for the favour, not of God, but of men. (*T. Guthrie, D.D.*) *The sinner betrayed by his sins*:—Jeroboam's calf symbolised not only his casting off the true faith, but also his preference for the secular and sensual culture of Egypt, instead of the simplicity and purity of life which God had prescribed for His people. For a while the rebellious people seemed to prosper. At length the thunderbolt of Divine wrath fell. The godless land was ravaged, and the people carried away captive by the Assyrians. Egypt turned a deaf ear to their appeals. This, Hosea predicted in words of withering sarcasm: "Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off." (The calf was a copy of the Egyptian Mnevis.) I. THE CALF STANDS IN GENERAL FOR SIN. No sin ever, in the long-run, meets the promise it makes to the imagination. In the end the soul has to pay for its guilty pleasures out of its own pains. True of fleshly lusts. Their glow is that of a fever rising; soon they will burn. Nature does not put enough strength in the human frame to endure more than a temperate, lawful supply of the appetites. This fuel gone, the indulgence has become a necessity, and consumes the life itself. Selfishness cannot enjoy its accumulations beyond a limited amount; beyond this they feed impatience and ennui. "Pride," as Bulwer says, "is a garment all stiff brocade outside, and all grating sackcloth on the side next the skin." II. THE CALF STANDS FOR A PECULIAR CLASS OF SINS. The Samaritans did not regard their worship as degrading. The calf represented life, productiveness; a far nobler object of worship than that set up by many heathen nations. It represented especially polite sins, and those lines of conduct whose evil consists chiefly in that they are not obedience to God. For instance, such as meet our ideas of expediency, but are not according to strict conscience. Young men generally begin with such sins. Thus the standard is gradually lowered. 1. They will do nothing disreputable in religious or even secular society. 2. Nothing disreputable in club life. 3. Nothing that they (now blinded by indulgence) think will hurt them. 4. At last, their own passion has become their standard, and they are socially a wreck before they are fully aware of their danger. III. THE CALF STANDS FOR A CURRENT FORM OF UNBELIEF. The calf-worship was mixed with some features of the true worship of Israel. It had a line of priests. Its chief sites were places already sacred in the religious history of God's people. The altars were dedicated at the time of a true religious festival—the Feast of Tabernacles. A current form of infidelity is a blinding of human conceits with some scriptural teaching. It uses Sabbaths, sanctuaries, ministries. It admires Jesus, and praises His precepts. But it denies super-

naturalism. Not God's Word, but the human reason, is supreme. (*L.*) *Cast off by the god of worldliness*.—The great Wolsey, after he had climbed the highest round of ambition's ladder, in the evening of life bitterly exclaimed, "Would that I had served my God as faithfully as I have served my king. He would not have abandoned me in my old age." The illustrious statesman, William Pitt, the favourite of king and people, "died," says Wilberforce, his friend, "of a broken heart." On his dying bed he is stated to have said, "I fear I have neglected prayer too much to make it available on a death-bed." Still more distressing was the closing scene of Sheridan's career. He who had stood on the pinnacle of glory, and gained the most flattering distinctions, writes in old age to one of his friends, "I am absolutely undone and broken-hearted." Misfortunes crowded on him, and his last moments were haunted by fears of a prison. Forsaken by his gay associates, dispirited, and world-weary, he closed his eyes in gloom and sorrow. Campbell, the author of "The Pleasures of Hope," in his old age wrote "I am alone in the world. My wife and child of my hopes are dead; my surviving child is consigned to a living tomb (a lunatic asylum); my old friends, brothers, sisters, are dead, all but one, and she too is dying; my last hopes are blighted. As for fame, it is a bubble that must soon burst." **How long will it be ere they attain to innocency?**—*Attainment hindered*.—I. AN ATTAINMENT SPOKEN OF. "How long will it be ere they attain unto innocency?" "Innocency" is here put for "true and saving religion." And this is a most desirable attainment, more so than all besides. 1. It is important because without it there can be no fellowship with God. Without fellowship with God there can be no peace; without peace there can be no happiness. 2. It is important because without it man cannot live well. A guilty man lives according to his thoughts. 3. It is important because without it man cannot die well. There is nothing before a sinner but death, darkness, and despair. II. A HINDRANCE SUGGESTED. The calves were the idols set up to prevent the Israelites from worshipping Jehovah. The hindrances to attaining innocency (that is, satisfying the natural cravings of religion in worshipping God) are the idols which are set up in the human heart. These idols may be—1. The gratification of self. Self is one of the most favoured of idols, it is worshipped by all, and the man who worships self cannot worship God. 2. The vanities of the world. The idolatry of the present day, if not so bold in its rebellion, is not so religious as in the days of old. The idolatrous Jews and heathen were essentially religious. It was death to any one to speak against the gods. It is pleasure now men worship, and a god of any sort is forgotten. 3. The blandishments of science. This is another idol men fall down before. These are the calves which keep men from God, calves set up by themselves at the instigation of Satan. No man can ever "attain unto innocency" so long as they remain. III. THE CONSEQUENCES INFERRED. A time is coming when true religion will be the only thing worth possessing. The day of sifting will arrive. God's anger will be kindled against the persistently ungodly. Then what avail will the false gods which men have served so long be to afford them shelter? The calf will cast thee off. There are two penalties, then, to the guilty. They lose both earth and heaven. They are cast off—1. By the devil whom they serve. The world cannot offer them help. Satan's object is only to effect their ruin. 2. By the God whom they have neglected. How can He who has been scorned and forsaken be the succour of those who have despised His love and rejected His rule? (*J. J. S. Bird, B.A.*)

Ver. 6. The workman made it; therefore it is not God.—*The religion of humanity*.—Humanitarianism has become the creed of the earnest and thoughtful who have found for themselves the awful truth regarding their fellow-men in the depths, and with that ever pressing upon them, have forsaken all else to grapple with that evil and right that wrong. It has become the home of loving, aching hearts that have lost their God. It has also become the mere fad of many who put on charity as they do a garment when it is fashionable, and are philanthropic when philanthropy is in vogue. But let these hangers-on of humanitarianism be distinguished from humanitarians. Humanitarians proper are large-souled enthusiasts. Humanitarianism has been elevated to the dignity of a religion, and the humanitarian god has been hailed as the God of humanity. When that is so, we have to look at the work in a new light, and study anew the claims which it puts forth. And, first of all, I think we may safely say that the first duty of any one who desires to elevate a cult

to the rank of a religion is to demonstrate that it is applicable to humanity in general, that it is deep enough to find a common basis in characters the most widely diverse. For that only is really religious which can be shared by all. The beauty-lover, who is convinced that in the power of perceiving and appreciating the beauty and harmony of the universe lies the uplifting of his kind, sets himself to show that that power is to be found, latent at least, in every one. The moralist, who thinks that a certain code of laws, if strictly adhered to, would meet all wants and settle all difficulties, has, for the first part of his task, to prove that an inherently moral nature is co-existent everywhere with human nature. And the humanitarian, too, must show that his religion may be a religion for humanity. To the enthusiasts who are fired to generous forgetfulness of self it may seem for a time to fulfil the purposes of religion. They find in it an aim, an inspiration, a faith. But what of the other side? Will it do for a religion to those who are to be uplifted to the passive element, which, in their scheme, is simply to permit itself to be raised to better conditions of life? Ah! that is where humanitarians err. They cling tenaciously to their theory that conditions make humanity. It is true, we grant it, but it must at the same time be admitted that humanity makes its own conditions. The conditions of man's material life, if they be evil, eat slowly but surely into his soul with corroding influence. But is the converse not also true? Does what a man is, down in the heart of him, not stamp itself upon his surroundings? Does not the likeness of a soul body itself out by slow degrees in the conditions amid which it exists? Conditions the most favourable for the growth of virtue, if round an ignoble soul, become a rich soil for vice to grow in. Beauty may be charged to ugliness by man's vulgar breath, harmony to discord by his strident voice. Conditions make humanity, and humanity makes its conditions. But these two truths were never meant to be brought into violent opposition. A perfect humanity is the humanitarian's dream, but a perfect humanity is an impossible thing. If humanitarians would study humanity more they would see the weakness of their claim for humanitarianism as a religion. There is a something in humanity, an unknown quality, which for ever evades the analyst. There is a wailing need for something greater than itself, the "something never seen but still desired," there is a hidden strength totally unpresaged by the individual's past life. Humanity is full of surprises; only the most careful student of it knows how small the circle is within which he may work, how great is the tract outside of it which must be allowed for unknown powers and their influences. Only those who know its waywardness, its uncertainty, its inherent weakness, its potential greatness, know how strong a hope, how Divine a thought, humanity needs for its deliverance. To serve is to obey, but do humanitarians ever dream of obeying the humanity which they deify? And to look to humanity as a paymaster, ah, what wages of sorrow they are earning, what disappointed hopes, what frustrated endeavours, what bitterness of heart that there is not sweetness enough in the world to sweeten! Oh, that they had given as unto God, and He would have repaid; that they had followed Christ's example—to serve God and save humanity. Then God would have rewarded, and humanity would have been the recompense. And now the thought of Christ arrests us. What, after all, is the humanitarianism which we have been seriously considering as a new religion, but a branch of practical Christianity? The limitation, which is its weakness, is all that is new in it. Why, then, has it attained such great proportions, become so prominent that it has for the time overshadowed all other considerations? Simply because it was for so long overshadowed and neglected. And yet the Church, whatever it may have done, has seen and attempted the greater part. It has taught this part of Christ's doctrine, that to be heroic and Christlike is better than to be comfortable. But the humanitarian flood answers back vehemently—"Your God is a God for the idealists, for those who in their visionary world delight themselves with thoughts of ideal beauty, and goodness, and truth, and never feel the burdened heart of the world of reality labouring beside them. Your creed is a creed for the comfortable, the well-to-do, the intellectual who study Christ's marvellous philosophy and forget that His practice gave it its power, and demonstrated its truth." Heroism is for the strength of the individual heart; the ideal is a home for the individual soul, but the attitude and practice of man towards his fellow-men should be that of pitying, helpful love. Christ was heroic. He stood majestic and unmoved in the midst of a scoffing, incensed mob. Yet He was the champion

of the friendless woman taken in adultery. He lived the life of an idealist, and fed His soul on the beauty of heaven. Yet He was always ready to render practical help to those in trouble or adversity. The duty of the Church as an exponent of Christ is to expound Him fully and equally. The Founder of Christianity came to enlarge, and deepen, and exalt the sphere of every life. It is terrible to think how, instead of helping Christ in such a work, we spend so much time and energy in crushing the life and power out of men; out of the boy or girl who want sunshine and joy to brighten their growth; out of the young man or woman enthusiastic with a great purpose to do good;—how we crowd men and women out of their places and push them down and cause them to despond, when all the while we could have inspired hope and given them life. The mission of religion is to give true increase of life, and the Church of Christ exists to help on the work. And the members of Christ's Church should each feel upon them the twofold chain that links them to God and their fellow-men. If our march were but from the cradle to the grave, then we could afford to leave such aids as the Church and religious communion out of account, and the creed and practice of the humanitarian might satisfy us. But are we only the creatures of the passing hour? Nay; verily the chords we strike here in the music of life are but the prelude to a never-ending song. When all our material wants are satisfied there is still a hunger of the soul which refuses to be allayed, because only God, the Infinite One, can satisfy it. We are infinite, spiritual beings, and no finite, material God, such as the humanitarian worships, can give lasting help and satisfaction. Nothing but the Infinite can fulfil our infinite needs; nothing but the Highest can satisfy those who are made in the image of the Most High. We need a God wide as the universe and eternal as the life to which we belong. (A. H. M. Sims.)

Ver. 7. For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.—*The consequences of sin.*—Misery is attached to sin as its inevitable consequence; but the connection does not always appear to a superficial observer. Transgression sometimes appears to be productive of happiness, and obedience to be a source of much affliction and trouble. But the wicked are not really happy now, and they have no reasonable expectation of happiness in the eternal world. **I. WHO MAY BE SAID TO SOW THE WIND?** To "sow the wind" is a proverbial expression for labouring in vain. It may be applied to all who seek happiness in the way of sin. 1. To sensualists, who yield themselves up to the gratifications of sense. See confession of Solomon (Eccles. ii. 1, 10, 11). 2. To worldlings. The lovers of this present world hope to obtain, not a momentary gratification, but solid and lasting benefits. But riches are proverbially uncertain. Our cares are generally multiplied by means of them. 3. To formalists. The performance of religious duties seems more calculated to make us happy. No one can be happy who disregards them. But a mere round of services can never satisfy the conscience. Some delude themselves with an idea that it will secure the Divine favour. Under that delusion they may be filled with self-complacency. A sight of sin will speedily dissipate these self-righteous hopes. 4. To false professors. There are many who wish to be thought religious when they are destitute of spiritual life. They may be jealous about doctrines and their own particular form of Church government, but they are not solicitous to live nigh to God in holy duties. **II. WHAT THEY MAY EXPECT TO REAP.** A "whirlwind" is a figure to represent extraordinary calamities. Their calamities will be—1. Sudden. They receive warnings, but are taken by surprise at last. 2. Irresistible. Illustrate by a whirlwind. 3. Tremendous. See desolation wrought by a whirlwind. Infer—(1) How earnest should we be in redeeming time! (2) How blessed are they who are living to God! (*Sketches of Sermons.*) *Reaping the whirlwind.*—Said Napoleon to La Place, "I see no mention of God in your system of theology." "No, sire," was the answer, "we have no longer any need of that hypothesis." A half-century of anarchy and social disorder in unhappy France was the result—the awful "reign of terror." How much wiser was Montesquieu, who said: "God is as necessary as freedom to the welfare of France!" *Sowing the wind.*—This is a proverbial speech, signifying the taking a great deal of pains to little purpose; as if a man should go abroad in the fields, and spread his hands about with effort and yet grasp nothing but air. The wind is an empty creature in respect of things solid, therefore the Scripture often makes use of it to signify the vanity of the hopes

and laborious endeavours of wicked men. 1. Many do nothing all their lifetime but sow the wind; they labour and toil, but what comes of it? It is no good account to give to God of our time, to say that we have taken a great deal of pains; we may take pains and yet "sow the wind." Who are those that sow the wind? (1) Some students: men that spend their thoughts and strength about things in no way profitable to themselves or others, such sow the wind: with a great deal of earnestness they do just nothing. (2) Idolaters. All those who take pains and are at great cost in superstitious worship, all their intentions that they have to honour God, come to nothing, it is but a sowing the wind. (3) Formalists. Such as content themselves in the outward part of God's worship, having no power nor life of godliness in the services they perform. (4) The vainglorious. They who do all that they do out of vainglory, who, to set up themselves among others, spend a long time in prayer, and an ostentatiously scrupulous observance of all rites and ceremonies, a principle of vainglory actuating them throughout. Men of public gifts, who do abundance of good in the Church of God and in the commonwealth, but are moved thereto by a principle of self and vainglory, these lose all, they sow but to the wind. (5) Such as serve themselves of sin; such as seek to shift for themselves by sinful means when they are in any straits, and forsake lawful courses to help themselves out of trouble. "They reap the whirlwind." The Hebrew word has a syllable more than usual added to it to increase its signification. It is not only a whirlwind, but a most terrible whirlwind. There is more in the harvest than in the seed. Sow a little sinful pleasure, and a great deal of misery is the fruit. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *The growth and power of habit*:—Notice the way in which the acts of daily life influence destiny. I. WE ARE CONTINUALLY FORMING HABITS. II. THE TENDENCY OF HABITS ONCE FORMED IS TO INCREASE IN STRENGTH. "Wind—whirlwind." III. HABITS INCREASE IN THE DIRECTION OF ORIGINAL TENDENCY. Same in kind, though vastly different in intensity and force. IV. THE TENDENCY OF HABITS IS TO INCREASE IN STRENGTH TILL THEY PASS BEYOND CONTROL. The whirlwind desolates the land and strews the sea with wrecks. Habit is something like appetite: we are led by it, just as a hungry man makes his way towards home. It cannot be explained how it is that actions become easier by being repeated, but that it is so everybody must admit. If we do anything a certain number of times, the doing has an effect upon us, and that effect we call "habit." We should therefore be very careful what we accustom ourselves to do, lest we should acquire the appetite or habit of doing things that are hurtful and wrong. Habit is the result of repeated acts, and it is wonderful how soon a little child acquires a habit. The doing of a thing once or twice is sufficient to lead the child to do it again—

"All habits gather, by unseen degrees,

As brooks make rivers, rivers run to seas."

(*A. Hampden Lee.*)

Ver. 9. **A wild ass alone by himself.**—*The Scripture figure of the wild ass*:—What a figure of the untamed soul which refuses the easy yoke of the blessed Redeemer. Man's untamed spirit spurns the adorable Lord's love. You cannot conceive a truer picture of the altogether untractable than this. The wild ass will go its own way. But this is according to nature. What we are called to contemplate is the fallen being man, described as a "wild ass alone by itself." Ephraim and the Ten Tribes are compared to the wild ass for many reasons. 1. They refused Christ's easy yoke; their hearts were untamed; they were stubborn in their rejection of God's inviting grace; they were full of obdurate folly; they were headstrong and unruly, not consenting to any restraints; they chose their own course, running up and down after sin, mad upon their idols, as the wild ass traverses the desert only to gratify its own low nature. 2. The wild ass is excessively swift; and although numbers of them commonly herd together, yet it is usual for some one of them to break away and separate himself from his company, and run alone or at random by himself. It is when he thus breaks away that he is such an easy prey to the lion. Ephraim, in seeking to be all for himself, became the more sure prey of the devourer; and whenever the sinner breaks away by himself, thinking thereby to be masterless and free, he is in a fair way of being left to his own devices and given up by God. 3. The wild ass is the lion's prey in the wilderness, and the soul faithless to Christ, seeking its

own things, is as a wild ass alone by himself, or for himself, for his own gratification, his own pleasure, and the end of these things is death. (*Alfred Clayton Threlson.*)

Ver. 11. **Ephraim hath made many altars to sin.**—*Perversion of worship*.—Israel was to have only one altar. Ephraim had built a number of altars in different places. Men have perverted worship, not only by making false gods, but by making false altars for the true God. I. **FALSE WORSHIP IS A GREAT SIN.** 1. It is a very propagative sin. Once admit a wrong thing in worship, and that one thing will multiply itself; superstition will give it fertility. 2. It is a self-punishing sin. This is the heavy judgment of God, to give men their heart's desire in what is evil. II. **IT IS A SIN AGAINST GREAT LIGHT.** Israel could not say it sinned in ignorance. 1. God has given us laws concerning worship. 2. These laws are oft repeated. 3. These oft-repeated laws leave false worshippers without excuse. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 12. **I have written to him the great things of My law, but they were counted a strange thing.**—*A grave miscalculation*.—What God complains of is that whilst He has made known to Israel the loftiest truths of righteousness and grace, Israel has treated those truths as matters altogether foreign, with which he had the very least concern. And is not this matter of ignoring the law characteristic of our own day? How many live without attending to Divine revelation; they give it the go-by, they dismiss it with serene unconcern. I. **THE TRUTHS OF REVELATION ARE OF THE HIGHEST CONCERN.** If the dilemma of life is that we cannot attend to everything, only to things of pre-eminent importance, then we must attend to the great doctrines of revelation; for they are bound up with our highest interests. Take the doctrine of righteousness from the Old Testament. The righteousness of the law is essential to our worldly interests, to our characters, to our happiness, and to our final salvation. Take the doctrine of grace from the New Testament. Is not this great doctrine essential? Many pride themselves upon neglecting religion. They attend to their business, and have no time for religion. Religion is a fancy, a fashion, a luxury, a thing to be brought in if possible, to be left out if necessary. But it is the one thing needful. II. **THE TRUTHS OF REVELATION ARE OF ABIDING CONCERN.** In Hosea's time the law had become irrelevant, obsolete. Many now regard the law of God in revelation as inadequate to the modern world. But do not these very objectors go back to the Greek for intellectual perfection; to Euclid to learn mathematics; to Demosthenes to learn eloquence; to Praxiteles to learn sculpture; to Homer for the ideal of poetry? As God gave the Hebrew the knowledge of righteousness, it is no reflection on us that we go back to Moses and Isaiah, to Job and Paul. Our text declares the abiding validity of the law. God keeps on writing the law; He is continually freshening it, and making it a living thing in the conscience of the world. Men speak of outgrowing Christianity when they have become dead to it through a life of materialism, worldliness, lust, selfishness. God's Word is not a strange thing. It is written for our admonition and salvation, upon whom the ends of the world have come. We need the precious truths of this Holy Book as much as ever. III. **THE TRUTHS OF REVELATION ARE OF UNIVERSAL CONCERN.** There is often in men the feeling that the truths of religion may concern others, but are not applicable to them. But the weighty things of the law concern us all. We all need the mercy of God in Christ. (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *The Scripture despised*.—It is in vain to imagine that the depravity of the Jews was peculiar to themselves. They were fair specimens of human nature. Under superior advantages, we are no better than they. With regard to the Scriptures consider—I. **THEIR AUTHOR.** If we consider Scripture to be a cunningly devised fable, we shall treat it as a delusion. If we believe it to be the word of man, we shall receive it as a human production. If we are convinced that it is indeed the Word of God, we shall feel it to be Divine, and it will work powerfully in us, as it does in those who believe. In favour of these writings we advance a Divine claim. Whoever was the penman, God was the author. Evidence comes from the prophecies; from kinness with the Book of Creation; from adaptation to the wants of man. II. **THEIR CONTENTS.** We naturally judge of an author by his work, but there are cases in which we judge of a work by the author. As soon as we learn that God Himself is the author of this Book, we may approach it confidently, expecting to find in it a greatness becoming His glorious name. We find great things. 1. Great

in number. 2. In profundity. 3. In importance. 4. In their efficacy. The greatest thing we have upon earth is the Gospel. III. THE RECEPTION WHICH THIS DIVINE COMMUNICATION MEETS WITH. "They were counted as a strange thing." That means a thing foreign to us; a matter of indifference. That men thus treat the Scriptures of truth is the charge here advanced. 1. It is a charge the most wonderful. We should naturally suppose that a book written by God Himself would engage attention. And people are naturally attracted to a work that regards themselves. 2. The most criminal. We often err in our estimate of things, especially those of a moral nature. We have frequently a wrong standard by which to judge of what is good; hence that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. In the same way we deceive ourselves with regard to what is evil. God takes into view the dishonour done to Himself. He weighs the state of the mind, the motives that determine us, the good we oppose and hinder; the difficulties we have to overcome, the convictions we have to stifle, the reasons that render us inexcusable. By this rule, nothing can be more wicked than to treat with contempt or neglect the means God has provided for our everlasting welfare. 3. The most dreadful. Though God is most patient with you, His judgments must most surely fall. 4. The charge is very commonly deserved. Few pay a due regard to the blessed Word of God. Of those who hear the Word, how many are curious hearers, captious hearers, forgetful hearers, hearers only deceiving their own selves. 5. The charge is not universally true. There are many exceptions. Good men have always been attached to their Bibles. Let me urge upon you a still greater attention to the Word of God. (*William Jay.*) *Our duty to the Bible*:—What should be our attitude and action in relation to the Holy Volume? 1. We should accept the volume gratefully as the gift of God. It is the message of our Divine Father to us; designed to instruct us in all the multifarious duties of life—to guide us in the intricacies of our pilgrimage—to solace us in the seasons of our sadness—to be a companion to us in our hours of loneliness. It is fully adapted to all the necessities of our nature, and to all the vicissitudes of our surroundings. Let us treat it as we treat no other volume. Let there be no cessation to our thankfulness to God for a treasure so precious, a comfort so profound, a guide so unerring, a weapon so unfailing, a light so transcendent. 2. Our duty is to circulate it. The Book of books should be placed in the hands of every man. It is addressed to all, intended for all, adapted to all, and should not be confined to any clime or any class. 3. We owe the duty to God and ourselves, to study the volume for our own consolation and guidance. (1) The Book should be approached prayerfully. (2) It should be searched intelligently. (3) It should be searched frequently. Did ever a nation, a family, or an individual regret adopting and following the inspired Book as their guide? Compare it with all the volumes in the public libraries of to-day. None originated in purer motives; none had a Diviner origin; none has had a more wonderful history; none has produced fruits of happiness and holiness so world wide; none has been so miraculously preserved; none is destined to a future so glorious. (*J. Hiles Hitchens, D.D.*) *The great things of Scripture*:—I. THE HOLY SCRIPTURES ARE GOD'S WRITING. II. THE SUBJECTS OF WHICH THE HOLY SCRIPTURES TREAT ARE GREAT THINGS. The things written in the Scriptures may well be styled great things. 1. Because of their inherent grandeur. Can there possibly be any greater subject than God Himself in His character, in His infinite excellence, and in His relations to men, God as incarnated and revealed in the person of His Son Jesus Christ? Can any themes exceed in interest, atonement for sin, redemption, the indwelling Spirit, immortal life, resurrection, heaven? 2. Because of their supreme importance. They have been given mainly for the purpose of answering those great questions which had perplexed the minds of men from the beginning of human history, and which weighed heavily upon their hearts and consciences the more they thought about them. 3. Because of their great effects. They make all those great who lovingly receive them into their hearts. And much of what the Word of God does for individuals it also does for nations. It introduces into them the germs of solid prosperity and the elements of true greatness. It makes a people righteous, temperate, pure, unselfish, benevolent. III. EVERY HUMAN BEING HAS A PERSONAL INTEREST IN THE CONTENTS OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES. They have been written for all, in the sense of having been written for each individual in that all. I have written unto him. This "I have written" arms every part of

the sacred Book with all the authority of God. IV. AND YET, HOW MANY TREAT THE "GREAT THINGS" WHICH GOD HAS WRITTEN IN HIS WORD IN THE VERY MANNER WHICH IS HERE CONDEMNED! They were counted by them as a strange thing; that is, with indifference, with looks askance, as things with which they had no practical concern, perhaps even with positive aversion. (*Homiletic Magazine*.) *The dignity of the Scripture*:—God hath vouchsafed the free use of His Word; what greater bounty? Men pass by it as a thing not worth the looking to; what greater impiety? I. THE FREE USE OF GOD'S WORD. 1. The commendation of God's Word, by the plenty, abundance, and largeness of the matter that is in it; and by the price, excellency, and worth of the matter. All necessary points, either touching faith or manners, are abundantly contained and laid forth in the Scriptures. This fact condemns the common neglect and universal contempt of the rules and precepts of Holy Scripture. In matters of conversation, men prefer the examples and guides of the times, the course and practice of the multitude, before the principles of God's Spirit. The excellency of Scripture is seen in that the author of it is God; the matter of it is the mystery of godliness; the style of it, there is a fulness of majesty in simplicity of words; the end of it is to make men wise unto salvation. II. THE MERCY OF GOD IN VOUCHSAFING HIS WORD TO US. 1. How can it be said that God hath written His Word? 2. Why was it meet to write it? 3. When the Word of God began first to be written, and how it was preserved for the Church's use all that time. 4. How we shall be assured that that which amongst us is now called the Scripture is the very same Word and precious will of God, which He hath written for the use and comfort of His people. Nothing is able to persuade a man's conscience that the Scripture is the Word of God, but only the Spirit of God. The best proofs are to be fetched out of Scripture itself. Its excellency is shown in the purity of the law of God by Moses; the quality of the matter in Scripture; the antiquity of the Scripture. III. MAN'S MISUSE OF SCRIPTURE. 1. Shew the nature of the fault. They regarded Scripture as containing matter that did not pertain to them. This fault is compounded of three gross evils—disobedience, unthankfulness, neglect of their own private good, even the good of their souls. What judgment is due to this offence? In general it openeth the very floodgate of God's wrath. In particular, it makes all our prayers odious, and the torment of our souls. Seeing then that to account the great things of God's law as a strange thing, is a fault, a grievous fault, a fault liable to extreme punishment, our fault, there is no remedy but we must henceforth give all diligence, that the Word of God may be no more a stranger unto us, but a dweller with us, and familiar unto us. (*S. Hieron.*) *The great things of God*:—1. They are things that proclaim the greatness of the Law-maker; and things of great use and importance to us. 2. It is a great privilege to have the things of God's law written; thus they are reduced to a greater certainty, spread the further, and last the longer, with much less danger of being embezzled and corrupted than if they were transmitted by word of mouth only. 3. The things of God's law are of His own writing; for Moses and the prophets were His amanuenses. 4. It is the advantage of those that are members of the visible Church that these things are written to them, are intended for their direction, and so they must receive them. (*Matthew Henry*.) *The great things of God's law counted as a strange thing*:—That which should have been for their health, became to them an occasion of more heinous and aggravated guilt. I. GOD HAS WRITTEN UNTO US THE GREAT THINGS OF HIS LAW. By the law of God understand the whole revelation which God has given of His will. Take brief survey of God's law, as written and delivered to us. 1. The declarations contained in it are great and important. 2. There are many promises which are exceeding great and precious. 3. There are great things written in the way of invitation and encouragement. 4. There are great and interesting precepts and instructions. 5. There are solemn threatenings against obstinate and impenitent offenders. We are certainly not less favoured than Israel was. II. WHETHER AND IN WHAT DEGREE WE ARE CHARGEABLE WITH THEIR GUILT, in "counting the great things of God's law a strange thing." 1. They did not receive what God delivered to them as being of Divine authority, but as a kind of imposition to which they were under no obligation to submit. We may judge who among ourselves are in a similar state of guilt. All those who deny the Divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, and deem that invaluable treasury of great things to be nothing better than a cunningly devised fable. 2. They did not at all see or discern their own interest

in those things. Are not similar views entertained among us? And is not similar conduct the consequence? Some consider the Bible and religion as adapted only to persons of a gloomy and melancholy cast of mind. Others think the study of them belongs only to divines. 3. They were apprehensive that a strict adherence to God's law would make their conduct appear strange and singular among their surrounding neighbours. We contract greater guilt whenever we are ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; when we are afraid to act up to its sacred rules. The mercy of God, in writing and committing to us the great things of His law, is such as cannot be sufficiently estimated. It calls for fervent and lasting gratitude. "To whom much is given, of him shall much be required." (*S. Knight, M.A.*) *No excuse of ignorance*:—God had written their duties for them in the Ten Commandments with His own hand; He had written them of old, and manifoldly. He wrote those manifold things to them (or for them) by Moses, not for that time only, but that they might be continually before their eyes, as if He were still writing. He had written to them since, in their histories, in the Psalms. His words were still sounding in their ears through the teaching of the prophets. God did not only give His law or revelation once for all, and then leave it. By His providence and by His ministers, He continually renewed the knowledge of it, so that those who ignored it should have no excuse. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *The Bible to be read*:—Young man, if some one laughs at you because you read the Bible, laugh him to scorn. Let him laugh at you because you read Plato, or Homer, or Dante, or Shakespeare, or Browning; but laugh at him if he laugh at you because you read the Bible. More than we have gained from all other literatures we have gained from this. More of our law from Moses than from Justinian; more of our poetry from David than from Homer; more of our inspiration from Isaiah than from Dante, Demosthenes, or Cicero; more of our philosophy from Paul than from Plato; more of our life from this one Book than from all other books combined. And yet it is not the book; it is the message in the book that has to give the life. (*Lyman Abbott.*)

Ver. 14. **For Israel hath forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples; and Judah hath multiplied fenced cities.**—*Neither the religion nor security of a nation to be judged by appearances*:—The temples are the idolatrous temples built after the models from Syrophœnicia. Fenced cities are fortified places erected against foreign invaders. 1. The multiplicity of temples is no infallible proof of the growth of religion in a country. When we think of the moral causes that often lead to the erection of temples, they rather prove our forgetfulness of God. They are greed, spite, sectism. 2. The increase of national defences is no proof of the increase of national security. The safety of a people is in the moral excellence of their character, and in the guardianship of heaven. (*Homilist.*) *God forgotten*:—Prosperous men become dangerously independent, and in their pride they forget God, and exclaim with Nebuchadnezzar, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built?" As Daniel Quorn quaintly says, "The devil is called in the Bible 'Beelzebub'—that do mean, the 'god o' flies'—and you're sure to find 'em a-buzzin' about the honey-pots o' prosperity." Nothing so completely blinds a man as gold-dust, for he cannot even see God—he is a practical atheist. Affluence leads first to indifference, then to coldness, then to unbelief, then to cynicism, and then to godlessness! Henry IV. once asked the Duke of Alva if he had observed certain eclipses which had occurred that year. "No," was the reply, "I have had so much business to attend to upon earth, that I have had no time even to look up to heaven." This is one of the perils of prosperity—to forget God, and leave heaven out of account. (*Helping Words.*)

CHAPTER IX.

VERS. 1, 2. **Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy, as other people.**—*Unreliable joy*:—All are not Israel who are of Israel. The merely nominal Christian is not to rejoice as the true Christian should. I. MERELY NOMINAL PROFESSORS HAVE GREAT CAUSE TO MOURN. These words suggest a vast number of Israelites preparing for the songs of those that triumph, the shout of those that feast. To

them the prophet says, "Rejoice not." 1. The first reason why Israel should not rejoice is that they had turned aside from the Lord. In leaving the Lord we leave all true happiness behind. 2. Because they were at ease in Zion. 3. Because they were heaping up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath. 4. Because they were without hope in the world. 5. Because they were under sentence of condemnation. To every merely nominal Christian God sends this message, "Rejoice not for joy, as other people." II. **GOD'S PEOPLE OUGHT TO BE A REJOICING PEOPLE.** 1. Christ's atonement should make them happy. 2. The Triune God has made with them a covenant, ordered in all things and sure. 3. The joy of the Lord is their strength. 4. The rest of God shall be theirs. 5. The Lord God omnipotent reigneth. The Lord reigneth, then your lot in this world will be controlled by the King of kings. Then your sorrows, disappointments, crosses, losses, and all the events of your life are controlled by His sceptre. Then the affairs of the home, and the joys and friendships of life are in the hands of the infinitely wise and good, and you may well rejoice. (*A. Clayton Thiselton.*) *The miseries of sin*.—The doctrine of this chapter relates to a time wherein Israel flourished much by reason of outward plenty, victories, and confederacies with their neighbours; and therefore did harden and please themselves in their sins, whatever the prophets said to the contrary. Therefore the whole chapter contains a large description of the miseries that were to come upon them for their sins, which may be branched out in four parts. 1. There is a description of the desolation to come upon them, to silence their presumptuous and carnal joy; wherein he declareth they had no cause to be insolent, thinking to prosper in sin as other nations, seeing their sin (idolatry) was more heinous than the sins of other people. 2. This desolation is declared to be near, whereby the Lord would discover the folly of their false prophets, and their sin in procuring such at God's hands, who, whatever they pretended to, were but snares to the people and causes of God's anger. 3. They are charged with the sins of their fathers, whom they imitated, hereby provoking God to call them to an account, particularly with ingrate forsaking of God, for which they are threatened that God would cut them off without hope of prosperity and abandon them. 4. Their superstition and idolatry, wherein their princes had chief hand, is again laid to their charge; for which they are threatened with God's anger, and rejection, and exile, and with cutting them off root and branch. Such despisers of God's Word should be rejected, and made to wander in exile. (*George Hutcheson.*)

Ver. 3. They shall not dwell in the Lord's land.—*The Lord's land*.—Before, God was to them as a father taking maintenance away from them, leaving them to suffer want; but here His anger increases, and He puts them out of His house; as a nation out of His land. God would make them know that it was His land, that they were but tenants at will, and enjoyed the land upon conditions of obedience. It is a good meditation for us to dwell upon, that we are God's stewards; the Lord is the great landlord of all the world. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." The land of Canaan was "Jehovah's land" in some special senses. 1. It was a land that God had "espied" as a special place for His people. 2. It was the land of promise. 3. It was a land given by oath (Gen. xxiv. 7). 4. It was a land which the Lord brought His people into by "a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm." 5. It was a land divided by lot. The possession that any man had was ordered by God Himself by lot. 6. It was a land wherein God dwelt Himself, a land that God called His own rest. It was the land wherein were the ordinances and worship of God, and His honour dwelt there, and so it had a peculiar blessing upon it above every land on the face of the whole earth. 7. It was a land over which God's eye was in a more special manner. 8. This land was typical of the rest of the Church in heaven. Then it would be a great judgment of God to drive men out of this land for their sin. To be cast out of those mercies which God by an extraordinary providence has brought to us is a sore and grievous evil. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) **And they shall eat unclean things in Assyria.**—*The sting of Divine judgment*.—Here we have the degradation of sin. To be ceremonially clean or pure was the joy and pride of Israel. The Jews would not eat things that were common or unclean, and by this mark they were distinguished from other people. Whilst Israel lived even in nominal piety, how superficial soever it might be, God gave him protection against degradation; but when Israel turned away adulterously from God, and sought satisfaction at forbidden fountains and altars,

then the Lord brought upon Israel the misery of this degradation and shame. Israel was forced to eat things that were unclean, things that were killed with the blood in them, things that revolted the sense of the nation, and went dead against all the prejudices of education. Thus a badge was taken from the shoulder of Israel, a distinction was removed from the chosen people; they could have borne reproaches on the ground of moral disobedience with comparative indifference, but to have social boundaries and distinctions broken down was a judgment which Israel keenly felt. But the Lord will seize the sinner at some point, for He cannot be baffled in judgment or thwarted in the application of His righteousness. The Lord's judgments are ordered according to our apostasy; God will strike most where we feel most; He will follow our pride and our vanity, and smite them so as to bring upon them our keenest shame. God will not content Himself with some general judgment; He will specifically scrutinise and either reward or punish according to the result of His inquest. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 5. What will ye do in the solemn day, and in the day of the feast of the Lord?—*Feasting after unaccepted sacrifice*.—Calvin thinks the allusion is to the time of exile, when the people would be deprived of all their sacrifices. But the better point is that the sacrifices of Ephraim being 1. unauthorised, and 2. unaccompanied with righteousness, could not be accepted; consequently they could have no joy in their lesser or greater festal times, because all the joy of such times depended on their reconciliation and acceptance with God. What joy can there be in any of the joy times of life when we bear in our hearts the sad conviction of our wilful and persistent estrangement from God? And men do carry that secret conviction even when, to their fellows, they seem to be bold and self-satisfied. There is no sunshine on human life when God's smile is hidden. Illustrate from the anxiety of Job concerning his children. They were feasting, but he did not feel sure that it was feasting after sacrifice, enjoying themselves with the smile of God's favour resting on them. So he offered sacrifices to ensure the acceptance which they had missed. In the ordinary ritual of the Jews a feast followed sacrifice, as in the case of Samuel. This was the case with simple sacrifice and with the special sacrifices of solemn days. No joy could be in the feast if the sacrifice had failed to gain acceptance. It is the supreme rule for all the joy times of human life. They never can be to us what they ought to be, unless we enter on them with the full sense of acceptance with God. It must always be, "sacrifice before feast." (*Robert Tuck, B.A.*) *The solemn days of life*.—The day here referred to is one of the great Jewish feasts, either Passover, Pentecost, or Tabernacles. What will you children of Abraham do when you are deprived of the privilege of attending these solemn assemblies? There are solemn days awaiting all of us—I. THE DAY OF PERSONAL AFFLICTION. II. THE DAY OF SOCIAL BEREAVEMENT. III. THE DAY OF DEATH. This awaits every man. What will ye do in this day, when heart and flesh shall fail? IV. THE DAY OF JUDGMENT. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 7. The days of visitation are come, the days of recompence are come.—*Days of recompence*.—The passionate anguish that breathes in these words gives its colour to the whole book of Hosea's prophecies. His language, and the movements of his thoughts, are far removed from the simplicity and self-control which characterise the prophecy of Amos. Indignation and sorrow, tenderness and severity, faith in the sovereignty of Jehovah's love and a despairing sense of Israel's infidelity, are woven together in a sequence which has no logical plan, but is determined by the battle and alternate victory of contending emotions; and the swift transitions, the fragmentary, unbalanced utterance, the half-developed allusions, that make his prophecy so difficult to the commentator, express the agony of this inward conflict. Hosea, above all other prophets, is a man of deep affections, of a gentle, poetic nature. His heart is too true and tender to snap the bonds of kindred and country, or mingle aught of personal bitterness with the severity of Jehovah's words. Alone in the midst of a nation that knows not Jehovah, without disciple or friend, without the solace of domestic affection—for even his home was full of shame and sorrow—he yet clings to Israel with inextinguishable love. The doom which he proclaims against his people is the doom of all that is dearest to him on earth; his heart is ready to break with sorrow, his very reason totters under the awful vision of judgment,

his whole prophecy is a long cry of anguish, as again and again he renews his appeal to the heedless nation that is running headlong to destruction. But it is all in vain. The weary years roll out, the signs of Israel's dissolution thicken, and still his words find no audience. Like a silly dove fluttering in the toils, Ephraim turns now to Assyria, now to Egypt, "but they return not to Jehovah their God, and seek not Him for all this." Still the prophet stands alone in his recognition of the true cause of the multiplied distresses of his nation, and still it is his task to preach repentance to deaf ears, to declare a judgment in which only himself believes. (*W. Robertson Smith, LL.D.*) **The prophet is a fool, and the spiritual man is mad.**—*Charge against religious ministers:*—What the prophet means is this. When the predicted retribution had come, Israel would learn that the prosperity which some of the prophets had predicted (*Ezek. xiii. 10*) proved them infatuated fools. This charge against religious ministers is—

I. SOMETIMES TOO TRUE. 1. There are men of weak minds; utterly incapable of taking a harmonious view of truth, or even forming a clear and complete conception of any great principle. 2. There are men of irrational theologies. They propound theological dogmas which are utterly incongruous with human reason, and therefore un-Biblical and un-Divine. 3. There are men of silly rituals. **II. OFTEN A SCOFFING CALUMNY.** The ideal preacher is the wisest and most philosophical man of his age. 1. He aims at the highest end. 2. He works in the right direction. 3. He employs the best means. The best is not legislation, art, poetry, rhetoric, but love. This is the Cross, the power of God unto salvation. (*Homilist.*) **Spiritual madness:**—Literally, the man of the lying spirit, the man who was determined to deceive the nations: that prophet is declared to be a fool, and that spiritual man is mad. In other scriptures another spiritual man is also said to be mad. Christ was so charged. Paul was declared to be mad. The apostles had to vindicate themselves against daily charges of insanity. Why so? Simply because they were spiritual men. There is a madness without which there is no greatness. Talent is never mad, genius is seldom sane; respectability is always decorous, enthusiasm sometimes makes a new map of the world every day, lining it and pencilling it according to an eccentricity not to be brought within rules and mechanical proprieties. Enthusiasm is another name for the kind of madness which is described in the Scriptures. It is not the professing Christian who is mad. He may be too sagacious; he may be too shrewd; he may be but a calculator. Men of mechanical piety never helped the cause of the Son of God. We should have more progress if we had more madness; we should make a great impression if we had more enthusiasm. The spiritual man is necessarily mad in the estimation of the worldly man. The spiritual man is mad, because he says that mind is greater than what we know by the name of matter. The religious or spiritual man is mad because he trusts to a spirit. The spiritual man sees the invisible, and is not to be laughed out of his spiritual ecstasy. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) **A converted woman accounted as mad:**—

Rev. John Robertson says: "During the revivals of 1859, a woman living in an Aberdeenshire village with her mother and sister was converted, and was full of enthusiasm. She went from door to door pleading with the people to let the Lord Jesus into their hearts. The mother and sister had a consultation together, and they came to the sad conclusion that Mary was mad. The village doctor, and with him the doctor of a neighbouring village, was called in. They consulted, and they came to the same conclusion, and thereupon signed the schedule for her admission to a lunatic asylum, simply because she besought one and all of those whom she loved to come to Jesus. On the night preceding the day upon which she was to be sent to the asylum the sister and the mother had strange thoughts, and when they met in the morning the mother said to her daughter, "Do you know, I have just been wondering all night whether it is Mary that is mad, or we." "Well, do you know, mother," replied the daughter, "I have just been wondering the same thing." They thought deeply, and searched their hearts, until they came to the conclusion that it was not Mary, but they themselves who were mad. Brownley North says that he took tea with the whole family, and with the relations on both sides of the house, about twenty-three in all, who, through Mary's pleading, had been led to Christ."

Ver. 9. As in the days of Gibeah.—*The lessons of an old story* (*Judg. xix., xx.*):—
1. When men to whom we seek for protection deal falsely with us, their wickedness is great in the eyes of God. 2. We may meet with worse usage from those

who profess religion than from those who profess it not. 3. God may regard those as unholy and unclean who make a fair show of religion. 4. For men to stand up impudently and boldly in the defence of wickedness committed is abominable in the eyes of God. 5. To join with others in defence of evil is worse than to stand out ourselves in evil. 6. Those who defend evil may for awhile prosper, but they must at last perish. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *Corrupting forms of wickedness.*—From the sad and dreadful story of Gibeah learn—1. Contempt of true prophets, and delighting in deceivers and their delusions, will draw men upon abominable wickedness. 2. As men once giving way to gross sins will soon involve themselves so that they cannot recover themselves, so it is a dreadful condition to be entangled in sin without hope of recovery, and for men to be active in hardening themselves. 3. As there is no wicked course or measure of sin, wherein men have fallen, but the Church, departing from God, may fall upon it again, so the sins of progenitors will be put upon the account of the present generation who imitate them, and this will draw to a great account. (*George Hutcheson.*)

Ver. 10. **They went to Baal-peor, and separated themselves unto that shame.**—*Sin and separation.*—The shame here alluded to was idolatry. I. ALL SIN IS SHAME. 1. It is shame in its commission. People seldom do iniquity in the full blaze of day. They would rather not be seen in its commission. It is shameful to be a sinner; to possess reason and to play the part of an idiot; to have liberty and to act the part of a slave; to be admitted to the arms of a benefactor and then to stab him in return. 2. It is a shame in its consequence. It produces shame. "Thou shalt be confounded," says God, "because of your shame." "The wicked shall rise to shame and everlasting contempt." II. SIN IS SEPARATION. Before a man can join the army of sin he must leave the service of God. Hence he separates himself. From what? 1. From the love, protection, guidance, and companionship of his God. What blessings to turn his back upon! 2. From the principles of truth, righteousness, and grace. He becomes another character. All that can exalt him is left behind. 3. From the prospect of future bliss. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 15. **All their wickedness is in Gilgal: for there I hated them.**—*Punishment proportional to privilege.*—Translated into modern life, the prophet's plea would read thus. "All their wickedness is in the house of God; all their wickedness is after coming from the table of the Lord, or after receiving some faithful letter, or after their own painful convictions and sorrowful confession, or after their repeated resolutions and vows. This helps us to realise how a Jew would feel who heard the prophet make this reproach. 1. At Gilgal the covenant of circumcision was renewed for the second time since they came out of Egypt. What circumcision was to the Jew, religious instruction is to us: circumcision was God's seal to the Jews that He would cleanse them from taint of Egyptian idolatry. 2. At Gilgal they celebrated the passover for the first time after they came out of Egypt. The Lord's supper is our passover. 3. It was at Gilgal that God Himself appeared in a most remarkable manner to assure the people of Israel that He would be their deliverer. The captains of the Lord's host came. Observe Joshua's momentary surprise, courage, reverence. Notice the communication. 1. Beginning life in humble circumstances may be a Gilgal to us. 2. So may a season of affliction be. Or 3. The loss of a dear friend. But the wickedness of Gilgal may be taken away. (*W. G. Barrett.*)

Ver. 17. **My God will cast them away, . . . and they shall be wanderers among the nations.**—*Divine severities for a nation.*—1. It is a judgment to have an unsettled spirit. A spirit wandering up and down, unable to settle to anything, sometimes in this place, sometimes in that, sometimes in this way, and sometimes in another, this is a judgment of God. The wandering of men's appetites and desires works them a great deal of vexation. 2. Those who are cast away out of God's house can have no rest; they go about like the unclean spirit, seeking rest, but can find none. The Church of God and His ordinances are God's rest. But you will say, May not men be wanderers; that is, may they not be cast out of their habitations and countries, and wander up and down, and yet not be cast off from God? There is no evil in wandering if we carry a good conscience with us. But there it is, "They shall be wanderers among

the nations." It was a great judgment of God for Israel to be scattered among the nations, for they were a people that were separated from the nations, and not to be reckoned among the nations; they were God's "peculiar treasure." This curse is upon the Jews to this very day,—how are they wanderers among the nations! (*Jeremiah Burroughs*.) **Wanderers among the nations.**—*The lost ten tribes*:—The words of the prophet imply an abiding condition. He does not say, "They shall wander," but "They shall be wanderers." Such was to be their lot; such has been their lot ever since; and such was not the ordinary lot of those large populations whom Eastern conquerors transported from their own land. The transported population had a settled abode allotted to it, whether in the capital or the provinces. Sometimes new cities or villages were built for the settlers. Israel at first was so located. Perhaps on account of the frequent rebellions of their kings the ten tribes were placed amid a wild, warlike population, "in the cities of the Medes." When the interior of Asia was less known, people thought that they were still to be found there. The Jews fabled, that the ten tribes lay behind some mighty and fabulous river, Sambatyon, or were fenced in by mountains. Christians thought that they might be found in some yet unexplored part of Asia. Undeceived as to this, they still asked whether the Afghans or Yezides, or the natives of North America were the ten tribes, or whether they were the Nestorians of Kurdistan. So natural did it seem that they, like other nations so transported, should remain as a body near or at the places where they had been located by their conquerors. The prophet says otherwise. He says, their abiding condition shall be, "they shall be wanderers among the nations"; wanderers among them, but no part of them. Before the final dispersion of the Jews at the destruction of Jerusalem "the Jewish race," Josephus says, "was in great numbers throughout the whole world, interspersed with the nations." Those assembled at the Day of Pentecost had come from all parts of Asia Minor, but also from Parthia, Media, Persia, Mesopotamia, Arabia, Egypt, maritime Lybia, Crete, and Italy. Wherever the apostles went in Asia or Greece they found Jews, in numbers sufficient to raise persecution against them. The Jews, scoffing, asked whether our Lord would go to the dispersion among the Greeks. The Jews of Egypt were probably the descendants of those who went thither after the murder of Gedaliah. The Jews of the North, as well as those of China, India, Russia, were probably descendants of the ten tribes. From one end of Asia to the other, and onward through the Crimea, Greece, and Italy, the Jews, by their presence, bare witness to the fulfilment of the prophecy. Not like the wandering Indian tribe, who spread over Europe, living apart in their native wildness, but, settled among the inhabitants of each city, they were still distinct, although with no polity of their own, a distinct, settled, yet foreign and subordinate race. "Still remains unreversed this irrevocable sentence as to the temporal state and face of an earthly kingdom, that they remain still 'wanderers,' or dispersed among other nations, and have never been restored, nor are in any likelihood of ever being restored to their own land, so as to call it their own. If ever any of them hath returned thither, it hath been but as strangers." (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*)

CHAPTER X.

VER. 1. Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself.—*The abuse of worldly prosperity*:—Our version is faulty here. Elzas renders, "Israel is a luxurious vine, whose fruit is very abundant." So our subject is the abuse of prosperity. Some men are very prosperous. Every branch of their life clusters with fruit. Some nations are very prosperous. When is prosperity abused? I. When it is used with an exclusive REGARD TO OUR OWN SELFISH ENDS. As—1. For self-indulgence. 2. For self-aggrandisement. The right which property gives is the right to lay it out for the benefit of our fellow-men. II. WHEN IT IS USED WITHOUT A SUPREME REGARD TO THE CLAIMS OF GOD. Unless we employ our property according to the directions of the Great Proprietor we abuse the trust. How does God require us to employ our property? 1. For the amelioration of human woes. 2. For the dispersion of

human ignorance. 3. For the elevation of the human soul. To raise it to the knowledge, the image, the fellowship, and the enjoyment of God. How are we, as a nation, using our enormous prosperity? (*Homilist*.) *The figure of the vine*:—Israel is a luxuriant vine. Not as in the A.V. "an empty vine," nor as in the margin A.V. "a vine emptying the fruit which it giveth," but a vine which pours itself forth, spreads out its branches. It denotes the outward prosperity and abundance which they had enjoyed. The vineyard had been planted with the choicest vine, and diligently cultivated, but it bore wretched fruit, significant of sins against God. (*W. Henry Green, D.D., LL.D.*) *The Church compared to a vine*:—1. No plant has a more unpromising outside than the vine. 2. The vine is the most fruitful plant that grows out of the earth. 3. No plant requires so great care as the vine. 4. The vine is the most depending plant in the world, unable to underprop itself, it must have props more than any other plant, and therefore nature has given it tendrils by which it catches hold of anything near it. 5. If it be not fruitful, it is the most unprofitable thing in the world. 6. A vine is the most spreading of plants. It spreads larger than other plants, and fills a great deal of room with its branches. 7. The vine is the softest and most tender of plants, the emblem of peace. But Israel is an empty, or emptying, vine; he makes himself empty. (1) Emptiness in those who profess themselves to be God's people is a very great evil. It is unnatural. It is a dishonour to the root. It frustrates the Lord of all the care, and cost, and charge He expends. There is no blessing upon thy soul if thou art "an empty vine." If there be grace, it cannot but bear fruit. Common gifts shall be taken away, if the vine proves empty. The evil of emptiness is great according to the greatness of opportunities. (2) Sin will empty a land of all the blessings God has bestowed. Sin is an emptying thing; it empties lands, families, and persons of all their outward comforts. (3) It is all one, to be an empty Christian, and to bring forth fruit to oneself. Men think that which they bring forth to themselves is clear gain; but this is an infinite mistake, for that which is for thyself is lost, and that which is for God is gained. (*Jeremiah Burroughs*.) *Israel as a robbed vine*:—The prophet means, that Israel was like a vine which is robbed after the ingathering is come: for the word *bekok* means properly to pillage, or to plunder. The prophet compares the gathering of the grapes to robbing; and this view best suits the place. Israel is like a robbed vine, for it was stripped of its fruit; and then he adds, "he will make fruit for himself." I understand by the words that Israel would lay up fruit for himself after the robbing, and sacred history confirms this view; for this people, we know, had been in various ways chastised: so, however, that they gathered new strength. For the Lord intended only to admonish them gently, that they might be healed; but nothing was effected by God's moderation. The case, however, was so, that Israel produced new fruit, as a vine, after having been robbed one year, brings forth a new vintage; for one ingathering does not kill the vine. Thus also Israel did lay up fruit for himself; that is, after the Lord had collected there His vintage, He again favoured the people with His blessing, and, as it were, restored them anew; as vines in the spring throw out their branches, and then produce fruit. God, in the next clause, complains that Israel, after having been once gathered, went on in his own wickedness. This is a useful doctrine. We see how the Lord forbears in inflicting punishments—He does not execute them with the utmost rigour. But how do they act who are thus moderately chastised? As soon as they can recruit their spirits they are carried away by a more headstrong inclination, and grow insolent against God. (*John Calvin*.) *Israel as a vine*:—A luxuriant vine; one which poureth out, poureth itself out into leaves, abundant in switches (as most old versions explain it), luxuriant in leaves, emptying itself in them, and empty of fruit; like the fig-tree which our Lord cursed. For the more a fruit tree putteth out its strength in leaves and branches, the less and worse fruit it beareth. "The juices which it ought to transmute into wine it disperseth in the ambitious idle shew of leaves and branches." The sap in the vine is an emblem of His Holy Spirit, through whom alone we can bear fruit. "His grace which was in me," says St. Paul, "was not in vain." It is in vain to us, when we waste the stirrings of God's Spirit in feelings, aspirations, longings, transports, "which bloom their hour and fade." Like the leaves, these feelings aid in maturing fruit; when there are leaves only, the tree is barren, and "nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned." "It bringeth forth fruit for itself," lit. "setteth fruit to, or on, itself." Luxuriant in leaves, its fruit

becomes worthless, and is from itself to itself. It is uncultured (for Israel refused culture), pouring itself out, as it willed, in what it willed. It had a rich show of leaves, a show also of fruit, but not for the Lord of the vineyard, since they came to no size or ripeness. Yet to the superficial glance, Israel, at this time, was rich, prosperous, healthy, abundant in all things. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *Self-aggrandisement, and its secret*:—"He bringeth forth fruit unto himself"; and yet, literally, he brings forth no fruit at all, only long stem and tendrils, and leaves innumerable: his fruit is all foliage. The figure is very Hebraic and grand. Israel is a vine, and a growing vine, but Israel misses the purpose of the vine by never growing any wine; growing nothing but weedy leaves, and so disappointing men when they come to find fruit thereon, and discover none. The Church is an empty vine. Theology is an empty vine. All religious controversy that is conducted for its own sake—that is to say, with the single view of winning a victory in words—is an empty vine,—luxuriant enough, but it is the luxuriance of ashes. "According to the multitude of his fruit he hath increased the altars; according to the goodness of his land, they have made goodly images." They have gone *pari passu* with the Almighty—He, the living Father, doing the good, and they, the rebellious men, doing proportionate evil. When the harvest has been plentiful, the idolatry has been large, increasing in urgency and importance; when the vine has brought forth abundantly, another image has been set up. That is the teaching of the prophet; yea, that is the impeachment of God. God may be represented as saying, Your wickedness has been in proportion to My goodness; the more I have given you, the less I have received from you; the larger the prosperity with which I have crowned you, the more zealous have you been in your idolatry; the more lovingly I have revealed Myself to you, the greater your wantonness, selfishness, and rebellion. That is not only Hebrew, it is English; that is not only ancient history, it is the tragedy, the blasphemy of to-day. What is the explanation? Where is the point at which we can stand and say: This is the beginning of the mischief? The answer is in the second verse, "Their heart is divided." That has always been the difficulty of God; He has so seldom been able to get a consenting heart. God says: These people want to do two irreconcilable things—they want to serve God and Mammon; they want to courteously recognise the existence of Jehovah, and then run to kiss the lips of Baal. Their heart does not all go one way; they cannot wholly throw off the true religion; it has indeed become to them little better than a superstition, but men do not like to gather up all the traditions of the past, and cast them in one bundle into the flowing river, in the hope that it may be carried away and lost for ever. So they come to the altar sometimes; now and again they look in at the church door; intermittently they listen to the old Psalm and the half-remembered hymn; but in the soul of them they are drunk with idolatry. There are persons very anxious to maintain orthodoxy who are the most notorious thieves in society; there are those who would subscribe to any society to defend Sunday, if they might do on Monday just what they liked; they are zealous about the Sabbath, and especially zealous that other people should keep it, but on Monday you would never imagine that there was a Sunday. "Their heart is divided." (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *The self-shoot the wrong one to cultivate*:—A little while ago an inexperienced hand had trained a rose-tree over a porch. The leaves of the tree were green, and the growth was strong, but not a flower was there. "Why is this?" inquired the master of a skilled gardener. The answer was given by an act, not by words, for, taking out his pruning knife, the gardener in one moment levelled the rampant growth to the ground. "What have you done?" cried the master. "Don't you see, sir," was the reply; "your man has been cultivating the wrong shoot!" and, at the same time, the gardener pointed out the grafted rose, which had barely struggled two inches above the ground, and which the wild shoot had completely overwhelmed. In a few months the graft, set free from the encumbering growth of the wrong shoot, sent out in vigorous life its beautiful branches, and covered the porch with its luxuriance; and there it lives, a parable of heavenly things. Not all the cultivation or training in the world could have made that wrong shoot become a beautiful and flowering tree, neither will the efforts of a whole life succeed in making our "old man" like Christ, or fruitful towards God. God has condemned our nature in the Cross of Christ: He has judiciously cut it down; and no fruit fit for God shall grow upon it for ever. The practical word, then, to those Christians who are seeking to produce out of self fruit acceptable to God is, Do not cultivate the

wrong shoot. (*H. F. Wetherby.*) *Sin the product of man's free will* :—This is the oldest illustration of cause and effect known to our race. The Old Testament, with its system of conscience education, is a profound commentary on the subject, its moral law creating a knowledge of sin, its sacrificial system deepening the sense of the guilt of sin, and its prophetic ministry denouncing sin, and bringing the sorrow and suffering following sin home to the hearts of the kings and the people with unflinching courage and precision. None the less striking is this truth when read from the pages of classic heathenism. It is Helen's crime and that of Paris which brings on sorrow in the downfall of Troy. *Æschylus*, *Sophocles*, and *Euripides* are pagan preachers enunciating the terrible judgments following in the train of wrong-doing. *Dante*, *Chaucer*, *Spenser*, *Shakespeare*, *Milton* build their poems and construct their dramas upon this foundation. Sin is the product of man's free will. "Israel bringeth forth fruit unto himself." In appropriating the gifts of God to self-gratification the Creator has been ignored. Sin is man's own product. It is the child of our own self-will. While it is true that in every human being there is a persistent tendency to take the wrong direction in moral development, yet no man is ever otherwise than a wilful sinner. The election by the individual will to act counter to the requirements of God is the source of all sin. Again, we see the insidious manner in which sin makes its home in the human heart. Self-interest is pressed into the service of sin, but sin, once getting a foothold, transforms a healthy self-interest into gross selfishness. Growth and prosperity are turned to sinful uses. In the satiety of self-indulgence, in the greed of self-aggrandisement, in the divided heart, we witness the wreck of God's purposes as they are related to human life. Into this terrible state of antagonism to the will of God the prophet *Hosea* declares Israel has come. When the Almighty created man with free will, He, in a sense, "set bounds to His own omnipotence." From that hour man has held in his will the awful power of resisting God. Sorrow, then, and suffering, are the inevitable results of persistent wilful sin. The moment sin is committed judgment begins with the steady developments of growth. But in the distressing picture of sin and its consequences now before us there is relief afforded. Sad, indeed, would be the lot of man if he were irrevocably doomed to endure the conditions of his terrible fortune. There is promised the overthrow of the dominion of sin by repentance and service in the cause of righteousness. (*E. M. Taylor.*)

Ver. 2. Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty.—A divided heart.—It is one grievous fault with the Church of Christ at the present day, that it is not merely divided somewhat in its creed, and somewhat also in the practice of its ordinances, but, alas! it is also somewhat divided in heart. When our doctrinal divisions grow to so great a head that we cease to co-operate, when our opinions upon mere ordinances become so acid towards each other that we can no longer extend the right hand of fellowship to those who differ from us, then indeed is the Church of God found faulty. Even *Beelzebub*, with all his craft, cannot stand when once his hosts are divided. The smallest church in the world is potent for good when it hath but one heart and one soul; when pastor, elders, deacons, and members are bound together by a threefold cord which cannot be broken. Union is strength. By union we live, and by disunion we expire. Apply the text to our individual condition. **I. A FEARFUL DISEASE.** "Their heart is divided." 1. The seat of the disease. It affects a vital part, a part so vital that it affects the whole man. There is no power, no passion, no motive, no principle which does not become vitiated when once the heart is diseased. 2. The disease touches this vital part after a most serious fashion. The heart is cleft in twain. Nothing can go right when that which should be one organ becomes two; when the one motive power begins to send forth its life-floods into two diverse channels, and so creates intestine strife and war. 3. It is a division in itself peculiarly loathsome. Men who are possessed of it do not feel themselves unclean; they will venture into the church, they will propose to receive her communion, and they will afterwards go and mingle with the world; and they do not feel that they have become dishonest. Take the glass and look into that man's heart, and you will discern that it is loathsome, because Satan and sin reign there. All the while that he is living in sin he is pretending that he is a child of God. Stand out in thy true colours. If thou art a worldling, be a worldling. 4. It is a disease always difficult to cure, because it is chronic. It is not an acute disease, which brings pain and suffering and sorrow with it.

But it is chronic, it has got into the very nature of the man. What physician can join together a divided heart? 5. This disease is a very difficult one to deal with, because it is a flattering disease. The most cunning of all flatterers is a man's own heart. A man's own heart will flatter him, even about his sins. He is contented and self-satisfied. II. THE USUAL SYMPTOMS OF THE DISEASE. 1. Formality in religious worship. These men have no faith; they have only a creed. They have no life within, and they supply its place with outward ceremony. What wonder, therefore, that we fiercely defend that! 2. Inconsistency. You must not see him always if you would have a good opinion of him. You must be guarded as to the days on which you call upon him. You must have a divided heart if you live an inconsistent life. 3. Variableness in object. There are men who run first in one direction then in another. Their religion is all spasmodic. They are taken with it as men are taken with the ague. They take up with religion, and then they lay it down again. 4. Frivolity in religion is often a token of a divided heart. It is perhaps too common a sin with young persons to treat religion with a light and frivolous air. There is a seriousness which is well-becoming, especially in youthful Christians. III. THE SAD EFFECTS OF A DIVIDED HEART. When a man's heart is divided he is at once everything that is bad. 1. With regard to himself, he is an unhappy man. Men who are neither this nor that, neither one thing nor another, are always uneasy and miserable. 2. He is useless in the Church. Of what good is such a man to us? We cannot put him in a pulpit or make him a deacon. We cannot commit to his charge spiritual matters, because we discern that he is not spiritual himself. We know that no man who is not united in his heart vitally and entirely to Christ can ever be of the slightest service to the Church of God. 3. He is dangerous to the world. He is like a leper going abroad in the midst of healthy people; he spreads the disease. Though outwardly whitewashed like a sepulchre, he is more dangerous to the world than the most vicious of men. 4. He is contemptible to everybody. When he is found out nobody receives him; scarcely will the world own him, and the Church will have nothing to administer to him but censure. 5. He is reprobate in the sight of God. To the eye of infinite purity he is one of the most obnoxious and detestable of beings. The holy God both hates his sin and the lies with which he endeavours to cover it. IV. THE FUTURE PUNISHMENT OF THE MAN WHOSE HEART IS DIVIDED. Unless he is rescued by a great salvation. Let me describe the terrible condition of the hypocrite when God shall come to judge the world. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The divided heart*:—The root of the evil in Israel was, as always, a heart divided,—that is, between God and Baal,—or, perhaps, “smooth,” that is, dissimulating and insincere. In reality, Baal alone possesses the heart which its owner would share between him and Jehovah. “All in all, or not at all” is the law. Whether Baals or calves were set beside God, He was equally deposed. Then with a swift turn Hosea proclaims the impending judgment, setting himself and the people as if down in the future. He hears the first peal of the storm, and echoes it in that abrupt “now.” The first burst of the judgment scatters dreams of innocence, and the cowering wretches see their sin by the lurid light. That discovery awaits every man whose heart has been “divided.” To the gazers and to himself masks drop, and the true character stands out with appalling clearness. What will that light show us to be? The ruin of their projects teaches godless men at last that they have been fools to take their own way; for all defences, resources, and protectors, chosen in defiance of God, prove powerless when the strain comes. It is a dismal thing to have to bear the brunt of chastisement for what we see to have been a blunder as well as a crime. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Antagonistic principles*:—Solomon wanted to live a life of self-indulgence while posing as a servant of God. His offering costly sacrifices, and building a magnificent temple, and making a beautiful prayer, could not rectify the inconsistency. The two could not exist together in one person. It was like the ice palace built for an empress of Russia, which was beautiful as a dream, with elaborate architecture, and glistening like a jewel in the sun. But it was intensely cold, and the empress ordered a fire to be built in it. The architect had to explain to her that the fire would destroy the building. She could not have an ice palace and warmth at the same time. Neither can any one have a heart of icy selfishness along with the warmth of God's love. (*Christian Herald.*) *A divided heart*:—You know there is what is called “changeable silk,” which looks now green and now brown, just as the light chances to strike it. It is neither brown nor green, as a matter

of fact, but a commingling and compromise of the two: therefore you can get whichever colour you like, according as you present it to the sun. And I am sorry to say that it is so with a good many Christians. You can get a worldly shade or a heavenly shade on their piety, just according to the company they are in. (*A. J. Gordon.*) *Divided hearts*:—We are told that some of our scientists have recently been trying a very doubtful experiment. They take a section of one creature and fasten it upon another creature of an altogether different type. This is done by a delicate surgery when the creature is immature, and when it comes to perfection you have a strange monster. For instance, it is said that they fasten a section of a spider on the butterfly, and by and by you get an alarming and tragical organism. You may imagine what becomes of those antagonistic impulses and instincts. The creature has a feeling for the light and a passion for the darkness; it has a taste for blood, and loves the scent of roses; is afraid of itself and worries itself. Now, when you have seen the spider and the butterfly blended into one organism, you have seen a pale reflection of your own personality. One part of us sympathises with the low and another part with the lofty; one part of us looks into the firmament and another part cleaves to the dust. (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *A divided heart*:—In every age and country there are some found with divided hearts on the subject of religion. Such was Hiram, King of Tyre, who, while he blessed the Lord that Solomon was king, and gladly traded with him for some of the materials for building a temple to Jehovah, also contributed one hundred and twenty talents of gold towards its erection. And yet, in his own country, he dedicated a golden pillar to Jupiter, built the temples of Hercules and Astarte, the Ashtaroth of the Zidonians, and enriched the shrines of the god and goddess with valuable gifts. So Redwald, the King of East Anglia, when converted to Christianity, is said to have kept two altars, the one to the God of the Christians, the other to Woden, a Saxon idol, being afraid of the imaginary god whom he had so long worshipped. So there are some now, who appear very religious at times, and yet their hearts go after covetousness, and they are quite at home in the circles of the gay and in the indulgence of sinful pleasure. *Judgment on the divided heart*:—1. As the heart is a vital part, which cannot be divided without death, so men can have no life of God, nor acknowledgment of Him, when they are not solely and wholly for Him and His way. 2. When men do fall from God's way, it is just with Him to give them up to start and multiply divisions without end in their own way. 3. Civil dissensions and commotions are the just fruits of men's divisions in the matter of God and His worship. (*George Hutcheson.*)

Ver. 4. *They have spoken words, swearing falsely in making a covenant: thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of a field.*—*Social sins and their result*:—I. SOCIAL SINS. 1. Vain speech. "They utter empty speeches." Not only are words of falsehood, blasphemy, and unchastity sinful, but empty words. How much idle language is there current in society! 2. False swearing. In judicial courts, in homes, in shops, in fields. 3. Unrighteous treaties. There is no harm in making covenants. Making a bad covenant is implied. The primal reference is to certain treaties Israel had formed with foreign nations. Untruthful as well as unrighteous bargains are being struck every hour. II. RESULTS OF SOCIAL SINS. "Judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field." Out of these social sins certain results appear. How do they come? 1. They come as a growth. Every sin is a seed from which a pestiferous plant must spring. 2. They come as a poison. Hemlock, or poppy, or darnel; poisonous productions. 3. They come in abundance. Very prolific is sin. See its plants growing in the ridges and furrows of life; in sick chambers, hospitals, workhouses, in prisons, in battlefields. (*Homilist.*) *Sin disturbing human relations*:—The sin of Israel is now contemplated in its effects on human relations. Before, it was regarded in relation to God. But men who are wrong with Him cannot be right with one another. Morality is rooted in religion, and, if we lie to God, we shall not be true to our brother. Hence, passing over all other sins for the present, Hosea fixes upon one, the prevalence of which strikes at the very foundation of society. What can be done with a community in which lying has become a national characteristic, and that even in formal agreements? Honeycombed with falsehood, it is only fit for burning. Sin is bound by an iron link to penalty. "Therefore," says Hosea, God's judgment springs up, like a bitter plant (the precise name of which is unknown) in the furrows, where the

farmer did not know that its seeds lay. They little dreamed what they were sowing when they scattered abroad their lives, but this is the fruit of that. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap"; and whatever other crop we may hope to gather from our sins, we shall gather that bitter one, which we did not expect. The inevitable connection of sin and judgment, the bitterness of its results, the unexpectedness of them, are all here, and to be laid to heart by us. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Sin the cause of sorrow*.—There is a connection between sin and sorrow, between wickedness and calamity, between moral transgression and physical, social, political disaster. We may define sin negatively as iniquity, iniquity, unspirituality; but Hosea speaks of it as a positive aggressive force, inflicting injury on the heart of the individual transgressor, and infecting also the external condition of the people. In emphasising the influence of sin on external conditions, the prophet teaches a profound truth, but not the whole truth. Jesus teaches that sin works disaster, even when the external condition is prosperous, and all that appears is respectable. Moral transgression is always followed by moral punishment. The connection between moral transgression and physical disaster is not constant and necessary. The prophet begins with a reference to Israel's condition as blessed by God. "Israel is a luxuriant vine." But he is found guilty. Here is the prophet's charge against Israel on account of their sin. 1. It perverts prosperity. Prosperity itself is not sinful. It is far from the thought of the Hebrew prophet that misery is the normal condition of the servant of Jehovah. But sin perverts prosperity. It allows the material to eclipse the spiritual. It fails to use prosperity for the noblest ends. It fails to take account of the latent force of prosperity; it does not appreciate its value. Prosperity is to be valued as a condition of life, as a means of ministering to life more abundant. 2. It destroys religion, and takes away its inspiration. Sin does not at once do away with religion. It would fashion religion to its liking; but in this transformation the essence of religion evaporates. So it was at least in Israel. In perfunctory religion there is nothing to take hold of and mould the man. 3. It invalidates government. The deepest conditions of national prosperity are not of man's creation, not determined by human legislatures. The political intercourse of men is conditioned on eternal principles of right, and nations as well as men must act in truth. 4. It emasculates society. It is a pitiable picture which Amos and Hosea paint of society in Samaria. Appetite reigns, drunkenness abounds, licentiousness and cruelty follow in their train. The very indulgence which sin practises defeats its own object. The fibre of the muscle is relaxed, the vigour of the mind is gone, patience, courage, hope have fled with faith, and the people lie supine, weak, inert. The prophet has disclosed the disastrous consequences of sin, but his purpose is to establish righteousness. God's aim is not to curse, but to bless. But alas! the prophet, like all spiritual teachers, speaks to heavy ears. The people have but little leisure for righteousness. They would none of Hosea's counsel, they despised all his reproof. (*T. D. Anderson.*)

Vers. 5, 6. **The inhabitants of Samaria shall fear because of the calves of Beth-aven.**—These verses dilate, with keen irony, on the fate of the first half of Israel's sin, the calf. It was thought a god, but its worshippers would be in a fright for it. "Calves," says Hosea, though there was but one at Bethel; and he uses the feminine, as some think, depreciatingly. "Beth-aven," or the "house of vanity," he says, instead of "Beth-el," the "house of God." A fine god whose worshippers had to be alarmed for its safety! "Its people,"—what a contrast to the name they might have borne, "My people!" God disowns them, and says, "They belong to it, not to Me." The idolatrous priests of the calf worship will tremble when that image, which had been shamefully their "glory," is carried off to Assyria and given as a present to "King Jareb,"—a name for the King of Assyria meaning the fighting or quarrelsome king. The captivity of the god is the shame of the worshippers. To be "ashamed of their own counsel" is the certain fate of all who depart from God; for, sooner or later, experience will demonstrate to the blindest that their refuges of lies can neither save themselves nor those who trust in them. But shame is one thing and repentance another; and many a man will say, "I have been a great fool, and my clever policy has all crumbled to pieces," who will only therefore change his idols, and not return to God. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The degrading influence of false worship*.—Doctrine.—1. Idolatry is matter of ignominy to any place or interest

that owns it; for it turns Beth-el into Beth-aven. 2. It proves the vanity of idols that their worshippers cannot trust in them, but must be solicitous and anxious about them in straits; for so were they about the calves of Beth-aven. This solicitude differs far from the fear of God's people about His worship and ordinances in times of danger, which does not flow from their diffidence in God, but from the sense of their guilt. 3. Anything that men place their confidence in beside God will prove matter of fear and terror. For so did the calves prove to Samaria in the time of their siege. 4. Albeit corrupt worship and religion may seem strange at first to them who have been bred up in the truth, yet in process of time, and being attended with success, it may take with them who are not well rooted. 5. Such as are eminently employed in and great gainers by corrupt worship have a sad day abiding them, therefore it is added in special that mourning is abiding the priests. 6. The glory of idolatry and of a false religion (being but borrowed, and having nothing to commend it but novelty and success) will at last vanish and depart. God will bring about this by judgments, when no other means will effectuate it. "The glory thereof is departed from it." This will be the lot of all false ways; whereas truth, however men loathe it for awhile, will still at last be found to be lovely, and to have a native unstained beauty. (*George Hutcheson.*)

Ver. 8 The high places also of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed.—Redeeming qualities gone.—Beth-el means the "house of God," and by iniquity, manifold and black, Beth-el was turned into Beth-aven, which means the "house of vanity." This is an instance of deterioration, and more than mere deterioration; it is an instance of transformation from good to bad, from the heights of heaven to the depths of the world of fire. Such miracles can be accomplished in the individual character, and such miracles have been found possible in ecclesiastical relationship. But the case is worse. We now read of "the high places also of Aven"; the "Beth" is left out: once it was Beth-aven, the house of vanity; now nothing is left but the vanity itself. That is the process of unchecked, untaught, unsanctified nature. We say of a man, he has still one or two redeeming qualities; but the time comes when every redeeming feature is lost. Then men say of the abandoned one, Aven, vanity, all vanity and vexation of spirit. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) **Degeneration.**—When men degenerate from the pure teaching of God, they in vain cover their profanations with empty names. God loudly proclaims respecting Beth-el that it is Beth-aven, and the reason is well known; it is because Jeroboam erected temples and appointed new sacrifices without God's command. The Lord approves of nothing but what He Himself commands. Hence the high places of Aven shall perish. (*John Calvin.*)

Vers. 9-11. O Israel, thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah.—Sin and punishment.—"The days of Gibeah" recall the hideous story of lust and crime, which was the low-water mark of the lawless days of old. That crime had been avenged by merciless war. But its taint had lived on, and the Israel of Hosea's day "stood," obstinately persistent, just where the Benjamites had been then, and set themselves in dogged resistance, as these had done, "that the battle against the children of unrighteousness might not touch them." Stiff-necked setting one's self against God's merciful fighting of evil lasts for a little while, but verse 10 tells how soon and easily it is annihilated. God's "desire" brushes away all defences, and the obstinate sinners are like children, who are whipped when their father wills, struggle how they may. The instruments of chastisement are foreign armies, and the chastisement itself is described with a striking figure as "binding them to their two transgressions"; that is, the double sin which is the keynote of the chapter. Punishment is yoking men to their sins, and making them drag the burden like bullocks in harness. What sort of load are we getting together for ourselves? When we have to drag the consequences of our doings behind us, how shall we feel? (*A. Macdaren, D.D.*) **It is in My desire that I should chastise them.—Divine chastisement.**—This is a graphic expression; the whole meaning of it does not appear in the English tongue. God does not willingly afflict the childron of men; it is not the delight of Almightiness to crush. It is the vanity of considerable strength to tyrannise, but in proportion as strength becomes complete it pities, it spares the helpless, for it knows that by one uplifting of its arm and the down-bringing of the same it could crush every opponent. Imperfect strength is a despot; Almightiness is

mercy. But now there is a stirring of the Divine emotions. God says, It will be better for these people to be afflicted; they have left themselves nothing now but depletion, and they must be brought to the very point of extermination. . . . The Lord is very pitiful and kind, and His eyes are full of tears, and judgment is His strange work: but there have been times in the history of providence which could only be consistently and rationally construed by granting that even the Divine Father must be stirred to the desire to chastise and humble wicked men. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 11. **Render thus,—Ephraim indeed is a heifer, broken in and loving to thresh, and I have spared the beauty of her neck; but now will I make Ephraim to draw.**—*Changes for Ephraim*:—Israel's punishment is enhanced by contrast with her former prosperity, which, as a mark of the Divine goodness, is compared to the consideration with which a young heifer is treated by its master. The work of treading out the corn was pleasant and easy; the heifer could eat freely as it walked without a muzzle round and round the threshing-floor. But *this* heifer, that is Israel, has abused the kindness of its Lord, and henceforth shall be put to the heavy labour of the field—a figure for the depressing conditions of life under a foreign master. The rendering "spared" (lit. passed by) is justified by Mic. vii. 18; Prov. xix. 11; it adds a beautiful distinctness to the figure, for the heavy yokes used in the East not only gall the necks of the animals, but often produce deep wounds. The meaning is that Jehovah has hitherto preserved His people from the yoke of captivity. (*T. K. Cheyne, D.D.*) *Ephraim's two yokes*:—Albeit Ephraim bred themselves delicately, and could not endure trouble, or God's yoke, yet God would put a yoke upon them, and to endure bondage and captivity. The yoke of treading out the corn, which was easy work, is contrasted with the hard yoke of the plough and the harrow. Whence learn—1. It is a fault incident to our nature to be much addicted to our own ease, and that which brings present content and comfort, and to abhor any lot or way of God's service which proves contrary to that. 2. It is a great snare to men, making them to dote on an easy way, when they have been accustomed in God's providence to such a lot, and, by taking too well with it, become effeminate: for "Ephraim is taught, and loveth to tread out the corn," that is, hath been tenderly dealt with, and hath accustomed his own heart to that way. 3. God hath an indignation at such as are too delicate, and take too well with ease, and is provoked to put them to trouble. For "I passed over upon her fair neck," that is, I brought her under the yoke, who kept herself so dainty: as if a man put a yoke upon the fat and sound neck of an undaunted heifer. 4. Let wicked men tamper as they will, yet they will not get trouble always shifted, but God will bring captivity and bondage, or other trouble upon them. Ephraim shall be tossed into captivity, as a man makes his horse carry him in far journeys. 5. The Lord's sentence is universal against all secure and delicate sinners, that He will send toil and trouble upon them, be they less or more corrupt. Therefore doth Judah, though more pure in many things than Israel, come in in the sentence, "Judah shall plough," which is a hard labour. 6. The hard lots of sinners may yet, through God's blessing, prove useful and profitable to them, however they may be ill-satisfied with them. (*George Hutcheson.*)

Ver. 12. **Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground.**—*Spiritual husbandry*:—There is not a more melancholy delusion than this, that in religious life the grand object may be secured without the use of the appointed means—that men may possess Christian privileges and realise Christian rewards, independently of those holy and strenuous endeavours so plainly required by our Divine Lord. In spiritual things there cannot be a cancelling of the rule which obtains in temporal things. The most unfading of crowns cannot be worn where there has been no running in the race. The most splendid of victories cannot be achieved where there has been no entrance into the battle. The most peaceful of havens cannot be reached where there has been no contending with the winds and the waves. The most glorious of harvests cannot be gathered in where there has been no labouring in the field. I. "BREAK UP YOUR FALLOW GROUND." The image here presented may apply variously. It may be applied to our country; to the circle of our own families; to the state of our own heart. The words may apply to the sincere believers amongst us. For we are found barren of many attainable graces and perfections. We may

always find some fallow ground that needs breaking up. II. SOW YOUR SEED. 1. The character of the work. There will be a righteous and constant rule of the law of Christ. We must respect it alone. The motive must be righteous. Whatever be the rule, if the motive be unholy, the act will be unholy. 2. The exclusiveness of the work. "To yourselves." The application is individual and personal. Others cannot do it for us, nor we for others. In the singleness of his own responsible existence every man must stand before God. III. REAP IN MERCY. The course of our spiritual husbandry bears an analogy with the natural. There is first the breaking up of the fallow ground, then the sowing of the seed, and then the reaping of the full corn in the ear: and as the strength is derived from God in the former two cases, the blessing in the third comes directly from Him as the Lord of the harvest. (*T. J. Judkin, M.A.*) *Spiritual husbandry*:—The Church is God's husbandry. We are called upon—I. TO BREAK UP OUR FALLOW GROUND. The heart of man is represented—1. As ground. Therefore expected to produce fruit that will benefit its owner. 2. As fallow ground. It is destitute of the fruit that it might produce. It is not only useless to its owner, it is prejudicial to neighbouring land that has good seed sown in it, in preventing the plants of righteousness from growing to perfection. 3. As our fallow ground. Because we all have ground committed to our cultivating care. And if it be not fallow now, there was a time when the term might have been applied to it with correctness and propriety. Breaking up our fallow ground implies a work—1. Of labour; for which the Master of the land imparts strength. 2. Of sacrifice; for which the Proprietor communicates fortitude. 3. Of constancy and perseverance; for which the Lord of the soil supplies patience. 4. Of renovation; for which the Owner of the ground affords means. The soil in its present state is unfit to produce any useful plants; but when the weeds which now grow therein are destroyed, the ground shall be renewed, that it may bring forth the fruits of piety. II. SOW TO YOURSELVES IN RIGHTEOUSNESS. We have here a representation of right principles, under the figure of seed; the propriety of which may be discerned, if we notice—1. Right principles are not indigenous to the human heart. They must be sown there. 2. The value of right principles. (1) Their author and giver—God. (2) Their price—the blood of the covenant. (3) Their result—plants of righteousness. 3. The care and attention they demand. How great is the solicitude of the husbandman in reference to his seed. 4. The vegetative power and productive quality. Right conduct is the offspring of these principles. "Sow to yourselves" means—(1) Allow these principles to sink deep into the heart; let all obstructions be removed out of the way. (2) Let every plant that grows in our heart be the result of this precious seed. (3) Though our anxiety should be principally on our own account, yet our conduct should be a union of piety and benevolence. III. REAP IN MERCY. If we plough and sow as directed, the result shall surely be a harvest of mercy. We shall reap—1. In pardoning mercy, that cancels our sins. 2. In restraining mercy, that prevents us from running into error. 3. In preserving mercy, that preserves the faithful. 4. In rewarding mercy. The mercy of God is, like Himself, infinite. The time of reward is represented as harvest, because—1. The time of ploughing and sowing is for ever over. 2. Because at that period all the produce of the soil will be presented to the Lord of the harvest. 3. Because reaping time is a season of joy and festivity. Eternity shall declare the advantages of sowing in righteousness. Observe—(1) This is the time to break up your fallow ground. (2) How great is the mercy of our God, that He will assist our endeavours to sow in righteousness. (3) How audacious is the conduct of those that despise the offers of mercy thus held out in the Gospel. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *Sowing and reaping*:—See what the Word of God teaches with reference to the necessity of a life of righteousness on our part, and as to the grounds on which a reward will be given to the righteous hereafter. The illustration here chosen from the works of nature is common to many other parts of Scripture. And the resemblance is so obvious between the progress of a seed from its first being committed to the soil, till the final harvest, with that of the gradual development of the principle of good in the soul of man, that I need not dwell upon it particularly. We are told to "sow in righteousness"; and what this injunction involves we may gather from a consideration of the state of those persons to whom it was originally addressed. There was required of apostate Israel, a thorough, unshrinking reformation, an unqualified turning from sin to God. And nothing short of this is required of us. Few of us have not continued, for a longer or a shorter space,

in deliberate and wilful transgression : all have to bewail an interminable catalogue of negligences and ignorances : and all have the evidence within themselves of an inherited nature so corrupt, that from the sole of the foot unto the head there is no soundness in it. This fallow ground must be broken up. Our hearts must be brought into a state of religious cultivation. Vicious inclinations, sensual appetites, inordinate affections must be rooted up. The soil must be ploughed ;—that which lay below must be brought up to the surface and exposed to the light of day. Self-knowledge and self-discipline must do their work, and the whole field be made fit for the reception and growth of the seed of righteousness. If we do, the text leads us to hope that we shall reap in mercy ; that is, we shall receive from the merciful hand of God our Father an abundant reward of unfading happiness and glory, eternal in the heavens. 1. We have no grounds on which to expect a harvest of mercy without a previous sowing time of righteousness. Without a holy life here, no man need expect or hope for a happy life hereafter. 2. The reward of our service is not to be looked for as of right, but as the gift of the free grace and mercy of God. Granting our seed-time of righteousness ever so perfect or so plentiful, how is God the better for it, that He should be constrained to pay us wages for it ? Here then is the sum of the whole matter. We shall not be saved *for* our works, but we shall never be saved without them. Knowing this, let us pray and labour and strive that no day may pass over our heads without our having made some progress in the work of sowing unto righteousness. (*F. E. Paget, M.A.*) *Sowing righteousness* :—Let them “sow to themselves in righteousness” ; let them return to the practice of good works, according to the rule of God, which is the rule of righteousness ; let them abound in works of piety towards God, and in justice and charity towards one another. Every action is seed sown. Let them sow what they should sow, do what they should do, and they themselves shall have the benefit of it. (*Matthew Henry.*) *What repentance of national sins doth God require, as ever we expect national mercies ?*—The prophet joineth counsel with threatenings. Amendment is that he calleth them to as a means to save them. By this text God proclaims, not only to particular persons, but to nations, how desirable it is to Him to execute His goodness ; and His extreme backwardness to avenge Himself on the most provoking kingdoms, unless they add impenitency under solemn warnings unto their rebellion. I. THE WORDS CONTAIN SOME OF THE ESSENTIALS OF REPENTANCE, AND SUPPOSE THE REST. 1. He that will repent must deal with his indisposed heart. “Break up the fallow ground.” 2. When the heart is thus prepared, we must proceed to proper acts of reformation. “Sow to yourselves in (or to) righteousness.” Let the rule of righteousness be observed in your hearts and ways. 3. You must also “seek the Lord.” Follow after Him : persist in your seeking. II. THIS REPENTANCE IS URGED FROM A VARIETY OF ARGUMENTS. Principally from this, that national mercies would certainly follow national repentance. What repentance of national sins doth God require ? 1. Resolve the case in general. Repentance ordinarily affords ground of our expectation of national mercies, notwithstanding national sins. But when this repentance is not in a nation, we cannot ordinarily expect national mercies. These things are supposed in the case as stated. What are national sins ? Such gross sins as render a nation guilty, and expose it to national judgments, and forfeit national mercies. These sins are gross in their nature. Not sins of infirmity, or sins which ordinary care, labour, and watchfulness could not prevent. They are such as idolatry, perjury, breaking of covenant, blood, uncleanness, apostasy, oppression, profaneness. These sins must be national. And sins become national by all, or the generality of a people, being personally transgressors, as to those crimes ; or when the governors, representatives, and influencing persons are transgressors ; or by the generality of a nation making itself a partaker of other men’s sins, though it do not actually commit them. These sins are such as expose to judgments and forfeit national mercies. More refined sins may expose one nation to judgments which may not expose another land. This depends on the variety of advantages some people are under above others. The provoking sins of one and the same nation may be made up by various kinds of offences, according to the different condition of offenders. The sins of magistrates are of one kind, and the sins of subjects another, according to their different talents and station. Usually the sins of a nation do not bring judgments or forfeit mercies by the simple commission of them, but as attended with some additional aggravations. A land rarely is destroyed, unless sins are committed after warnings. Security and impenitence is

added to rebellion before God proceeds against a people. What then are national mercies in the case before us? Such blessings as truly and considerably affect the good of a community. They must be blessings in their nature, and national in their extent. These mercies regard our souls, or our bodies, or both. The pardon of past sins, and help against the like offences; the presence of God as effective of spiritual and temporal good; Gospel ordinances; love and peace among Churches; freedom from persecution and malignity; a godly magistracy; peace in our borders; justice in our courts; learning in the schools, &c. &c. III. THE CASE STATED AND DISTINGUISHED FROM WHAT SEEMS LIKE IT. The question connects our repentance and warrantable expectations. The scope of it is,—what is the lowest sort or degree of repentance for national sins which is requisite to warrant, and ordinarily direct, our expectations of national mercies? IV. THE DIFFICULTIES OF THE CASE. 1. Other nations are not under such express rules with respect to God's outward dealings as the Jewish nation was. There have been always great displays of sovereignty in God's dispensation of judgments and mercy toward nations. There are prophetic periods wherein national mercies shall not be obstructed by impenitence but repentance shall follow them. The desolation of a land is sometimes absolutely determined. God sometimes moderateth and refrains His judgments from other considerations besides repentance. It is not very easy, at all times, to judge of national judgments. V. THE CASE RESOLVED. The rule by which we must determine this is hinted in the case itself, under those words, "What repentance doth God require?" Some expression of the Divine will must guide us; we must not judge by second causes, or by vain fancy, as we are apt to do. 1. A repentance short of that which is enjoined in order to eternal salvation will suffice to warrant our expectations of national mercies. Eternal issues are not determined by the same rules as temporal blessings. Unregenerate persons may repent, so as to divert present judgments, and secure mercies. This is evident in Ahab and Nineveh. 2. The repentance which yields us ground to expect national mercies, must be for national sins. It includes clear convictions of the guilt and offences of a nation. Shame, fear, and deep humblings of soul under the sense of the wrath of God, as provoked by our sins. Such a compliance with God's warnings and rebukes, as to put men on seeking God's favour, and resolving to forsake the national pollutions. And there must be reformation. In proving the decision of the case, the described repentance doth ordinarily afford a people national mercies, notwithstanding national sins. And where this repentance obtains not, a people cannot justly expect national mercies. When a people is given up to impenitency, and God withholds a blessing from the methods that tend to their repentance, there is just cause to fear that judgments are determined against that land. Impenitence is not only a moral obstacle to good, but it is also a natural obstacle. The iniquity of a nation is even materially its ruin. (*Daniel Williams, D.D.*) *The fallow ground*.—Very often the prophet had to reprove and call the people to repent. Hosea is doing this in the passage before us. I. THE PARTICULAR SORT OF CHARACTERS HERE INDICATED. They are figuratively indicated by the term, "fallow ground," or land lying fallow, producing nothing. The figure must not be taken quite literally, because there are some points in which it will not apply. The point in the figure is this. There is a human heart, producing nothing; there is a man, whose character has no religious fruitfulness, no religious excellence in relation to God. It is not verdant soil. It is not like the soil of the primitive forest, which never has produced anything, for it has had its crops. That is the character here represented,—a nation, a Church, or an individual, that was fruitful, that was religious, but it has been neglected, and it is now lying barren, fallow, producing nothing. But the farmland is left fallow intentionally, and for a good purpose. In the fallow ground which is a man, and not a farm, there is not one thing done with thought, deliberation, purpose, or plan. Man's heart is left fallow by temptation, negligence, ignorance, sin, backsliding, and instead of being the better for it, its condition is an injury and a curse. II. THE EXHORTATION. "It is time to seek the Lord." The Hebrews ought never to have needed a time for seeking the Lord. Heathen might feel after God, but Hebrews knew Him. The Hebrew child had to seek God for himself, but that is quite a different thing. Though, therefore, this exhortation ought not to have been needed, by the mercy of God it is given. It may be enforced in the sense in which the apostle uses an expression of the same sort, "It is high time to awake out of sleep." It may be used in the sense of a time being propitious. An accepted time. Observe what man is told to do. Four

things are figuratively expressed in the text. 1. Repentance. 2. Reformation. 3. Prayer. 4. Perseverance. III. THE RESULT. "Till God rain down righteousness upon you." God rains down, not righteousness absolutely, but that which will produce it. IV. THE WHOLE IS IN MERCY. "Reap in mercy." (*T. Binney.*) *What sowing involves*.—If we "sow for righteousness," that is, if our efforts are directed to embodying it in our lives, "we shall reap according to mercy." That is true universally, whether it is taken to mean God's mercy to us, or ours to others. The aim after righteousness ever secures the Divine favour, and usually ensures the measure which we mete being measured to us again. But sowing is not all; thorns must be grubbed up. We must not only turn over a new leaf, but tear out the old one. The old man must be slain if the new man is to live. The call to amend finds its warrant in the assurance that there is still time to seek the Lord, and that for all His threatenings, He is ready to rain blessings upon the seekers. The unwearied patience of God, the possibility of the worst sinner's repentance, the conditional nature of the threatenings, the yet deeper thought that righteousness must come from above, are all condensed in this brief Gospel before the Gospel. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The Divine voice to a worthless people*.—Sowing and reaping are figures here used to denote the spiritual and moral conduct of this people. All human life consists of sowing and reaping. Every intelligent act embodies a moral principle, contains a seed that must germinate and grow. I. A WRETCHED MORAL STATE. "Fallow ground," uncultivated earth. A state of—1. Unloveliness. It is either an expanse of grey earth, or of weeds, thistles, and thorns. 2. Unfruitfulness. Unless the soil is cultivated there is no fruit, and the land is worthless. 3. Wastefulness. On fallow ground the rain, dew, and sunshine fall, but all in vain. How much Divine grace is wasted on unregenerate men: sermons, books, Bibles, providences, means of grace, all wasted. II. AN URGENT MORAL DUTY. 1. Moral ploughing. Think on two things. What God has been to us. What we have been to Him. 2. Moral sowing. 3. Moral reaping. III. A SOLEMN MORAL SUGGESTION. 1. No time to lose. 2. Much has been lost. 3. It is only now the work can be effectively done. IV. A GLORIOUS MORAL PROSPECT. "He will rain righteousness," or "teach you righteousness." Pursue this work of moral agriculture properly, and God Himself will come and teach you righteousness. (*Homilist.*) *The fallow ground state*.—The characters represented by the term, "fallow ground," are to be found in every town and in every congregation. I. WHO ARE THE CHARACTERS INDICATED? Those whose affections, habits, and thoughts were once bearing a rich harvest for God, but in whom this is all changed, and the heart is become barren. But not the backslider only; the description applies to all who are careless or hardened in their sins; all whose characters have no religious fruitfulness. II. HOW MAY WE BREAK UP THE FALLOW GROUND? We must first satisfy ourselves that the ground is fallow; and in doing this prayerful meditation will greatly assist us. We may also have the guidance and assistance of the Holy Spirit. III. WHY WE SHOULD BREAK UP THE FALLOW GROUND? The constraining motive is this, "it is time to seek the Lord." Time because you have already spent too much of your short life in the service of sin and Satan. Because you will never have a more suitable season than the present. You have sought to persuade yourself that, by and by, you would be more at leisure for seeking the Lord. You must not think a time of affliction will prove a more suitable time. The more happy we are, in the fulness of our strength, before the eye is dim, and before the intellect begins to fail—that is the time to think deeply upon the claims of God. (*R. K. Baile, M.A.*) *The reward of well-doing*.—How shall we attain eternal life? The text declares that obedience shall not fail of its reward. And that the reward is of grace, and not of debt. We should understand that there is a vast difference between reward and merit. Merit is the right to receive a reward. Reward is a free testimony of approval. The text animates every one of us with the hope of reward; it abases each one of us by a denial of merit. I. IF WE SOW, WE SHALL REAP. A man might as reasonably expect a crop in the autumn, though he had wasted the season of seed-time, as suppose that a life of indolence and sensuality would lead him to Paradise. II. CONSIDER THE CAUTION, "REAP IN MERCY." The caution is against admitting any notion of merit. They claim most who have no ground of claim at all. If the notion of merit would be impiety in an angel, what must it be in man? And men have to regard not only the power of God, but also His holiness, which can carry no terror to sinless spirits. You shall reap "according to mercy." Be assured, then, that you cannot sow too

freely for that harvest. (*M. Biggs, M.A.*) *Sowing and reaping*:—Activity is not only a sign of life, it is a necessary condition of its continuance. The illustrations of this common law of life are as abundant as life itself. That which is true of trees, of muscle, and of brain is equally true of spiritual powers. For them no condition is a surer augury of death than unuse. As a Divine call to religious activity, Hosea's words contain some points of perpetual importance. The call is—1. Distinctly personal. "Sow for yourselves." Whether a man will or not, he is constantly a sower of seed. The bad man, the defective Christian, the dilatory, the prayerless, are all sowers. This Divine call does not deal so much with unconscious influences, as with purposed and determined work. 2. The call is specific and definite. You are not to sow anything that may come first to hand. You are to sow the right word, the right spirit, the right action. Every seed we scatter with our hands deliberately, every seed that is unconsciously permitted to wing its way from our whole demeanour, is to bear within it the germ of the true life. 3. The call is opportune. It is always timely to be doing good. There are, however, certain seasons when religious activity is the present duty. 4. The call is urgent. All the verbs are in one mood; and this is not the conditional or subjunctive, but the imperative. God never gives men any call without making it possible for them to obey it. Our encouragement to obedience is found in the—1. Answer of a good conscience. 2. In certain success. 3. In full proofs of Divine mercy. 4. The success will be far spreading. The Christian worker is blessed in his deed. And—5. The success will be abundant. Let the labour for God tax our utmost ability, our patience, our faith; still, be it ours to work on, confident of the result. The blessing is certain to come, even for ourselves, certain to have proofs of mercy in it, certain to reach further than we anticipated, certain also to be plentiful. Enlarge your faith, therefore, in the power and blessing of God. Your work of faith and labour of love shall not be forgotten; but shall be copiously and even abundantly blessed. (*J. Jackson Goadby.*) *True seeking*:—The prophet bids them "seek diligently" (so the Hebrew) and perseveringly, "not leaving off or desisting," if they should not at once find, but continuing the search, quite up to the time when they should find. His words imply the need of perseverance and patience, which should stop short of nothing but God's own time for finding. The prophet, as is the way of the prophets, goes on to Christ, who was ever in the prophets' hearts and hopes. The words could only be understood improperly of God the Father. God does not come, for He is everywhere. He ever was among His people, nor did He will to be among them otherwise than heretofore. No coming of God, as God, was looked for to teach righteousness. But the coming of Christ, the patriarchs and holy men all along desired to see. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *Spiritual husbandry*:—God has been pleased to give us instruction not only by His Word, but also by His works. Nature echoes Scripture to our sins, and if we would permit it, to our hearts. The ground we till is under the curse of God for man's sin; that its natural produce is only thistles, weeds, brambles. You have seen a piece of ground that has been left waste and uncultivated, and how it has become full of weeds, and rank with poisonous herbs, and infested with noisome creatures. Just such a place is man's heart. You have but to look at what man becomes when left to himself, without knowledge, without instruction, without the restraining and renewing grace of God, and you cannot doubt but that the inclination of his heart is not to good, that its imaginations are only evil continually. And out of that heart comes all manner of wickedness that is practised amongst mankind. Suppose any one of you had a garden overrun with weeds, how would he set about getting rid of them, so as to do it effectually? Would he take a scythe and cut off the tops, or a spade and dig them all up by the root? So if we were to tell men that they must put away this or that particular sin, we would do no more towards making them really holy, than a man would do towards clearing his garden if he should only break off the heads of the weeds growing in it. For both would be leaving the roots alive. Some may doubt whether their hearts are so bad as they have been represented to be. Then hear the Word of God (Jer. xvii. 9, &c.). The words of the text bid us break up the fallow ground of our hearts, that it may be prepared to receive the good seed of eternal life. I. THE THING TO BE DONE. The plough breaking up the soil, the harrow tearing to pieces the hard and cumbering clods, are a sign of what must be done in our own hearts. The foul, unprofitable soil of the carnal and natural heart must be broken up from the bottom. It will not do just to disturb the

surface. Have you ever even suspected that your heart wants cleansing? Is not the deadly root of sin shooting up there in a thousand shapes? Is there not unbelief, like the poisonous nightshade? Is there not pride, as a towering plant that brooks none to overlook it? Does not selfishness twine its roots and strike them deep, ay, down to the very ground of the heart? Is there no foul and rotten heap of unclean desires? Are not the cares and pleasures of this world like thorns and briars within you, choking up the thought and the love of better things? But how can your hearts be broken up? Not of yourselves. It is the Spirit of God carrying home the word which, like a two-edged sword, pierceth even to the dividing asunder of the bones and marrow,—it is He alone that can break up the hard and stony soil of the sinner's heart. It is a joy to the angels to see the fallow ground of the sinner's heart broken up with godly sorrow, humbled into repentance before God. When the ploughshare of conviction has gone deep, when the heart is no longer hardened, the seed of everlasting life will have a chance of springing up. But it is the Spirit alone who can renew us unto repentance and holiness. II. A REASON WHY IT MUST BE DONE. A stirring motive is given us all in breaking up our fallow ground. "It is time to seek the Lord." The farmer who should stand idling with folded arms when he ought to be sowing, and should let the seed-time slip away, could expect in harvest only weeds and thistles. Leave not, then, to the evening the proper work of the day. Opportunities lost cannot be recalled. III. THE BLESSING PROMISED. We shall not seek in vain. He will "come and rain righteousness upon us." The Lord will satiate the weary soul, and replenish every sorrowful soul. Upon them that seek Him will the Lord rain righteousness, even all the sanctifying graces of His Holy Spirit. Then wait upon the Lord in prayer, wait upon Him till He come, and pour out of His Spirit upon you. (*E. Blencowe, M.A.*) *The proportion of mercy.*—Rather "Sow righteousness in the proportion of mercy." As God has been merciful to you, so be ye righteous to Him: keep pace for pace with the Divine mercy; be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect; be ye holy as your Father in heaven is holy. This is the ideal; God would have human righteousness in proportion to Divine mercy. The standard is not arbitrary; it is gracious and tender and condescending, but who can attain unto it? It is not in man that liveth to keep pace with God. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *It is time to seek the Lord.*—*Seeking and seekers.*—I. WHOM ARE WE TO SEEK? "The Lord." Our Creator, Father, Redeemer, Lord, Judge. II. HOW ARE WE TO SEEK HIM? 1. Earnestly. "Agonise to enter in." 2. Humbly, in view of our helplessness and sin; hence penitently. 3. Prayerfully. 4. Obediently. Israel had become profane, idolatrous covenant breakers. III. WHY ARE WE TO SEEK HIM? 1. For God's sake. 2. For our neighbour's sake. 3. For our own sake. (1) Viewing the facts connected with our being as immortal sinners, we cannot be happy without salvation. (2) Seeking the Lord is preparation for the future. IV. WHEN ARE WE TO SEEK HIM? Now—1. The Scriptures often urge haste. 2. Delay itself is sin. 3. The great good derived from such a course. 4. The way to the throne is open. 5. The time is short. (*W. Veenschoten.*) *The duty of seeking God.*—I. THE DUTY ENJOINED. We should seek the Lord—1. In the performance of His will. 2. In a dependence on His mercy. 3. In a due preparation of heart to receive His blessings. II. THE ARGUMENTS BY WHICH IT IS ENFORCED. 1. The urgency of the duty. 2. The certainty of success in it. (*T. Hannam.*) *Seeking the Lord an immediate duty.*—I. WHOM ARE WE TO SEEK? "The Lord." This implies—1. That man is removed from God by sin. 2. That man may get near to God by seeking. 3. That it is his duty to do so. II. HOW ARE WE TO SEEK THE LORD? 1. By repentance. (1) The heart broken for sin. (2) The heart broken from sin. (3) Reformation of life. 2. By faith. (1) In God. (2) In Christ. III. WHEN ARE WE TO SEEK THE LORD? "Now." 1. To some of you these words contain a reproof. 2. For many of you these words contain a warning. (1) You will never have a better time. Facilities for seeking the Lord decrease with delay. (2) You may not have another opportunity. Many have waited for the convenient season which never came. (*E. D. Solomon.*) *Seeking the Lord an immediate duty.*—I. THE BEING WHOSE FAVOUR MEN ARE TO SEEK. "The Lord"; this is expressive of His greatness and power as the Proprietor of all things. "He is Lord over all." "The earth is the Lord's," &c. Think of His relation to us. Creator—Preserver—Benefactor—the God of grace. Think how able and willing He is to promote our happiness. II. THE NATURE OF SEEKING THE LORD. It implies—1. A knowledge of His character and a conviction of the importance and

advantages of having Him for our portion. 2. A conviction that sin has deprived us of Him as our portion. "Your iniquities," &c. "All we like sheep," &c. 3. A knowledge of the way in which God may be sought. Through the Sacrifice of His Son, the Mediator, the Surety, mercy, pardon, and acceptance may be obtained. 4. Heartfelt repentance. Contrition; godly sorrow; confession of evil to God; cessation from sin, as an evidence of regeneration commencing. "Let the wicked," &c. 5. Faith in Christ. "Repent and believe the Gospel." "Believe in," &c. What is faith? It is the reliance of the sick and diseased one upon the skill and healing power of the Great Physician; it is the reliance of the debtor, of the prisoner, captive, &c. &c., upon Christ, whose work on the Cross is adapted to meet all those exigencies of the sinner. 6. With diligence and perseverance. "With the heart man believeth," &c. "Ye shall find Me when ye shall search for Me with all your heart"; "Cry out for the living God." III. THE ADVANTAGES OF SEEKING THE LORD. 1. We avoid infinite evil; as the result of transgression. "The wages of sin is death." 2. We become possessed of infinite good. The benefit of all His attributes—of all His providence—of all the riches of His grace—of all the glories of His heaven—of His eternity. 3. We become auxiliaries to Christ in the glorious work of salvation—extending the boundaries of the mediatorial kingdom. This honour have all the saints! 4. By seeking the Lord, and finding Him, we do that which thousands in a dying hour, and at the judgment day, will regret that they have not done. "The harvest is past," &c. 5. Those who seek the Lord now will never lose Him in eternity. IV. THE IMMEDIATE ATTENTION WHICH THIS DUTY DEMANDS. 1. It is time, according to the statements of Scripture. "To-day," &c. "Behold now," &c. "Seek ye the Lord while," &c. 2. It is time, on account of the great evil already perpetrated. "One sinner destroyeth much good." 3. The great good to be realised proves that it is time to seek the Lord. When the miser, the ambitious, &c., perceive an opportunity of gaining gold, honour, &c., how do they rush forward to seize the coveted good! 4. The frailty of human existence declares it is time. 5. It is time, because the facilities in seeking the Lord will gradually lessen. (*Helps for the Pulpit.*)

Vers. 13-15. **Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity.**—*Diligence in serving sin*:—Whereas the Lord had, by His prophets, frequently inculcated that exhortation, to take pains on their own hearts, to bring forth the fruits of piety and righteousness; they, on the contrary, took pains enough in serving sin, wherein they wanted not fruit, though it should disappoint their expectation. This challenge is further amplified and enlarged by showing what was the fountain and spring of all this wickedness; to wit, their carnal confidence in the sinful ways and courses they followed, both in matters of state and religion, and their confidence in their many valiant men. 1. Many are so perverse, as they are not only content to live in sin, neglecting their duty, but they will be at pains to promote sin, and will trouble themselves to undo themselves. 2. Sin is a very fertile weed among the children of men; such as are bent on it will soon get their hearts' desire of it, and God will give up such as are diligent that way, to a height of impiety, as a plague upon them. "Ye have reaped iniquity." By this we are not to understand God's causing them to reap the fruit of sin in judgments, but that their labours in sin came to a ripe harvest of grown-up iniquity. 3. Whatever fruit sin seem to promise to its followers, or whatever present comforts or success men seem to have by it, yet it will prove but vain, and disappoint them. 4. Men's carnal confidences are great snares to draw them upon sinful courses, and are promising fruits which will disappoint them. 5. There is no confidence that more easily ensnares men, and will disappoint them sooner, than their own witty projects and devices in matters civil and sacred, without respecting the law of God; and their seeming to have power enough to manage and uphold them in these contrived ways. For such is their snare here, which will surely disappoint them. (*George Hutcheson.*) *Sow a habit, reap a character*—Professor William Jones, of Harvard, in his text-book on psychology, says: "Could the young but realise how soon they will become mere bundles of habits, they would give more heed to their conduct while in the plastic state. Every smallest stroke of virtue or of vice leaves its scar. The drunken Rip Van Winkle, in Jefferson's play, excuses himself for every fresh dereliction by saying, 'I won't count this time.' Well, he may not count it, and a kind heaven may not count it, but it is being counted none the less. Down among the nerve-cells and fibres the molecules are counting it, registering and

storing it up, to be used against him when the next temptation comes. Nothing we ever do is, in strict scientific literalness, wiped out. Of course, this has its good side as well as its bad one. As we become permanent drunkards by so many separate drinks, so we become saints in the moral, and authorities and experts in the practical and scientific, spheres by so many separate acts and hours of work." **Because thou didst trust in thy way.**—*Trust in our own things.*—Israel, the ten tribes, had two great confidences. "Thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men." I. **IN THEIR WAY.** That is, in the way of religion that they had chosen for themselves, and which was distinct from the way of Judah, from the true worship of God. They were confident that they were right, and would not hear anything to the contrary. That which is a man's own way he is very ready to trust in, and to esteem highly. None are more ready to charge others with pride than the proud; and none are more ready to charge others with adhering to their own way than those who most stick to their own conceit. II. **IN THEIR MIGHTY MEN.** They had an army to back them, to fight for them, and to maintain that way of theirs. When the outward strength of a kingdom goes along with a way of religion, men think it must needs be right, and that all its opponents are but weak men. Great armies are the confidence of careless hearts. Those that trust to any way of their own have need of creature strengths to uphold them. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*)

CHAPTER XI.

VER. 1. When Israel was a child.—*The national unit.*—The meaning is not, necessarily, when Israel was an infant, a child in mere years, but when Israel was a child in spirit, docile, simple of mind, sincere of purpose, true in worship. When Israel lifted his eyes heavenward, and sought for Me, then I stooped over him as a man might stoop over his child to lift him into his arms, and press him closely to his heart. There is a unit of the individual; let us take care lest we rest there, and so miss the ever-enlarging revelation of the Divine purpose in human history. There is not only a unit of the individual, there is a unit of the nation. Israel is here spoken of as if he were one man, a little child; though a million strong in population, yet there was in the million a unit. This is one aspect of Divine providence. We must not regard nations as if they ceased to have status and responsibility, name and destiny before God. A nation is one, a world is one, the universe is one. What does God know of our little divisions and distributions into pluralities and relationships? The nation may have a character. The Church is one, and has a reputation and influence. So we come upon the Divine handling of great occasions. The Lord is not fretted by details. All the details of His providence come out of and return to one great principle of redeeming Fatherhood. The locks are innumerable; the key is one, and it is in the Father's hand. Let Him hold it. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *God's love to us the pattern of our love to others.*—The leading topic of this chapter appears to be the calling of the people of Israel out of the prison-house of Egypt. It gives a gracious account of our heavenly Father's love, and a fearful picture of man's ingratitude. Under figures and emblems there is a lively representation of God's dealings with His redeemed ones—with the Israel that now is, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. The call of Israel from Egypt, as typical of Christ and of His people, is our subject. It is typical of us, as we are called from sin to the holiness of the heavenly Canaan. I. **GOD'S LOVE TO CHRIST, AS A CHILD, MANIFESTED TO US BY HIS CALLING HIM FROM EGYPT.** In the fulness of time the beloved of the Father became flesh, and dwelt among us. But no sooner did He appear than His life was threatened. The child was borne for safety into Egypt. In due time Christ was called out of Egypt, brought again to the Holy Land, there to exercise His ministry and perform the will of God. II. **GOD'S LOVE TO US, WHILST WE WERE YET AT A DISTANCE FROM HIM.** We who are redeemed are loved with the self-same love with which God loved His only begotten Son. III. **THE EFFECT WHICH THE POSSESSION OF THIS LOVE WILL NATURALLY PRODUCE IN OUR HEARTS.** It will produce love to others. What should be the effect of God's love in our minds? A disinterested love to our

follow-creatures. Thus shall we have a scriptural evidence that we are of the spiritual Israel, whom God hath loved and called out of Egypt. (*G. C. Tomlinson.*)

A typical portrait of a people :—I. A HIGHLY FAVOURED PEOPLE. 1. God loved them. 2. God emancipated them. 3. God educated them. 4. God healed them. 5. God guided them. 6. God relieved them. 7. God fed them. II. A SIGNALLY UNGRATEFUL PEOPLE. 1. They disobeyed God's teaching. 2. They gave themselves to idolatry. 3. They ignored God's kindness. 4. They persistently backslided. III. A RIGHTEOUSLY PUNISHED PEOPLE. The judgment would be—1. Extensive ; and 2. It should continue ; and 3. It should be destructive. Is not this history of this people typical ? Do not they represent especially the peoples of modern Christendom, highly favoured of God, signally ungrateful to God, and exposed to punishment from God ? (*Homilist.*)

Backsliding :—1. This is the great sin of the visible Church, to which she hath a strong inclination naturally, even in her best frame. 2. Men's hanging sometimes in suspense, and having some inclinations to return, will neither double out their point against the power of corruption within them, nor will it extenuate their backsliding. 3. The great backsliding of God's people is their backsliding from God and communion with Him ; which draweth on all other apostasies and defections. 4. It is of the Lord's great mercy that He ceaseth not to follow backsliders with messages from His Word. (*George Hutcheson.*)

A fivefold view of God's love :—1. It is adopting love. God loved Israel in Egypt, Israel in captivity, Israel among the brick-kilns, and called him "His son." It is by no merit or righteousness of our own that we are made sons of God. We become children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. God's love is adopting love. God delights in adopting children, and giving them the spirit of adoption, and taking them to the home of the ransomed family. 2. It is a tender love. The Lord describes the manner of a mother teaching her babe to walk. "I taught Ephraim to go." The Omnipotent became as a nurse to Israel. When difficulties arose He bore him in His arms as a man doth bear his little child. And the heavenly Father is ever the same. 3. His inviting love. "Called My son out of Egypt." We know how cruel Pharaoh was, and how hard were his taskmasters. But there was One who loved them, who said, "I have heard their cry, and have come down to help them." His fiery cloudy pillar was the symbol of his inviting love. 4. It is weeping love. God mourns over their iniquities. God's love as weeping love was displayed by the "Man of Sorrows," whose grief was for the hardness of men's hearts, and whose hot tears over Jerusalem were because she knew not the things which belonged to her peace. 5. His incarnate love. "The cords of a man." Incarnate love is the magnet by which souls are drawn to God. "The Word was made flesh" begins the story of redemption. Christ became man, to stand in man's place and deal with God in man's behalf, and to be able to enter into our feelings and fears as a merciful and compassionate High Priest. (*A. Clayton Threlton.*)

Mingled severity and mercy :—The scope of this chapter is to clear God from severity, and to upbraid Israel for ungrateful and stubborn carriage, against mercies and means, and yet to promise mercy to the remnant, to His elect ones. At the close of the preceding chapter there were dreadful threatenings against Israel, that the mothers should be dashed in pieces upon their children, and the king utterly cut off. But does not this argue God to be a God of rigid severity ? Where is the mercy, goodness, and clemency of God towards His people ? God says, "For all this I am a God of mercy and goodness, for I have manifested abundance of mercy already, and am ready still to manifest more ; but you have been a stubborn and a stout-hearted people against Me." From this general scope observe—1. God stands much upon the clearing of Himself to be a God of love and mercy. Whatsoever becomes of the wicked, yet God will make it clear before all the world that He is a God of much mercy. God takes it very ill that we should have any hard thoughts of Him ; let us not be ready to entertain such thoughts of God, as if He were a hard master. "When Israel was a child." That is, at his first beginning to be a people, in his young time, My heart was towards him. When he knew little of Me. When he could do little for Me. When there was much vanity and folly in him, as there are generally in children. When he was helpless and succourless, and knew not how to provide for himself. The love of God to Israel is expressed in these three particulars. (1) God "entered into a covenant" with him. (2) "Thou becomest Mine," that is, I had separated thee for Myself, and took thee for a peculiar one to Me, and intended special mercy and goodness to thee. (3) I con-

firmed all this by an oath, "I swear unto thee." Observe—2. It is the privilege of the Church and of the saints to be beloved of God. God loves His people; this is their privilege. He loves them with a special love. 3. It is a great aggravation to sin, to sin against love. 4. It is very useful to call to mind God's old love. 5. All God's old mercies remain engagements to duty and aggravations to sin. 6. Let not our hearts sink in despairing thoughts, though we see that we are able to do but little for God, and though we are unworthy of His love. 7. God's love begins betimes to His people; let not His people's love be deferred too long. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *God's love for the Church.*—1. God's love to the Church is her first and great privilege, which prevents her in her lowest condition, when she is unworthy and base. When Israel was a child, witless and worthless, then I loved him. And this is the fountain of all God's bounty to him. 2. The Lord will make His love to His people conspicuous in their preservation in a low condition, and under much trouble, when He seeth it not fit to deliver them from it. 3. The Lord also will magnify His deliverance from trouble and bondage, not only spiritual, but outward also, in so far as is for their good. 3. As the Lord doth oftentimes manifest His love, and put special honour on His people, by putting them to sufferings and trouble, so He will specially make His delivering of them proclaim His love and estimation of them, and His peculiar interest in them. (*George Hutcheson.*) *And called My son out of Egypt.*—"And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord, Israel is My son, even My first-born; and I say unto thee, Let My son go, that he may serve Me." On these words Hosea's reference rests. The people of Israel are to God as a son to a father; even as a first-born son. That is why He has come down to deliver them. We speak of the "purposes" of God, as though God had formed some complex schemes at an early period in the world's history, and now He must work these schemes out. But the God of the Bible is no scheme-maker. He is a Father—we are His sons. It is Israel's cry that has brought Jehovah down to deliver them. He is the Father of the fatherless. He hears the cry of the afflicted. But though God is moved by love, He does all things in order. He pities His people before their cry has ascended to Him; but He waits for that cry before He comes down to deliver them. For He will not deliver the unwilling or the proud. So He waits. And He came to the right person. He will do His work by means of a man, and He knows the man to do it. Moses brought Israel out of Egypt. Jehovah, that is the name of Israel's Father and Deliverer. "I am that I am" is practically the translation of Jehovah. It is a somewhat cold name to us, because we know the tenderer name of Father. Hosea's reference looks forward as well as backward; it looks before and after. Hosea saw that his words had a fuller meaning than could be filled by the people of Israel. He saw that they carried a promise which had not been performed even in his day. Like Abraham, he saw Christ's day afar off, and was glad. (*James Hastings, M.A.*) *The flight into Egypt.*—How can Matthew speak of these words as a prophecy, and of the sojourn of the Divine babe in Egypt as a fulfilment of their prophecy? It has been said that Matthew uses Hosea's words, so to speak, rhetorically or classically, declaring that the story of the infant Jesus in Egypt was a fine instance of Hosea's saying. Or it may be answered that the literal Israel was the type of the spiritual Israel. At all events, the Divine Man was Himself the true, ideal Israel, and as such Jehovah did call Him when a child out of Egypt. Once more, it may be answered, in a more general way, that the present is ever the fruit of the past and the seed of the future. Events are born of events, as successive parts of plants are born of preceding parts; the parts are different, but they are radically only repetitions of the original seed. History repeats itself. The historic is ever the prophetic. Particularly is it true in a case of special Divine election, like that of the Jewish nation, that history will be prophecy. The fulfilments of the prophetic Scriptures, like waves of the sea, are ever-multiplying and enlarging concentric circles. And Jesus Christ is evermore the final and crowning fulfilment. The Divine Man is the universal *pleroma*—alike the radiant point and the circumference of all things. As God called out of Egypt His son, so out of Egypt does He call His Church. It was literally true of some of the most eminent of the fathers,—Tertullian, Origen, Athanasius, Cyprian. It is spiritually true of all God's people. (*G. D. Boardman.*)

Ver. 2. *They sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images.*—*Graven images.*—We read frequently of graven images and of molten

images, and the words are become so familiar as names of idolatrous images that, although they are not well chosen to express the Hebrew names, it seems not advisable to change them for others that might more exactly correspond with the original. The graven image was not a thing wrought in metal by the tool of the workman we should now call an engraver; nor was the molten image an image made of metals or any other substance, melted and shaped in a mould. In fact, the graven image and the molten image are the same thing under different names. The images of the ancient idolaters were first cut out of wood by the carpenter, as is very evident from the prophet Isaiah. This figure of wood was overlaid with plates either of gold or silver, or sometimes perhaps of an inferior metal, and in this finished state it was called a graven image (i.e., a carved image), in reference to the inner solid figure of wood, and a molten (i.e., an overlaid or covered) image, in reference to the outer metalline case or cover. Sometimes both epithets are applied to it at once (Nah. i. 14; Hab. ii. 18). The English word *molten* conveys a notion of melting or fusion. But this is not the case with the Hebrew word for which it is given. The Hebrew signifies to spread, or cover all over, either by pouring forth a substance in fusion, or in spreading a cloth over or before, or by hammering on metalline plates. (*Bishop Horsley.*)

Ver. 3. **I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms.**—*Taken by the arm*:—When God redeems and shelters His people by the blood of the Paschal Lamb,—i.e., of Christ our Passover sacrificed for us—and gives them His law, telling them to serve Him, He does not leave them to their own strength, but gives them power to do what He bids them: He teaches them how to go, taking them, as a nurse would, by the arms. Our obedience is not the cause which procures or awakens God's love to us, but His love is the cause that procures and awakens our obedience. The text tells us what God is doing for the true disciples of Jesus, and how God undertakes to teach them how to go. "Taking them by the arms." As a nurse teaches a helpless child to walk, He invites us to rely upon His strength and watchful care. He knows our weakness. The thought may be illustrated by Deut. xxxii. 11. In this life we cannot go without the support of Christ; but there are different ways in which He gives this to His people. At first He teaches them to fight against their own evil passions, to resist their own wayward wills, to quench their fiery temptations. But soon they pass onward. The new nature moves, stirs, waxes stronger, grows; the old decays. At first He leads, He guides them against their will, then without it, and it is a happy day when their will cheerfully goes along with His; then they are taught to go. (*W. Grant.*) **But they knew not that I healed them.**—*Unrecognised blessings*:—Two different types of ignorance in relation to two different methods of Divine dealings. Look—1. At the words uttered by the Lord to Cyrus, the Persian king—"I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me" (Isa. xlv. 5). From these words we learn that while God uses His own people for a gracious purpose, they are not the only people that He uses for the furtherance of His designs. He places men in high positions, and by their instrumentality He often brings about the fulfilment of His own purpose, though they themselves have had no conscious part in the accomplishment of such a glorious end. 2. Our text points to a very different dealing, namely, God's treatment of the Jewish people. The ignorance of Cyrus, as a heathen, was not the culpable thing that ignorance of God on the part of any king of Israel or Judah would have been. God had granted Israel a special revelation, and admitted them into an exceptional relationship with Himself as His people. Notwithstanding all God's goodness to Israel, Hosea says, in God's name, "They knew not that I healed them." Thus we have two types of ignorance. That of the man who has never been brought under godly influence; and the wilful ignorance of those who sin against the light, and in spite of gracious influences. The latter is the only ignorance possible to us. The surprising thing about Israel was that they could be so ignorant of God's goodness after all that He had done for them. Knowledge of God they had, but it had formed no part of their being, had not permeated their character and life, and had not given a bent to their conduct. Their attitude toward God was atheistic. They talked flippantly enough about their history, but there was no gratitude in the heart that would mould and fashion life into submissive obedience to the law of God. Thus their ignorance was all the worse for being so wilful and persistent. "Ye are weary of Me," exclaimed God to

them. I know of no charge more pathetic than that. This ignorance is the result of the blinding power of a sinful passion; an ignorance which will not let a man know the truth because he is too closely wedded to his evil. (*D. Davics.*)

Ver. 4. **I drew them with cords of a man.**—*God's saving method with the soul*:—I. GOD IN THE ACTION OF GREAT SOLICITUDE. "I drew them." There are two ways by which this thought is confirmed—1. By Scripture. 2. By experience. God is represented in the Song of Solomon as drawing us with the odour of a great ointment. II. GOD DRAWING MAN THROUGH THE PRINCIPLE OF HUMAN AGENCY—"Cords of a man." 1. God did this in the use of the prophets. 2. God did this in the Person of Christ. 3. God is now doing this in the Christian ministry. III. GOD DRAWING MAN THROUGH THE PRINCIPLE OF SPIRITUAL CONDITIONS:—"With bands of love." 1. There is the voice of the inner life,—telling of wrong, and pointing to right and duty. 2. There is the agency of the Holy Spirit,—pointing to holy decisions. Dr. Doddridge once said to his daughter, "My dear, how is it that everybody seems to love you?" She answered, "I do not know, papa,—unless it is that I love everybody." Jesus loves us. Shall we not love Him? (*W. A. Perrins.*) *God's redemptive agency*:—I. THE UNCOERCIVENESS OF HIS REDEPTIVE AGENCY. He draws, not drives. This Divine mode of action implies two things—1. That God respects the moral freedom of human nature. He has endowed us with moral agency. We have a consciousness of freedom which defies and spurns all the logic that would prove us slaves. The Holy Father treats us according to the natures He has given us. God neither condemns nor saves men contrary to their own will. 2. That God's moral power in the Gospel is extraordinarily great. (1) It is a power to draw souls. Brute force can only drive bodies. Mere might has no magnetism for the soul. There is a moral power, the power of anger, falsehood, disgusting immorality, that can drive souls away—repel them with disgust. But holy moral power alone can draw the entire soul. (2) It is a power to draw depraved souls. It is something therefore extraordinary—greater than the moral power of nature. It is the power of infinite love, embodied in the life of Christ. II. THE HUMANITY OF GOD'S REDEPTIVE AGENCY. It is by a man's intellect, heart, life, example, influence that he draws. God saves man by man. 1. The reasonable draws man. God appeals to our reason through man. 2. The merciful draws man. God appeals to our gratitude through man. 3. The excellent draws man. 4. The desirable draws man. (*Homilist.*) *The place of love in the Gospel*:—It is God who speaks of the humanity of His treatment of us. When a man would influence, he must begin by loving. Few can resist that spell. I need not tell any one how mighty, how almighty, in a man's being is the force of love. There are not two definitions of love, though it has many modifications. The symptoms common to all loving are delight in presence, impatience of absence, eagerness for reciprocity, intolerance of coldness, joy in exchange of thought, sympathy in each change of circumstance; delight in the opportunity of benefiting, and corroding grief in the prohibition of intercourse. We have claimed for hope—we have claimed even for fear—a place in the Gospel. Can it be needful to do the same for love? Yet there may be some comparative, if not positive, disparagement of this grace. I have heard men speak slightly of Gospel love. They judge it better, on the whole, for the character of Christ's Gospel, that in its central innermost shrine the Deity of deities should be rather obedience than love. Thus, in improving Christ's Gospel, they spoil it, marred, ruined it. I. THE GOSPEL IS A REVELATION OF LOVE. Herein lies its power, the secret of its strength. It reveals the love of God. That God loves virtue, and will compensate and make up for the sufferings of the good, is a tenet which needs not a revelation. But that God loves all men, even the sinner, is that quite right? Must there not be something here not altogether sound in doctrine, because not altogether conducive to morality and good? The Gospel risks this perversion. It refers us to Christ. Did Christ's example, did Christ's life, encourage or favour sin? There is, in the immeasurable love of God, room for all His creatures. There is a yearning of soul over the scattered, dispersed, erring, and straying race. He loves, therefore He pleads. The whole secret of the drawing lies in the spontaneity of the love. Tell a man,—*"Seek God, and He will be found of you,"*—and you waste words. Tell him,—*"God loves you as you are. God has come after you, with far-reaching endeavour,"* He will find there is strength in that which will not, cannot, be resisted. II. THERE IS AN INVITATION OF LOVE. There is

something always pathetic, to the unsophisticated ear, in the petition of love. The outcries of barren, thirsting affection waste themselves oftentimes upon the desert. And yet there was a love for them, would they but have had it, a love better than of son or daughter, better than of wife or husband, a love indestructible, satisfying, eternal. It is permitted to you to love God. Ought not that to be joy enough and privilege enough for any man? God makes it religion to do the thing which will make us happy; and therefore He turns the invitation into the injunction of love, and bids the fallen self-ruined creature just love and be happy—just love and be saved. III. THERE IS A COMMUNICATION, OR TRANSMISSION, OF LOVE. He who has been loved, and therefore loves, is hidden by that love of God to love his brother also; and then, in that transmission, that handing on of the love, the whole of the Gospel—its precept as its comfort—is in deed and in truth perfected. Little, indeed, do they know of the power of the Gospel who think either that obedience will replace the love of God, or duty be a substitute for the love of man. Christ teaches us that both towards God and towards man love goes first and duty follows after. Not, indeed, that we are idly to wait for the feeling, and excuse the not doing on the plea of not loving. There is such a thing as worshipping because I desire to love. So there is such a thing as doing good to my brother, if so be I may love him; a setting myself to every office of patient and self-denying charity, if by any means it may at last become not a labour but a love to me. But how can we love the unlovely? Surely whosoever sees with the eye of Christ, can discern, if he will look for it, on the most tarnished, debased, defaced coin of humanity, that Divine image and superscription in which God created, and for the sake of which Christ thought it no waste to redeem. This is love's place in Christ's Gospel. Love revealed, love reciprocated, then love handed on. (*C. J. Vaughan, D.D.*) *Good Friday*:—This is not a day for difficult doctrines, but for the simplest and humblest feelings. The great work of this day is quite beyond the reach of our understanding. The appeal is not made to our understanding, nor even directly to our conscience. With the cords of a man we are drawn. The human affections which all men share, the feelings which even the poorest, the meanest, the most ignorant partake in, the pity, the tenderness, the love that can only be called forth by love, these are now the cords by which our Father draws us, the cords of a man. To the heart that loves like a child, to the sinner deeply laden with his burden of unhappiness, to the broken spirit that secretly longs to escape from fetters which it is powerless to break, to the soul that is ready to despair, this Gospel speaks, and tells of hope, and love, and eagerness to forgive, and embracing arms, and falling on the neck, and tears of joy, and the welcome of the prodigal son. We cannot study here. We can but surrender our hearts to the love which is too much for them to contain. We are sometimes cold and dead. There are times when our feelings towards God seem to lose their warmth. We can obey and do, but we feel like servants, not like children, and we are unhappy because we cannot rouse any warmer feelings in ourselves. And when this is so, where can we go but to the Cross of Christ? Perhaps under a decent exterior we hide some sinful habit which has long been eating into our souls. It is possible that we may be discharging every duty as far as human eyes behold us. Yet time after time the temptation has proved too strong, or we have been found too weak. Our besetting sin has clung to us, and we cannot get rid of it. Then let us once more turn to God, and gaze upon the Cross of Christ. Or perhaps we have never striven to serve God at all. We have lived as best suited the society in which we were, as most conduced to our own pleasures. Whenever the thought of God or conscience comes across us, we find that but a dull subject to think on, and we turn to pleasanter and more exciting themes. What then shall warm our hearts but this plain story of sadness? If we have human feelings still left us, and sympathy can yet touch our souls, it will be impossible to read of the Cross of Christ without emotion. (*Archbishop Temple.*) *God's gracious dealings*:—I. I DEALT WITH THEM RATIONALLY, AS MEN, NOT AS BEASTS. 1. My statutes were according to right reason. 2. They were supported by many arguments. 3. And by persuasions, motives, and exhortations. II. I DEALT WITH THEM GENTLY, NOT WITH RIGOUR AND VIOLENCE. 1. Suits Myself to their dispositions. 2. Dealing with them when they were in their best temper. 3. Giving them time to consider. III. I DEALT WITH THEM HONOURABLY, IN A MANNER SUITABLE TO THAT RESPECT WHICH IS DUE TO MAN. 1. My instructions ever exceeded My corrections. 2. Whatever spark of ingenuousness remained in them, I took care to preserve it. 3. I aimed at their

good, as well as My own glory, in all things. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *Silken cords* :—No man ever does come to God unless he is drawn. Man is so utterly "dead in trespasses and sins" that the same Divine power which provided a Saviour must make him willing to accept a Saviour. But many make a mistake about Divine drawings. They seem to fancy that when the time comes, they will, by some irresistible power, without any exercise of thought or reasoning, be compelled to be saved. But no man can make another man lay hold of Christ. Nay, God Himself does not do it by compulsion. He hath respect unto man as a reasoning creature. Love is the power that acts upon men. God draweth no man contrary to the constitution of man, but His methods of drawing are in strict accordance with mental operations. 1. Some are drawn to Christ by seeing the happiness of true believers. 2. Another cord of love is the sense of the security of God's people, and a desire to be as secure as they. 3. Some will tell you they were first drawn to Christ by the holiness of godly relatives. 4. Not a few are brought to Christ by gratitude for mercies received. 5. Some have been caught by becoming convinced that the religion of Christ is the most reasonable religion in the world. 6. A far larger number, however, are attracted to Jesus by a sense of His exceeding great love. 7. The privileges which a Christian enjoys ought to draw some of you to Christ. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *God's goodness to His people* :—Let us see what this goodness did for Israel, and what it does still for God's people. Three leading articles. I. *ATTRACTION*. "I drew them." God attracted the Jews to Himself as their Lord and portion by conviction and affection. The attraction is to Him as well as by Him. In pushing and driving you urge a thing from you; but in drawing it you bring it towards you. God's aim is to bring us to Himself. This aim regards the state that we are previously in—a state of distance and alienation from Him. As in this state we see his sin, so we equally see his misery, for with God is the fountain of life, and we can never be happy save as we are near Him. Look at the manner in which this attraction is accomplished. "With the cords of a man." That is—1. *Rationally*. Hence religion is called a "reasonable service." 2. *Affectionately*. Love is the supreme attraction. There are four heads of goodness which are peculiarly attractive and powerful. (1) Unreserved kindness is very attractive. So is (2) Disinterested kindness. And (3) Magnanimous kindness. And (4) Costly and expensive kindness. II. *PROVISION*. "I laid meat unto them." Meat means food generally. To show the plenitude and riches of the Gospel provision it is represented in the Scriptures by a *feast*. The provision is found in the Scriptures. It is "laid unto you in the preaching of the Gospel." III. *EMANCIPATION*. He takes off the yoke from our jaws. What yoke? 1. The yoke of Judaism. 2. Of popery. 3. Of persecution. 4. Of bigotry. 5. Of ignorance. (*William Jay.*) *Drawn heavenwards* :—A weeping willow stood by the side of a pond, and in the direction of that pond it hung out its pensive-looking branches. An attempt was made to give a different direction to these branches. The attempt was useless; where the water lay, thither the boughs would turn. However an expedient presented itself. A large pond was dug on the other side of the tree, and as soon as the greater quantity of water was found there, the tree of its own accord bent its branches in that direction. What a clear illustration of the laws which govern the human heart. It turns to the water—the poisoned waters of sin, perhaps—but the only streams with which it is acquainted. Remonstrate with it, and your remonstrances are vain. It knows no better joys than those of earth, and to them it obstinately clings. But open to its apprehension fuller streams, heavenly water; show to it some better thing, some more satisfying joys; and then it is content to abandon what it once worshipped, and turns its yearning affections heavenward. (*J. A. Gordon, D.D.*)

Ver. 7. My people are bent to backsliding from Me.—Religious declension :—How singular is the moral condition of a believer bent on backsliding. It is not a mere vacillation between God and mammon, holiness and sin, but a steady leaning, an earnest leaning toward the latter. I. **WHO ARE THEY WHO ARE BENT ON BACKSLIDING?** 1. The first mark is a neglect of secret and family prayer. The neglect of one kind of prayer usually follows neglect of the other kind. 2. Habitual neglect of the Bible. Whoever walks closely with God takes delight in His Word. It is a bad sign when the Scriptures are read only from a conviction of duty. 3. Backwardness or reluctance in efforts to do good. Does a civil, political, or pecuniary enterprise awaken an energy

and zeal which you never evince for the Saviour's cause? If so, what does it indicate? 4. The undervaluing of religious ordinances. Lightly to esteem the house of God, its praises, prayers, instructions, hallowed associations, indicates a backsliding heart. Other marks of a backsliding believer are,—ensoriousness; high regard for gaiety and fashion; preference for vain amusements and frivolous company. II. THE GUILT WHICH THIS MORAL CONDITION INVOLVES. 1. Every such professor is acting the part of a hypocrite. We may not charge him with wilful hypocrisy, we may with practical hypocrisy. 2. Their influence goes to depress the standard of piety which the Saviour has fixed, to adulterate that system of truth and duty which He has given as the hope of the World. Christianity is a holy religion. What we charge upon every Christian professor whose heart is bent on backsliding, is the guilt of adulterating this holy religion, and depressing, so far as his influence goes, its Divine standard of duty. What is it we are doing when we put a base alloy into the gold of heaven? Inter-mingling principles of selfishness with those of a heaven-born beneficence. Of course, no Christian could intend to perpetrate so audacious a crime. The intention to work such mischief is not charged upon any one. Yet all this mischief is involved in the course pursued by every backslider. 3. The backslider retards the progress of Christianity in the world. He cuts the sinews of its strength; he takes off its chariot wheels. 4. While bent to backsliding you cannot be depended on in religion. You are not reliable persons. You prove recreant to duty. Christianity may well exclaim in reference to many of its professed votaries, "Deliver me from my friends." III. THE CONSEQUENCES OF CONTINUING IN THIS GUILTY COURSE. There are two rods in the hand of God for offenders, the rod of discipline and the rod of retribution. The former is to correct, with a view to reclaim the offender. The latter is to punish the incorrigible, with a view to vindicate and maintain His outraged authority. With the rod of discipline come oftentimes desolation, rebuke, discomfort, darkness and barrenness in spiritual experience. 1. The first appliances which God will use are disciplinary. The first consequence to be apprehended by a backslider—whether an individual or a Church, is outward rebuke. 2. Another consequence is the discomfort of the forsaken soul: its restless condition, the possibly deep gloom which may settle like night upon it. It must be unhappy when comforts are withdrawn, with a grieved departing Saviour, the sweet influences of His grace, as well as the joyful assurance of blessedness hereafter. 3. The last consequence relates to the future world. It takes hold of retribution. Unless you repent and do your first works, you must perish. There is no talismanic charm about the name of Christian, or about a profession of religion which can rescue the hopeless backslider. He must lie down, like other sinners, under the wrath of God. And connected with this consequence to yourselves are melancholy consequences to the unconverted in your families, and in the community. How seldom a sinner repenteth while the Church is far from God! (*E. Strong.*) *In suspense:*—Two explanations of this sentence are given. 1. The word *teluaim* signifies "perplexed." The people would suffer a just punishment through being anxious and looking around them, and yet finding no comfort; for this would be the reward of their defection or apostasy. 2. God here complains of the wickedness of the people, as of those who deliberated whether they ought to repent. They then take suspense for doubt. "My people are in suspense." They debate on the subject as on a doubtful matter, when I exhort them to repent, and they cannot at once decide what to do, but alternate between divers opinions, and now incline to one thing and then to another; as if the subject itself made it necessary for them to deliberate. (*John Calvin.*) *Backsliding Israel:*—I. A CERTAIN COURSE DESCRIBED. "My people are bent to backsliding from Me." 1. What this fact proves. The doctrine of human depravity. 2. What it involves. (1) Folly the most extreme. (2) Ingratitude the most base. (3) Treachery the most enormous. II. A CERTAIN FEELING INDICATED. "How shall I give thee up?" 1. Its nature. It was a feeling of perplexity. 2. Its causes. His backsliding children deserved to be punished; but He waiteth to be gracious, and is ready to forgive. III. A CERTAIN RESOLUTION FORMED. "I will not execute the fierceness of Mine anger." This should—1. Excite our astonishment. 2. Kindle our gratitude. 3. Subdue our opposition. 4. Dissipate our fears. (*Author of "Footsteps of Jesus."*) *Backslider:*—In the west of Scotland when you travel, sometimes when the furnaces are all in full blast, furnace after furnace flings its reflection on the sky. You see the molten metal flowing into the mould.

As you look from the carriage windows you see dusky figures flitting about, all activity; but when the furnaces are damped down for a strike or for dull trade, what a misery it is to go through these manufacturing districts and behold idleness. The flames have been damped out, the men are not working, but lounging about at street corners; women and bairns, sad at heart; wheels still; hammers ceased hammering. It is the same way, maybe, with your soul. You have damped out the furnace of Christian activity. God knows it. Why, when you were a young man, you had dozens of furnaces in full blast for God. You gave tracts, you spoke to your fellows, you took a class in the Sabbath school, you gave of your money, you prayed and agonised; and all is shut up, and you know it. You're asleep; you do nothing for God now. (*John Robertson.*)

Vers. 8. 9. **How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?**—*God's feeling in the face of man's obstinacy*.—Many have been the ways adopted by God to communicate His thoughts and reveal His will to the human race. But in all, Divine truths were always represented in a manner most adapted to the constitution of the human mind. Three things suggested by the passage. I. **MAN IS ABLE TO RESIST GOD IN THE DISPENSATIONS OF HIS MERCY.** The supposition that man is governed by some Divine fate, that he is a passive being, destitute of a capacity to act in any way besides in accordance with the Divine will, has arisen partly from three sources. 1. Unacquaintance with the nature of the human will. Man is so constituted as to be able to exercise authority not only over his own feelings, actions, and character, but also over the heart itself; he can regulate his disposition, so as to turn his whole soul to be a sanctuary to particular objects. Three reasons for this view. (1) Mankind in general believe that they are free—at liberty to choose any course of action they please. (2) Our own consciousness. We are conscious that our actual volitions are such and only such as we please to put forth. (3) Our moral nature implies the same truth. 2. Unacquaintance with God's moral government—confounding the natural with the moral. God does not rule man with an irresistible force, but with motives of gentleness and love. 3. Misinterpretation of some particular portions of the Word of God. II. **THAT MAN'S RESISTANCE RENDERS IT NECESSARY, ON GOD'S PART, TO GIVE HIM UP.** 1. The most applicable means is insufficient for recovering him. 2. The only means is insufficient to recover him. III. **THERE IS AN INFINITE, COMPASSIONATE RELUCTANCE ON GOD'S PART TO GIVE UP MAN.** 1. The relation that exists between God and man renders Him reluctant to give him up. One is a father, the other is a child. 2. God's knowledge of man renders Him reluctant to give him up. 3. God's dealings towards man prove that He is infinite in mercy, reluctant to give him up. The most illustrious display of Divine mercy was the sending of God's only begotten Son into the world. This mercy was displayed also in sending the Holy Spirit. Then if God feels so intensely for those who are strangers and aliens from Him, ought not the same compassionate feeling to characterise His Church universally? And if we are free agents, having control over our dispositions and actions, or endowed with capacity to choose the right and reject the wrong; and if we are the objects of Divine pity, is it not our most incumbent duty to pity ourselves by receiving God's mercy, and obeying His commandments? (*J. A. Morris.*) *Justice and mercy in the heart of God*.—The Bible is pre-eminently an anthropomorphic book. That is, it represents God through man's emotions, modes of thought and actions. It is in the character of a father that these verses present Him to our notice. No human character can give a full or perfect revelation of Him. Yet it is only through human love, human faithfulness, human justice, that we can gain any conception of the love, faithfulness, and justice of the Eternal. I. **MERCY AND JUSTICE AS CO-EXISTING IN THE HEART OF THE ETERNAL.** To give up to ruin, to deliver to destruction is the demand of justice. "Mine heart is turned within Me, My repentings are kindled together." This is the voice of mercy. What is justice? It is that sentiment which demands that every one should have his due. What is mercy? A disposition to overlook injuries and to treat things better than they deserve. These two must never be regarded as elements essentially distinct, they are branches from the same root, streams from the same fountain. Both are but modifications of love. Justice is but love standing up sternly against the wrong, mercy is but love bending in tenderness over the helpless and the suffering. In the heart of God this love assumes two phases or manifestations. 1. Material nature shows that there is the stern and mild in God. 2. Providence

shows that there is the stern and the mild in God. The heavy afflictions that befall nations, families, and individuals, reveal His sternness; the health and the joy that gladden life reveal His mercy. 3. The spiritual constitution of man shows that there is the stern and the mild in God. In the human soul there is an instinct to revenge the wrong, often stern, inexorable, and heartless. There is also an instinct of tenderness and compassion. These came from the great Father. II. MERCY AND JUSTICE AS EXCITED BY MAN in the heart of the Father. 1. The moral wickedness of Ephraim evoked His justice. Human wickedness is always stirring, so to say, the justice of the Infinite heart. 2. The filial suffering of Ephraim evoked His mercy. God calls Ephraim His son, and Ephraim was in suffering, and hence His compassion was turned. III. MERCY STRUGGLING AGAINST JUSTICE IN THE HEART OF THE GREAT FATHER. Even as the human father finds a struggle between what justice requires, and mercy pleads for, in dealing with his wilful son. IV. MERCY TRIUMPHING OVER JUSTICE IN THE HEART OF THE GREAT FATHER. 1. Mercy has so triumphed in the perpetuation of the race. 2. In the experience of every living man. 3. In the redemptive mission of Christ. How comes it to pass that mercy thus triumphs? Here is the answer: "For I am God, and not man." (*Homilist.*) *Divine forbearance towards sinners.*—The long-suffering of God, His patience toward sinners, His unwillingness to punish, His readiness to pardon, form conspicuous parts of the Divine character, as set forth to our view in the sacred writings. The text describes a strong and tender struggle in the mind of God between the opposite and contending claims of justice and mercy: and in the end represents the latter as prevailing, mercy rejoicing against judgment. We are not indeed to suppose that a struggle ever really takes place in the Divine Mind. He does but speak to us after the manner of men. Ephraim had done everything to provoke the Lord to anger. Forgetful of all that He had wrought for them, and of all which they owed to Him, they had left His service, renounced His worship, and had given themselves up to the most shameful idolatries. Mercies and judgments had been employed to reclaim them, but in vain. And now, what could be expected but that they should be dealt with according to their deserts? But no—such is the sovereignty of Divine mercy, that instead God says, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?" Attend—1. To the debate which is represented between justice and mercy. 2. The determination of the debate. After a long struggle mercy prevails. 3. The ground and reason of this determination: "For I am God, and not man." He who is God, and not man, alone could overcome the difficulty. Draw some profitable reflections. 1. How exactly does the view here given of the Divine mercy and forbearance, in this particular instance, agree with the general representations of them in Scripture. Illustrate times before Flood. Israel in wilderness. The spiritual redemption of man. 2. How greatly do these views increase and aggravate the sinfulness of sin. Sin is rebellion against a just and rightful Sovereign. It is robbery committed against a good and a gracious Master. It is ingratitude to a most kind and bountiful Friend and Benefactor. Sin is despite done to the richest mercy and tenderest compassion. If God were not so very merciful, sin would not be so exceeding sinful. How great must be the guilt of those who disregard the mercy offered in the Gospel! 3. What great encouragement does the subject give to every humbled and penitent sinner! Such are apt to be full of doubts and fears. They cry for mercy, but cannot believe that they shall find it. Was God so unwilling to give up even penitent Ephraim? And will He be unwilling to receive and pardon penitent offenders? Surely He feels for you the tenderest pity. He will meet you with loving-kindness. (*E. Cooper.*) *The Holy One.*—The holiness of God is at once a ground why He punishes iniquity, and yet does not punish to the full extent of the sin. Truth and faithfulness are part of the holiness of God. He will keep His covenant. But the unholy cannot profit by the promises of the All-Holy. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?*—There is nothing more inspiring in human history than the long, hard struggle of the Lord against the proclivities of the Jewish people. How this struggle of evil against God arose, what are the conditions of the Divine and the creature nature which render it possible, and render it possible that it should be prolonged, we may never be able to settle. But the fact of the struggle is clear as the sunlight. We are resisting God's will; we make life a ceaseless struggle against His will. God has created free men; all the burden of their activity, all the possibilities of their development He accepted in the hour in which He created them free. He parted as it were with a power,

a power to rule all things by His decrees. A free spirit cannot be ruled by a decree. There is a new sphere of existence created, in which God's Spirit, in communion with free spirits, alone has power to sustain His way. And this Spirit may be grieved, wounded, resisted even unto death. "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone," may proclaim that the resources of the Divine patience and love are exhausted. And yet, was that sentence final? Certainly, in Hosea's time, Divine patience was not exhausted. Is it even exhausted yet? The answer is found by considering, with some fulness of detail, the history of the long-suffering of God with His ancient Church. (*Baldwin Brown, B.A.*) *God's dealing with sin and sinners*.—It is important that we acquire and cherish right views of the character of God, and the modes of His dealing with the children of men. We cannot fully comprehend the Divine Being. It may happen that the aspect which is most attractive is just that which we most fail to see. Revelation makes known to us that He is not regardless and indifferent to what takes place on earth, and not unmindful of the welfare of the beings His hands have made. He is the Father of our spirits. We read of God as a God of justice, and we are in danger of thinking of justice as unalloyed with and untempered by mercy. But He is also merciful. He delighteth in mercy. The aspect of God, brought before us in this text, is that of God reluctant to inflict deserved punishment, suffering deep disquietude and longing because of the waywardness and sinfulness of men. Man's alienation and rebellion causes grief and regret to God. I. GOD'S BACKWARDNESS TO PUNISH SIN. The very strength of God's love for His creatures kindles His indignation against that which works their ruin, whilst regard for His own character and government necessitates the punishment of the ungodly and impenitent. One great difference between God's anger and man's is this,—whilst man's anger is soon kindled, God is "slow to anger, and of great mercy." II. GOD'S YEARNING DISQUIET FOR THE SALVATION OF MEN. Of this the words of the text are an earnest expression. (*Joseph Shillito.*) *God unwilling to abandon the sinner*.—The making of His creatures happy, according to their capacities of happiness, is highly pleasing to God. The Divine nature is all love and benignity. The sun and light may be as soon separated as God and goodness, the Deity and loving-kindness. If He withdraws His favour from any people, it is all along of themselves, not the least defect of goodness in Him. It is wholly owing to their rendering themselves unmeet to be any longer partakers of His grace and favour. God is always inclined to do good to His creatures, but He is often under the necessity of being very severe. Still, He ever designeth a general good in the judgments He executeth. Men's learning of righteousness is God's designs in His judgments. Then God inflicts His judgments, not out of free choice, but from constraint, and with a kind of unwilling willingness. In the text we see that, highly as they had incensed the great God against them, He nevertheless makes good, when one would least expect He would, that saying of the son of Sirach, "As is His majesty, so is His mercy." In the text He seems to say, "How can I find in My heart to be as bad as My word in executing such fearful threatenings?" Nothing less than apparent necessity can prevail with the infinitely good God to make His creatures miserable; and this further appears by the following considerations. 1. God's earnest and most pathological exciting of sinners to turn and repent, that iniquity may not be their ruin, is of itself sufficient to assure us hereof. 2. 'Tis God's ordinary method to give warning to sinners before He strikes. He wants reformation and repentance to stay His hand and prevent the blow. Illustrate by the warning of Noah's ark, and the warnings sent by the prophets, &c. Signs of the times are God's warnings nowadays. 3. It is God's usual course to try a wicked people with lighter judgments first, before He brings the heaviest upon them. 4. When God determined to pour down the vials of His vengeance upon a wicked people, He sometimes plainly intimated that He did it not, until their wickedness was come up to such a height as did necessarily call for them. 5. It is likewise apparent that God Almighty is most backward to the destroying of a wicked people, or putting them into miserable circumstances until necessitated, in that He hath again and again declared His being diverted from so doing by such motives as one would think could have but very little influence upon such a Being as He is, or rather none at all. The following are some of these motives. (1) A mere partial humiliation, one far short of true repentance, as in the case of Ahab and Rehoboam. (2) The prayers of a few good people. As in Moses' intercessions. (3) The advantages taken by God's enemies from His destruction of His people (Deut. xxxii. 27).

Learn from this what strange folly, or even desperate madness, doth lodge in the hearts of sinful men. Will sinners still persevere in this their madness? (*E. Fowler, D.D.*) *The Gospel in Hosea*:—Hosea appears again and again to contradict himself. In one line he is denouncing a ruinous and final doom; in the next, with a voice that breaks with tenderness, he is promising a day of golden restoration. Does it not sound like a feeble absurdity to say that both sets of declarations can be fulfilled? Yet fulfilled in some ideal way I believe they are. Surely the prophet recognised that there were positive contradictions in life,—life and death, light and darkness, blessing and cursing, the flame of wrath and the dew of blessing; and leaving these contradictions as he found them, he yet believed that God is a God of love, that mercy shall somehow or somewhere triumph over justice, that God will smite sin, and yet will spare. Hosea's was a real and not a sham message, and it was a message full of comfort; and still more full of comfort was the reason, "for I am God, and not man." The deepest consolation of life lies in this, God and not man is the judge. God is the Father of the prodigal. Christ was the friend of publicans and sinners; and in the revelation of God throughout all the Scripture, as in the words of Christ, we find always side by side with the awful certainty of retribution, the unquenchable beams of love and hope. But Hosea had learned his lesson, as so many are forced to learn it, in sorrow and anguish. He tells us his secret in the first three chapters. These explain the varying of emotions in almost every verse of the prophecy; and they also explain why this prophet seems to see more deeply than all others into the heart of the love of God. The sorrows of life come to us all, though they seem to come in different measure; but the point for us to observe is how differently they affect the wise and the foolish. The holy submissiveness of Hosea's life taught him the one great lesson without which he would never have become a prophet at all. This lesson,—If the love of man, the love of a husband for a wife, of a father for his child can be so deep, how unfathomable, how eternal must be the love of God! To what sunless depths, to what unfathomed caverns can the ray of that light penetrate! In this is a message of hope for individual souls. (*Dean Farrar.*) *Moderation in Divine judgments*:—1. God's mercy interposing on the behalf of sinners doth produce not only good wishes but real effects to them. 2. God's mercy towards His sinful people, doth not see it fit to keep off all effects of His displeasure, or leave them altogether unpunished. 3. When a sinful people are under saddest temporal judgments, yet so long as they are in the land of the living, they are bound to reckon that their condition might have been worse if all God's just displeasure were let out. 4. The Lord's moderating of deserved judgments, if it were but to preserve a people from being utterly consumed, is a great proof of God's mercy, and ought to be acknowledged as such. 5. It is the great mercy and advantage of the Lord's sinful people that they have to do with God, not with man, in their miscarriages. (*George Hutcheson.*) *A father's solicitude for the erring*:—A number of years ago, before any railway came into Chicago, they used to bring in the grain from the Western prairies in waggons for hundreds of miles, so as to have it shipped off by the lakes. There was a father who had a large farm out there, and who used to preach the Gospel as well as attend to his farm. One day, when church business engaged him, he sent his son to Chicago with grain. He waited and waited for his boy to return, but he did not come home. At last he could wait no longer, so he saddled his horse and rode to the place where his son had sold the grain. He found that he had been there and got the money for the grain. Then he began to fear that his boy had been murdered and robbed. At last, with the aid of a detective, he tracked him to a gambling den, where he found that he had gambled away the whole of his money. In hopes of winning it back again he had then sold the team and lost that money too. He had fallen among thieves, and, like the man who was going to Jericho, they stripped him, and then cared no more about him. What could he do? He was ashamed to go home and meet his father, and he fled. The father knew what it all meant. He knew that the boy thought he would be very angry with him. He was grieved to think that his boy should have such feelings toward him. That is just exactly like the sinner. He thinks, because he has sinned, God will have nothing to do with him. But what did that father do? Did he say, "Let the boy go"? No; he went after him. He arranged his business, and started after the boy. He went from town to town, from city to city. He would get the ministers to let him preach, and at the close he would tell his story. "I have got a boy who

is a wanderer on the face of the earth somewhere." He would describe his boy, and say: "If you ever hear of him, or see him, will you not write to me?" At last he found that he had gone to California, thousands of miles away. Did that father even then say, "Let him go"? No; off he went to the Pacific coast, seeking his boy. He went to San Francisco, and advertised in the newspapers that he would preach at such a church on such a day. When he had preached he told his story, in the hope that the boy might have seen the advertisement, and come to the church. When he had done, away under the gallery there was a young man, who waited until the audience had gone out; then he came towards the pulpit. The father looked, and saw it was his son, and he ran to him, and pressed him to his bosom. The boy wanted to confess what he had done, but not a word would the father hear. He forgave him freely, and took him to his home once more. Oh, prodigal, you may be wandering on the dark mountains of sin, but God wants you to come home! The devil has been telling you lies about God; you think He will not receive you back. I tell you He will welcome you this minute if you will come. Say "I will arise, and go to my Father." There is not one whom Jesus has not sought far longer than that father. There has not been a day since you left Him but He has followed you. I do not care what the past has been, or how black your life, He will receive you back. Arise, then, O backslider, and come home once more to your Father's house. (*D. L. Moody.*)

Ver. 12. **Ephraim compasseth Me about with lies.**—*Beset round with lies*:—By lies understand false worship, for that is a lie with false pretences; they put fair glosses upon things, but all are but lies; they have beset Me with politic shifts of their own devising. They not only seek to blind men, but they would (if it were possible) deceive Me, saith God. And indeed, when men seek to blind their own consciences, what do they but seek to deceive God? In the very act of worship they are false. 1. Many, in their prayers, in the solemn act of worship, beset God with lies. Can God be deceived? No, but they did what lay in them to deceive Him; if it were possible for God to have been deceived they would have deceived Him. 2. Many also beset the business and affairs that they manage with lies. They plot with themselves how they may handsomely contrive to put together a goodly number of lies, that so they may beset men's understandings. There are such cunning attempts in the world to beset the understandings of men, that men shall not know what to say to things; and yet, whilst they cannot tell how to believe them, neither do they know what to say, things are so contrived. Deceitful men think with themselves, If such a thing shall be questioned, then I have such a shift to put it off; and if another thing shall be doubted of, then I have such a report, and such a fair pretence, to make it good. 3. When men are once engaged in shifts and lies, they grow pertinacious in them, and there is little hope of their recovery. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *Fraud and falsehood*:—The Lord complains "that He had been compassed with the falsehood and fraud of the people." By these words He means that He had in everything found the multiplied perfidy of the Israelites; for this is the import of the word "compassed." Not only in one way, or in one thing had they acted unfaithfully towards God; they were full of innumerable frauds, with which they surrounded God, like an army at a siege. This is what hypocrites are wont to do; not only in one thing do they endeavour to deceive God, but they transform themselves in various ways, and ever seek some new subterfuges. When they are caught in one sin they pass into another; so that there is no end to their deceit. He speaks of "frauds and falsehoods," for they thought that they escaped, provided they covered themselves with some disguise, whenever the prophets reproved them. But God here testifies that they gained nothing by their craftiness. The prophet reprobates those specious excuses, by which people think they are absolved before God, so as to elude all the threatenings of the prophet. This passage teaches that men in vain make excuses before God; for when they contrive pretences to deceive God, they are themselves greatly deceived; for He clearly perceives their guiles and falsehoods. (*John Calvin.*) **But Judah . . . is faithful with the saints.**—*Faithful with the saints*:—That is—1. With Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with Moses, with the prophets, with the forefathers. 2. Faithful with such as are sanctified, the true priests of God, that God has sanctified to Himself. Whereas Jeroboam took "of the lowest of the people" and made them priests to God, Judah would

have no other priests but the sanctified ones of God. 3. Faithful with the people of God. For all of Israel that were holy, that were godly, that were saints, and were not detained by some special hand of God, went up from the Ten Tribes to Judah, to the true worship of God; now Judah entertained them, and used them well, and was faithful to them. But on the contrary, Israel, the Ten Tribes, were unfaithful, by using the saints of God evilly that would worship God according to God's own way; they were cruel and oppressing and unfaithful to them, but Judah was faithful towards such, embracing and encouraging them. For us to go on in faithfulness, though we have none to join with, is a commendation; and the ways of God are excellent, whether any or no do join with us in them. But it is a great encouragement to be faithful with the saints; that is, to go on in those ways in which we see the saints walk: and to join with the saints, with such as are the choice saints of God, greatly encourages and strengthens the people of God in their way. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *The faithful tribe:*—There is a striking analogy between the leading characteristics and facts of Church history under the Old Testament dispensation, and under the New. In both we see a chosen people, a redeemed people, a preserved people, and a perverse, rebellious, stiff-necked people. Nothing but immutable love and sovereign grace could have borne with their conduct. The great mass of nominal Israel of old were carnally minded. They degraded themselves with abominable idolatries. Just so do multitudes who pass for Christians in the nineteenth century, boasting of ancient pedigree, long succession, and exclusive right; wearing the name of Christian without possessing one spark of Christianity. The modern profession of Christianity has awfully apostatised from ancient orthodoxy, and set up idols throughout Christendom, worshipping the work of men's hands according to the free-will system. The great calamity of the present day arises from carnal men interfering with religion in any way, for in so doing they are sure to do mischief: if they legislate for it, they clog and fetter it; if they endow it, they curse it; if they even speak of it, they misrepresent it,—and can it be otherwise while they are destitute of it? Turn attention to the faithful tribe who, in the face of all the revolting and apostasy of the present day, may be said to rule with God, and deal faithfully with the saints. There is still such a tribe in Christendom. If the God of all grace would bestow upon His elect remnant a revival of vital godliness, Christian union, and fervent prayer, there would be nothing to fear from pope or infidel. Brethren, be of one mind. Electing love, Divine substitution, and invincible grace are our rallying-points. (*Joseph Irons.*)

CHAPTER XII.

VER. 1. Ephraim feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind: he daily increaseth lies and desolation.—*The east wind in Palestine*, coming from Arabia and the far East, over large tracts of sandy waste, is parching, scorching, destructive to vegetation, oppressive to man, violent and destructive on the sea, and by land also, having the force of the whirlwind. "The east wind carrieth him away, and he departeth, and as a whirlwind hurleth him out of his place" (Job. xxvii. 21). In leaving God and following idols, Ephraim fed on what is unsatisfying, and chased after what is destructive. If a hungry man were to feed on wind, it would be light food. If a man could overtake the east wind, it were his destruction. Israel "fed on wind when he sought by gifts to win one who could aid him no more than the wind; 'he chased the east wind' when, in place of the gain which he sought, he received from the patron whom he had adopted no slight loss." Israel sought for the scorching wind, when it could betake itself under the shadow of God. "The scorching wind," says St. Cyril, "is the burning of calamities, and the consuming fire of affliction." "He increaseth lies and desolation"; for unrepented sins and their punishment are, in God's government, linked together; so that to multiply sin is, in fact, to multiply desolation. Sin and punishment are bound together as cause and effect. "Lying will signify false speaking, false dealing, false opinions, false worship, false pretences for colour thereof, false hopes, or relying on things that will deceive. In all these kinds was Ephraim at that time guilty, adding one

sort of lying to another." (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *Feeding on wind*.—This is a proverbial speech to note—1. The following after vain, unprofitable things. When men please themselves in their own conceits and in their own counsels, and walk in ways that are, and certainly will be, unprofitable to them, they are said to feed on wind. When men think to please God with their own inventions, to escape danger by their own shifts, to prevail against the saints by their deep counsels and fetches, they feed upon wind; when men promise to themselves great matters by ways of their own, that are not God's, they feed upon wind, and for all this the prophet rebukes the ten tribes. 2. The prevailing pride and elation of heart. According to the food, so will the body be; those that feed on wind must needs have hearts puffed up with conceitedness of themselves, and contempt of others that are not in the same way as themselves: they lie sucking imaginary content and sweetness in their own ways; they are full of themselves. They feed on wind, yet one prick of disappointment will quickly let out all the wind from such bladders. 3. Dependence on carnal creature comforts. Evil men that live upon the applause of men, upon honours, feed on wind, and are puffed up for awhile; but any prick of God's appearing against them lets out the windy stuff, and quickly they are dead. Any member of the body that is puffed up with wind seems to be greater than any other part, but it is not stronger; no, it is consequently the weaker: and so it is with the hearts of men that are puffed up with windy conceits and with creature contentments, they have no strength by this inflation; though they seem stronger, yet when they are called either to do or to suffer for God, they then appear to be very weak, and therefore will change as the wind changes. Illustrate by the chameleon. 4. The turbulent, unquiet disposition of such. We know that the wind raises tempests and storms; and so men that are puffed up with the wind of their own conceits are the men that raise such tempests and storms in the places where they live. The saints have better food to feed upon, food that makes them more solid and more staid. Learn—(1) Creature comforts will prove but wind. Those who seek to satisfy themselves with such, and to stay themselves on their own conceits, not only deceive themselves, and will be disappointed at last in their expectations, but they will find these their ways to be very pestilential, hurtful, and dangerous; they will find that they will undo them and bring them to utter misery. 2. It is a grievous thing, when troubles come, to have nothing within us to bear us out but the wind. Suppose men meet with the rough east wind, or storms and tempests befall them, yet if they have had solid food, whereby they come to get good blood and marrow and spirits, they may be able to bear it; but when the body is empty and meets with tempests, this is very grievous to the poor frame. So it is with many when they meet with afflictions; but the saints have such solidity within them as bears them out, but other men that are empty, that have fed upon the wind all their days, have nothing to bear them out in great afflictions, but their hearts sink down in horror and despair. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *Worthless soul-food*.—Delitzsch renders, "Ephraim grazeth wind." The idea is that it sought for support and satisfaction in those things which were utterly unsubstantial and worthless—"wind." I. SENSUAL INDULGENCES ARE WORTHLESS SOUL-FOOD. II. WORLDLY DISTINCTIONS ARE WORTHLESS SOUL-FOOD. III. RELIGIOUS FORMALITIES ARE WORTHLESS SOUL-FOOD. (*Homilist.*) *And will punish Jacob according to his ways*.—None can sin with impunity.—You are only under grace as long as you keep clear of God's law. The moment you do wrong you put yourself under the law, and the law will punish you. Suppose that you went into a mill, and the owner of that mill was your best friend, even your father. Would that prevent your being crushed by the machinery if you got entangled in it through ignorance or heedlessness? I think not. Even so, though God be your best of friends, ay, your Father in heaven, that will not prevent your being injured, it may be ruined, not only by wilful sins, but by mere folly and ignorance. (*Charles Kingsley.*)

Vers. 3, 4. *And by his strength he had power with God.—Wrestling Jacob*.—This story has a strange fascination for most Bible readers, due, in part, to the vividness with which it is told; in part, to the deep spiritual truth which it half reveals and half conceals. Jacob recalls in his prayer the time when he passed this very place twenty years before as he fled from the wrath of Esau. God has been with him, and prospered him. Let us picture again that weird night scene. The almost oppressive silence

was only broken by the roar of the shallow Jabbok, which writhed and struggled between obstructing rocks as it plunged and tumbled to the Jordan valley two miles below. We can see the rough waters gleam under the torches as drove after drove of animals splashed and ploughed their way through,—the goats and the sheep, the camels and the cattle, the asses and their foals are carefully arranged in successive relays, to appease the wrath of Esau. Then, in two companies, his frightened household followed, and the sounds died away again until nothing was left but the deepened roar of the turbulent stream beside him, which seemed to intensify the dead silence all around. Jacob was left alone. He was anxious, and apprehensive of what might happen. He was a greedy man, and he stood to lose, at one stroke, the wealth which represented the struggles of twenty years. He was an intensely affectionate man, and it seemed as if wives and children might be snatched away from him at one fell swoop: "I fear lest Esau come and smite me, the mother and the children." Then, through the long night there wrestled with him a man till daybreak—till the reach of the Jabbok flashed again in the sudden Syrian sunrise. As he lay there in the growing light, thrown, exhausted, he knew it was no man who had striven with him. In the sunrise he had seen God face to face. So he called the place Peniel—God's face. But that is only the outside of the story, the body of this experience. What is its inner meaning? An instinct tells us that this is the record of a moral and spiritual struggle, which doubtless has its counterpart in the human life of these breathless days. That shrivelled tendon was the mark left in Jacob's body of a moral and spiritual struggle—the crisis of his history. We know the long night ended in tearful and penitent prayer. What makes me feel certain that this is the record of a moral and spiritual struggle is the undoubted fact that from that day a great moral change came over Jacob—a change represented by his new name. He was no longer Jacob—sly, subtle, crafty, tricky Jacob, he was an Israelite, indeed, in whom there was no guile. He was Israel, God's prince, for he had prevailed. He not only had a new name, but a new nature. The blessing which came with the dawn was the highest blessing which can ever come to any man—the assurance that his better self would become increasingly his truest self. He was a prince of God. It is not difficult to see that Jacob's whole life had been one long wrestle, a tough, hard struggle with others. He had wrestled for bread, for love, for justice. Yes; and he had prevailed. He had succeeded, he had reaped the fruit of struggle—strength. He had gained what comes with victory—self-confidence. He had outwitted the crafty Laban. He went to his uncle a penniless tramp; he left him a wealthy man. And now he comes back to the land which was promised him. And here, on the very border and frontier of it, just as he is about to grasp what seems to be already his, he is brought up suddenly face to face with an old sin; and, as old sins are wont to do, it unnerved him. Do you know men who sinned—twenty years ago? They have been successful in spite of their sin—nay, by means of it, and God has given no sign. Then, after twenty years, they are brought face to face with the consequences. They do not ask now: What will it mean to me? There is a question which cuts deeper than that: What will it mean to wife and children? If no one else were involved, if the man knew definitely what it would mean and how it would end he could face it. Though it brought ruin and exposure and shame, he could meet it like a man. But when the vague dread of it hangs over his life, and he lies awake at night and goes over all the possibilities and chances of what may happen, and wonders if any contingency has been left unprovided for, till the heart is sick with a nameless dread—then suspense becomes anguish. Now, that was Jacob's case. He had done all that foresight and long experience could devise. He had sent messages, intended to convey to Esau the impression that he was a man of some consequence—obsequious messages, too, to "my lord Esau." And "my lord" sent back a soldier's answer: "Esau cometh to meet thee with four hundred men." With great astuteness Jacob divides his household into two companies, so that if Esau falls on one, the other may perhaps escape. His trouble drives him to his knees, for with all his subtlety and shrewdness Jacob was a praying man. He appeals, in his extremity—like many a trickster since—to his father's God. And yet, apprehension of his loss breaks through his very prayer. He is a rich man now, and has much to lose. . . . "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant, . . . deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of my brother." In the very act of prayer his subtle brain is scheming how he will send presents to Esau—not in a lump,

but first one, then another, drove after drove. He knew very well how to appeal to the frank, generous heart of the rough twin-brother. What a mixture the man is!—craft and prayer, cunning and faith, daring and dread! . . . "Then Jacob was greatly afraid, and was distressed." Does all this let any light on some past experience of your own? You were walking, as you thought, in the way of God's leading—in obedience to His call—to some land of promise, and on the very border of it you are suddenly brought face to face with some past wrong. The power in which you trusted—the result of long experience—fails you. Your self-confidence is rudely shaken. You betake yourself to prayer, and yet you will not trust wholly in that either; you do all that foresight can suggest—and stretch a point in doing it—to make quite sure that the blessing shall be yours. You try to deal with God as you have dealt with men. Is that the meaning of Jacob's wrestling? You come to the very border of your land of promise. It is almost your own. And you will make quite sure of it by human means,—as if God could be tricked and managed, as if the blessing must be wrested from unwilling hands. Then you find that you have more than Esau to deal with. There is another Antagonist—unknown, mysterious, persistent. So you struggle on through the darkness, unwilling to cast aside the powers which have never failed when dealing with your fellows. Does not your own experience interpret this story for you? Then, at daybreak, with one touch the nameless wrestler shrivels the strongest muscle in Jacob's body, and shows what He might have done at any moment. The strong man falls back spent and thrown. His self-confidence is broken, he has met more than this match.

Nay, but I yield, I yield;
I can hold out no more!

Is that the end, then? It would have been with some men, but Jacob clings with all his remaining strength to his great antagonist, until he wrings a blessing from the struggle. It was *after* his defeat, you observe, *after* he was worsted and thrown, that he prevailed. Look at the text again (R.V. margin), "In his strength he strove with God; yea, he strove with the angel, and prevailed." But how? In this way: "He wept, and made supplication unto Him." He supplicates the possession he cannot win. The blessing he sought to wring from God was his in a free and gracious gift. The sun rose on a changed and chastened life. But the long struggle had left its mark on him. He halted on his thigh. He lost the proud, self-confident swing in his gait. He was a humbler and a better man. Is that an old story I have been telling you? Is it not your story? Yours and mine? Do you remember that dark and troubled day when the Unseen asserted its rights—when you wrestled, but not with flesh and blood? And you found that the tricks and quirks which avail in that warfare were no use, for you were dealing with God. Is that the explanation of some struggle in the darkness which is going on here and now? Have we never heard of the striving of the Spirit? Is that the meaning of some bitter disappointment which comes unexpectedly into the life of some self-confident man who has hitherto never known what failure means? The power which wrestles with you is a power which longs to bless. If you will cling with all your strength, it may be you will come out of that struggle crowned and with a new name, because in the struggle you have learned His name, and in defeat you have learned to pray. (*A. Moorhouse, M.A.*) *Jacob's strength*:—The strength that God puts into us, though it be God's own, yet when we have it, and work by it, God accounts it as ours; it is called Jacob's strength, though the truth is, it was God's strength. It is a great honour to manifest much strength in wrestling with God in prayer. In this was the honour of Jacob, with his strength he prevailed with God. We should not come with weak and empty prayers, but we should put forth strength; if a Christian has any strength in the world for anything, he should have it in prayer. According to the strength of the fire, the bullet ascends; so according to what strength we put forth in prayer, so is our prevalence. This strength of Jacob was a type of the spiritual strength which God gives His saints when they have to deal with Him. See Eph. iii. 16. Surely the strength is great that is by the Spirit of God, but such strength shall manifest the glory of the Spirit of God. This is the strength attainable for Christians, even here in this world. Let us not be satisfied with faint desires and wishes, when Jesus Christ is tendered to us as the fountain of strength. But do you walk so that your strength manifests

that such riches of the glory of God dwell in you? Christians should seek to be strengthened with all might, according to the glorious power of God. The way to prevail with men is to prevail with God. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *Jacob's victory and our duty.*—The prophet takes the opportunity of showing the difference between their conduct and that of Jacob, after whom they were called. His design in doing so was to make them know that, if they expected to be saved, it was not by proving their descent from Jacob, but by acting as did that pious patriarch when he was in danger and was suffering from the effects of his former misconduct. Reference is to the scene of wrestling with the angel. We use it as an example of the mode and nature of faithful and successful prayer. All must pray, and to be heard must pray aright, in the same persevering manner as Jacob, and in the same holy temper. We are taught, in other parts of Scripture, to address our God with penitence, holiness, faith, and perseverance; and all these essentials of acceptable devotion are illustrated in this narrative. (*Beaver H. Blacker, M.A.*) *Israel unlike Jacob.*—Alas! a nearer view of Judah shows that all the descendants of Jacob, in Zion as in Samaria, provoke judgment. How unlike the early devotion and fervent faith of the pilgrim-patriarch their father! From the strong prayer amidst the stones at Bethel, where the eternal pathway between heaven and earth was opened in vision, and from the wrestling of supplication at Peniel, what moral degeneracy didst the wealthy traffic adopted in Canaan! And what a cry to God may not the prophet raise for a restoration of the old simple tent-life, when it seemed natural to men that God should raise up speakers of His will, and quicken their spiritual life by fervent preachers! In those days of prophets Israel dwelt safely: under her kings she sins and suffers. God spared the ten tribes, notwithstanding that Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, made them sin. Now, since idolatry multiplies, since Baal is worshipped, and perhaps even human bloodshed, either to Moloch, or through contagion of Moloch worship, notwithstanding Abraham's purer faith had sought better propitiations, the nation drifts like chaff, stubble, smoke. All God's appeals are in vain. Stolid and obstinate, the nation which God called to for a new birth of a pious generation, and for new thoughts and hope, stands gazing on its idols. God would have saved them from the Assyrian sword, and would have foiled the besieger, and bidden death and the grave stay their devouring. But since sinners do not repent, God cannot relent. (*Rowland Williams, D.D.*) *Bethel and Peniel.*—The house of God and the face of God. God is here. God is mine. **I. JACOB'S FIRST CONVERSION.** At Bethel Jacob cannot be called a "religious man." He had come into no personal relations with God. He acknowledged, but did not know, his father's God. His character had, as yet, received no shakings, so it had thrown down no personal and independent rootings; there were no signs of the sway of any central and unifying principles. He could still be described as "without God in the world." But out of the very consequences of his wrongdoings come the beginnings of nobler things. The vision gives us the time when Jacob first entered into personal relations with God. It may help us to understand in what our conversion to God essentially consists—a revelation of the personal God to the soul; and the acceptance, by the soul, of the responsibilities of that revelation. Jacob's new life begins with a personal revelation of God. This is the Divine arrest of the man in the very midst of his wilfulness and selfishness. God guides him with the hand of His Providence, and sets him just where He can best reveal to him Himself. We have no record of Jacob's struggling after the light, and at last reaching, after long efforts, to the light of God. In his case there is no growing of knowledge into the wisdom of God, no unfolding of moral feeling into spiritual life; but upon him, while actually in his heedlessness, the revelation of God comes: a new fact of his existence is impressively disclosed to him: this fact, that God, his father's God, Abraham's God, was with him. That fact at once, and altogether, changes the principle and spirit of his life. Religion is not a development; it is not an education; it is not something which man can himself start and nourish. It is the effect of a Divine salvation; an intervention of God; a gracious mode of bringing man into conscious and happy relations with God. It was a vision of God, and an assurance of the Divine nearness to him, and care of him, that bowed Jacob down with the profoundest awe and humiliation. The ungodly soul felt that God was about him, close to him. The vision opened Jacob's eyes—1. To see God's relation to his life. The vision showed God caring for sinful, wandering Jacob, watching over his slumbers, peopling the desert for him with ministering angels, and assuring him of unfailling

guardianship. He could never be the same man again when this fact had been brought home to his very heart. 2. To feel a conviction of the Divine claims of God is here, I must wait, listen, obey. 3. To realise the Divine love, the sovereign fulness and freeness of Divine grace, Jacob woke in the morning to feel—God loves me, even me. II. JACOB'S SECOND CONVERSION. The wrestling represents the highest point in the spiritual history of Jacob. It was the time in which Jacob learned the mystery and the joy of trusting wholly, committing himself entirely to the Divine love and lead. The wrestling at Jabbok is the close of a scene of which each part requires careful attention. Anxious and scheming as he came within sight of Canaan, he had the vision of the guarding angels to recall him from his schemings to trust. He had hitherto only seen his helpless company and the approaching peril, and like the prophet's servant in later times, God opened his eyes to see, closer than any danger, the two angel-bands of watchers. Recalled thus to the thought of God's nearness, Jacob feels that he must blend prudent schemes with prayer, and the prayer he offers is full of humility, thankfulness, and pleading, that makes it in many ways a model of prayer. But it is easily overestimated. It is the prayer of one who is still much too self-conscious, of one who has not yet quite given up his guileful ways: there is still something of Jacob's old mistake of "making terms with God." He is evidently learning his great life-lesson, but the prayer shows that he has not fully learned it yet. It was a kind of drama of his life which was acted through that night. It was a gracious way of shewing Jacob what had been the mistake of his whole career. He had always been wrestling. Now in his heart he was even wrestling with God. But He will find that a very different thing. If it does seem that a man's wrestling brings mastery, it is only because God does not put forth His strength in the conflict. When He does and simply touches, Jacob, the confident wrestler, is prostrate and utterly helpless; he can wrestle no more, he can only cling, he can only say, "Give me the blessing"; he gives up at last all self-efforts to win the blessing. (*Robert Tuck, B.A.*)

Ver. 5. *Even the Lord God of hosts; the Lord is his memorial.*—*The name Jehovah as a memorial*:—To stir them up to present duty, Hosea describes God, who did all this, and spake to Jacob, as the true God and God of armies. It teaches—1. Christ is, without all controversy true God, the same in essence and equal in power and glory with the Father; for this Angel (ver. 4) is even Jehovah, the God of hosts. 2. Great is their advantage and their dignity who have converse and keep communion with God, who hath being of Himself, and who hath all creatures ready as hosts at His command, as there is need. For this sets out Jacob's advantage, that in his wrestlings and other intercourse he had to do with the Lord God of hosts. 3. God is unchangeably still the same, as kind, able, and exorable to His people as ever He was at any time, if they would come and make use of Him; for He did all that to Jacob, not only for present use, but that, proving Himself to be Jehovah, this might be His memorial for the use of His Church in all generations; and upon this ground it is that in the next verse they are exhorted to turn to Him. See Exod. iii. 15. 4. The Lord needs no images to keep up a memorial of Him; but His name and nature are manifested in His word and works sufficiently to keep them who converse with these in remembrance of Him; for Jehovah, and His manifesting Himself to be so, is His memorial. (*George Hutcheson.*)

Ver. 6. *Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually.*—*Instructions to the unconverted and to the converted*:—As encouragement to repentance, the example of the patriarch Jacob is presented. Let the descendants of the patriarch copy his example; let them seek God and walk with Him, as Jacob had done, and they would surely find Him, and receive a blessing from Him in their turn. The advice was most reasonable. It directed them to turn to God; and then to walk with Him in the duties and comforts of true religion. I. THE INSTRUCTION TO THE UNCONVERTED. "Turn thou to thy God." An unconverted person is one whose heart is not changed and turned to God. Every person who is habitually proud, sensual, or covetous, indulging a self-righteous spirit, or following sin with greediness; or leading a worldly life, careless of his soul and eternity; every person who sins without remorse, and has, in fact, no other rule for his conduct but his own interest, gain, or will—every such person is an unconverted person.

All unconverted persons are turned from God. They are estranged from Him in heart and affections. Those who are turned away from God must be miserable. The first step in real religion is conversion, that is, the turning of the heart to God. There can be no real religion till this step be taken. Do you inquire the way? There is but one way, even Jesus Christ. He is "the way." Would you then turn to God, you must come to Him by this way. You must draw nigh to God in faith; and pray to Him for Christ's sake to be reconciled unto you. You must beseech Him to grant to you the Spirit of Christ, to work in you true repentance. Thus turning to Him, you will be graciously and favourably received. He never casts out any souls that turn to Him through Jesus Christ. II. THE INSTRUCTION VOUCHSAFED TO THOSE WHO ARE ALREADY CONVERTED. "Keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually." The converted are those who, having through grace renounced the ways of sin and the course of this world, have turned unto God by faith in Jesus Christ their Saviour; with penitent hearts have joined themselves unto Him, and, being justified by faith, have peace with God. The instruction divides itself into two parts—1. "Keep mercy and judgment." All who turn to God should be careful to maintain good works. They are called with a holy calling, and their life and conversation should accord with it. In mercy. In exercising kindness and compassion to all. In judgment. In doing justice and righteousness; in rendering to all their due; in making restitution for wrongs or injuries committed. 2. "Wait on thy God continually." To wait upon God is to depend upon Him; to exercise a believing expectation of receiving from Him all those supplies and succours of which we stand in need. (*E. Cooper.*) The "power room":—The quietest room in a Lancashire cotton mill is the engine room. It is significantly called the "power room" of the mill. But from that quietest room emerges all the force which speeds the busy looms in their process of production. Let the engine be neglected, let countless looms be added without proportional increase of power, and the mill breaks down. We have been neglecting our quietest room, our power room: we have been adding to the strain without multiplying the force, and the effects are seen in weariness, joylessness, and ineffectiveness. We must not work less, but we must pray more. (*Life of C. A. Berry, D.D.*)

Vers. 7, 8, 9. He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand; he loveth to oppress, etc.—*Fortunes*:—I. FORTUNES BADLY USED. 1. Here there is no recognition of human co-operation. No man comes in possession of wealth without the efforts of some men either living or dead. Wealth, in most cases, is the result of the efforts of a large number of human workers. But the possessor oftentimes takes no note of this. He thinks only of himself. 2. Here there is no recognition of Divine agency. All fortunes come of God. Out of His materials, out of His seasons, out of the activity of His creatures. Many fortunes are held and employed in a spirit of haughty egotism. II. FORTUNES BADLY MADE. 1. Here is fraud. There is deceit everywhere. In all fabrics, groceries, trade commodities. Deceit in making, deceit both in the buying and the selling. 2. Here is oppression. Fraud is oppression in some form or other. 3. Here is cunning. Ephraim—this typical fortune-maker—took such care to conceal all that was unfair and nefarious in his operations that he was certain no wrong could be found in his doings. Many who have made a fortune by a swindle have so guarded the transaction that they have clapped their hands and said, "None will ever find it out." III. FORTUNES BADLY ENDED. To all such fortune-holders and fortune-makers retribution must come sooner or later. (*Homilist.*) And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out substance.—*I am rich*:—Literally, I am simply rich, in all my labours they shall find none iniquity that is sin. It was the custom of the trade; that is how it is. In forty pounds weight of calico put sixteen pounds weight of china clay—it is the custom of the trade: a custom more honoured in the breach than in the observance. Sell for ten yards of cloth nine yards and seven-eighths. A man likes an eighth of a lie; a little fraction of falsehood is a kind of condiment in his supper; it is the custom of the trade. And especially if a man, after doing this, can take the chair at a missionary meeting, and speak lugubriously and tediously about the condition of the heathen he has never seen, but often cheated; he feels that there is none iniquity in him that is sin; he says, Business is business. He always says that when he wins; when he loses he says, There ought to be some morality in business after all. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *Keeping*

up appearances.—I. THE HIDING OF SIN. Ephraim is in truth most unrighteous, but he contrives to sin in such a way that he appears innocent. And do we not attempt by many subtleties to hide the real qualities of our actions, to shelter ourselves from their just penalties? 1. Men sin deeply, and yet keep within the civil law. National and international law were scrupulously observed by Ephraim. Men still flatter themselves that they keep the law of the land. A man may do that and still be an infinite scoundrel. He may be guilty of gross dishonesty. He may keep the civil law with very little sense of generosity. We may be guilty of deep cruelty to our fellows, and the law of the magistrate takes no cognisance of our actions. Often the very worst escape, whilst those far less guilty are denounced and punished. 2. Men sin deeply, and yet keep within public opinion. A public opinion exists which is more strict and pervasive than the civil law. This public opinion we are bound to respect, we do respect it, and some of us are abundantly satisfied if we succeed in meeting its exactions. But how much personal, commercial, political immorality is yet untouched by public opinion! A man may be a rascal, and yet a gentleman. With a plausible tongue, a polished style, with fine phrases and fine manners, a man may be guilty of fraud, cruelty, uncleanness, and yet remain throughout popular in society! Rotten at the core, he is painted on the rind, and the world sees the skin and not the soul. Some of the handsomest butterflies have the strangest tastes—they turn aside from the most glorious flowers to sip filthiest messes. 3. We sin deeply, and yet maintain the sense of personal dignity. Ephraim hid the fact of his guiltiness by looking at his successfulness. Men still forget their sinfulness in their prosperity. A man may be a conqueror, and yet his glory be his shame; he may attain honour, and his scarlet robe be the fitting sign of his scarlet sins; he may grow rich, and every coin in his coffers witness against him. "His honour rooted in dishonour stood." Proud, selfish, dishonest, sensual men flatter themselves in their own eyes until their iniquity is found to be hateful. 4. Men sin deeply, and yet keep within ecclesiastical discipline. Ephraim would do no iniquity that were sin from an ecclesiastical point of view. Yet all the while he was guilty of falsehood, robbery, injustice, uncleanness; he called himself Israel, but God called him a Canaanite. A man may be a terrible sinner, and yet observe all the ceremonial law. II. MARK THE INEVITABLE EXPOSURE AND PUNISHMENT OF SIN. Cleverly disguised as sin may be, it will surely suffer detection. God knows nothing about appearances; He knows us as we think in our heart. And what stands revealed is bound to meet with just retribution. Then in all life let us—1. Aim at the highest; and—2. Test ourselves by the highest; let us judge ourselves in the sight of God, and by the absolute standard. (*W. L. Watkinson.*)

Ver. 9. *Make thee to dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of the solemn feast.*—*The feast of tabernacles as a type*.—This feast was the yearly remembrance of God's miraculous guidance and support of Israel through the wilderness. It was the link which bound on their deliverance from Egypt to the close of their pilgrim life, and their entrance into their rest. The passage of the Red Sea, like baptism, was the beginning of God's promises. By it Israel was saved from Egypt and from bondage, and was born to be a people of God. Yet, being the beginning, it was plainly not the completion, nor could they themselves complete it. The wilderness dangers had to be surmounted. It was a time of the visible presence of God. It was a long trial time, and they were taught entire dependence on God; a time of sifting, in which God proved His faithfulness to those who persevered. Standing there, between the beginning and the end of the accomplishment of God's promise to Abraham and to them, it was a type of His whole guidance of His people at all times. It was a pledge that God would lead His own, if often, "by a way which they knew not," yet to rest with Him. The yearly commemoration of it was not only a thanksgiving for God's past mercies; it was a confession also of their present relation to God, that "here we have no continuing city"; that they still needed the guidance and support of God; and that their trust was not in themselves, nor in man, but in Him. This they themselves saw. "When they said, 'Leave a fixed habitation, and dwell in a chance abode,' they meant that the command to dwell in tabernacles was given to teach us that no man must rely on the height or strength of his house, or on its good arrangements, though it abound in all good; nor may he rely on the help of any man, not though he were lord and king of the whole earth, but must trust

Him by whose Word the worlds were made. For with Him alone is power and faithfulness, so that whereinsoever any man may place his trust he shall receive no consolation from it, since in God alone is refuge and trust." The feast of tabernacles was also a yearly thanksgiving for the mercies with which God had crowned the year. The joy must have been even the greater since it followed, by five days only, after the mournful day of atonement, its rigid fast from evening to evening, and its confession of sin. Joy is greater when ushered in by sorrow; sorrow for sin is the condition of joy in God. The Feast of Tabernacles was, as far as it could be, a sort of Easter after Lent. At the time when Israel rejoiced in the good gifts of the year, God made them express, in act, their fleeting condition in this life. It must have been a striking confession of the slight tenure of all earthly things, when their kings and great men, their rich men and those who lived at ease, had all, at the command of God, to leave their ceiled houses, and dwell for seven days in rude booths, constructed for the season, pervious in some measure to the sun and wind, with no fixed foundation, to be removed when the festival was passed. Because, says a Jewish writer, at the time of the ingathering of the increase from the field, man wishes to go from the field to his house to make a fixed abode there, the law was anxious lest, on account of this fixed abode, his heart should be lifted up at having found a sort of palace, and he should "wax fat and kick." Therefore it is written, "All that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths." Whoso begins to think himself a citizen in this world, and not a foreigner, him God biddeth leave his ordinary dwelling, to remove into a temporary lodging, in order that, leaving these thoughts, he may learn to acknowledge that he is only a stranger in this world, and not a citizen, in that he dwells as in a stranger's hut, and so should not attribute too much to the shadow of his beams, but "dwell under the shadow of the Almighty." Every year the law was publicly read in the feast. Ephraim was living clean contrary to all this. He boasted in his wealth, justified himself on the ground of it, ascribed it and his deliverance from Egypt to his idols. He would not keep the feast, as alone God willed it to be kept. While he existed in his separate kindgom, it could not be. Their political existence had to be broken that they might be restored. God then conveys the notice of the impending punishment in words which promised the future mercy. He did not *then* make them to dwell in tabernacles. For all their service of Him was out of their own mind, contrary to His will, displeasing to Him. This, then, "I will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles," implies a distant mercy, beyond and distinct from their present condition. Looking on beyond the time of the Captivity, He says that they shall yet have a time of joy, "as in the days of the solemn feast." God would give them a new deliverance, but out of a new captivity. The Feast of Tabernacles typifies this our pilgrim-state, the life of simple faith in God, for which God provides; poor in this world's goods, but rich in God. The Church militant dwells, as it were, in tabernacles; hereafter, we hope to be "received into everlasting habitations" in the Church triumphant. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *The days of Moed*:—1. Explanation. Of ancient agreement, or according to appointed days; for God had promised to give the land of Canaan to the posterity of Abraham for their perpetual rest. Explanation—2. Israelites are here reproved, because they neglected the command of God, who had instituted a festal day, on which they were to commemorate yearly their redemption. Explanation—3. The prophet threatens the Israelites, as though he said, "God will again drive you out, that you may dwell in tents, as you formerly did in the desert." Explanation—4. "Inasmuch as your former redemption has lost its influence through your wicked forgetfulness, I will become again your Redeemer; I will therefore make thee to abide in tents as formerly; as your first redemption avails nothing, I will add a second, that you may at length repent, and know how much you are indebted to Me." (*John Calvin.*)

Ver. 10. I have also spoken by the prophets. — *The responsibility of having the revealed Word of God*:—This is a further declaration of God's goodness to this people, and an upbraiding of them for their wickedness, when they have had so many means. 1. It is God who speaks by the prophets. Though the prophets and the messengers of God are mean, yet so long as they speak to you in His name, the authority of what they say is above any. They may be under their auditors in many ways, but the message they bring is above them; though they are weak, the power of God goes along with what they speak,

to make it good. The Word does little good till men come to apprehend this, that it is God who speaks by His messengers. 2. It is a great mercy to a people for God to reveal His mind to them by His prophets. What would all the world be but as a dungeon of darkness, were it not for the prophets and ministers of God? 3. God will take account of what becomes of the word, labour, and pains of His prophets. So He here upbraids Ephraim with them. God will take account of all the spirits that His ministers spend, of every drop of their sweat, and of all their watchings in the night; I sent My prophets, rising early. God will take account of all, and you shall know that there has been a prophet among you; the ministers shall be brought out to say and testify, "Lord, I was in such a place, and I revealed Thy mind thus unto them; they could not but be convinced, and yet still they continued in their wickedness." (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*)

And used similitudes.—*The figurative and literal in Scripture.*—There is a strong tendency of the mind to delight in figurative descriptions above literal statements. Unless all the powers of the mind are equally cultivated; unless there is a due balance of the faculties preserved in all mental operations, the imagination will certainly prevail; and there will be felt a reluctance to relinquish the splendid object of contemplation in which the imagination is interested, for what might be called a cold contemplation of truth in its literality. We never rise to the fountain-head of truth till we have seen it literally; till we have stripped it of all figurative dress, till we have seen it in its own soberness and its own simplicity, we have never seen it as it is; and figurative language is employed for the purpose of giving to the mind such an interest in the truth to be understood, as will lead to the literal contemplation of it. Many things operate in the production of figurative language. Such as the limited vocabulary of uncivilised and early nations. The state of things in Eastern countries, luxurious vegetation, &c. What are we to lay down as the principles on which we are to deal with figurative language? We have to inquire whether the language is employed in reference to a vision, or whether it is the mere result of prophetic inspiration. Figurative language in visions is not to be taken literally. A great number of predictions are delivered in figurative language. By a "similitude" we understand something resembling what it is desired to describe. Orientals frequently selected things to be the signs of words, instead of words themselves. Parables, though often taken literally, are nothing more than similitudes. Parables are sometimes intended to illustrate simply one idea, and meaning should not be forced into the mere parts of a parable. A safe rule would be, always to take the language of Scripture literally, except when that would involve an absurdity. How often has the cause of God been traduced by its adversaries, how often burlesqued by the infidel, in consequence of the extravagant and figurative interpretations of its own friends! The figurative interpretation, that is, taking figures for literalities, began with a pagan school of philosophers, who, when converted, brought their mystical philosophy into their interpretation of Scripture. Unfortunately this method has come to be styled "spiritual" interpretation. Those who offer these interpretations to the people, and often bewilder their minds by them, interpret by no rule, and on no principle: just what they like they deem to be meant; just what they feel to be beautiful is accepted by them; just what they feel to be interesting is declared to be true. (*John Burnet.*) *Everybody's sermon.*—Among the rest of God's agencies for striking the attention and conscience of the people, was the use of similitudes. The prophets were accustomed not only to preach, but to be themselves as signs and wonders to the people. God is every day preaching to us by similitudes. Providence is God's sermon.

I. BEGIN WITH THE EARLY MORNING. This morning you awaked, and put on your garments. By a similitude God reminded you that you needed a garment for your soul. Taking meals. Going to business. Returning home in the evening, all are similitudes.

II. ALL THE YEAR ROUND GOD DOTH PREACH TO MAN BY SIMILITUDES. Seed-time. Then the time of blade; of ear, of full corn in the ear. The migration of birds. The wind, heat, &c.

III. EVERY PLACE TO WHICH YOU JOURNEY, EVERY ANIMAL YOU SEE, EVERY SPOT YOU VISIT, HAS A SERMON FOR YOU. Journeying, the mountains, the sea, all have their lesson for us.

IV. EVERY MAN IN HIS CALLING HAS A SERMON PREACHED TO HIM. Illustrate from the farmer, the baker, the butcher, the brewer, the salesman, the writer, the doctor, the builder, the jeweller, &c. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Despising God's Word.*—God speaks after the manner of men. It is enough to take away every excuse from men to allege the fact, that they obey not the Word, and offer not

themselves to God as submissive and teachable, when He by His prophets exhorts them to repentance. It is an enhancing of sin when God says He has uselessly spent all His efforts to collect the dispersed Israel, through the labours of His prophets. (*John Calvin.*) *God's method in teaching the great teachers of the world* :—God is the great Teacher of mankind. He teaches the best lessons in the best way and for the best purpose. God has always employed prophets in His great school for humanity. The text indicates His method of teaching them.

I. BY VISIONS. He gives to these men inner revelations, unfolds to them spiritual realities, opens their spiritual eyes, and bids them look. What wonderful visions Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Paul, and John had. These visions serve to show three things. 1. The distinguishing glory of the human mind. 2. The accessibility of the human mind to God. 3. The reality of spiritual things. **II. BY SIMILITUDE.** He showed them the invisible by the visible, the spiritual by the sensuous. He gave them parables. There are good reasons for this mode of teaching spiritual truth. 1. It makes the spiritual more attractive. 2. It makes the material appear more Divine. (*Homilist.*) "*Take heed how you hear*" :—The Lord takes account of the manner of men's preaching as well as the things they preach. Men may have their sins aggravated, not only for standing out against the Word, but against the Word so and so delivered. The main necessary truths of God are made known to all, but to some they are given in a more sweet and winning way, in a more convincing manner than to others. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*)

Ver. 14. Therefore shall He leave his blood upon him.—*The blood-figure: sin and guilt left upon the sinner* :—That is, he shall bring his sin upon his own head. Those that be wilful in sin, their blood be upon their own heads, that is the meaning. Never stand excusing any more, you have warning enough. If you will go on in your way, the blood be upon your own head, you will undo yourselves, and there is no help. Mark the phrase, "Therefore shall He leave his blood upon him." When God brings the guilt and punishment of sin on a man's own head, and there leaves it, that is sad indeed. It is happiness when it may be said of God, He has made the sin and the guilt to pass away from the sinner. But on the other side, when God leaves the sin, with its attendant guilt, upon the sinner, there is woe indeed. The Lord many times brings His saints unto the fire of afflictions, but He will not leave them there; but when He brings the wicked into the fire, there He leaves them. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*)

CHAPTER XIII.

VER. 1. When Ephraim spake trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal, he died.—*Two conditions of Ephraim* :—"Spake trembling," i.e., there was trembling. "Ephraim was once very awful," Bishop Hall says, "so as, while he spake, the rest of the tribes were ready to tremble." The prophet contrasts two conditions of Ephraim, of prosperity and destruction. His prosperity he owed to the undeserved mercy of God, who blessed him for Joseph's sake; his destruction, to his own sin. There is no period recorded when Ephraim spake tremblingly, i.e., in humility. Pride was his characteristic, almost as soon as he had a separate existence as a tribe. Under Joshua, it could not be called out, for Ephraim gained honour, when Joshua, one of themselves, became the captain of the Lord's people. Under the judges, their pride appeared. Yet God tried them, by giving them their heart's desire. They longed to be exalted, and He satisfied them, if so be they would thus serve Him. They had the chief power, and were a terror to Judah. But he abused the goodness of his God; his sin followed as a consequence of God's goodness to him. God raised him, and he offended. The alliance with a king of Tyre and Sidon, which brought in the worship of Baal, was a part of the worldly policy of the kings of Israel. The twenty-two years of Ahab's reign established the worship. The prophets of Baal became 450, the prophets of the kindred idolatry of Ashtoreth, or Astarte, became 400; Baal had his one central temple, large and magnificent, a rival of that of God. The prophet Elijah thought the apostasy almost universal. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *The responsibility of those having authority and influence* :—

When Ephraim spoke, there was trembling. There was a time when Ephraim was very honourable among the tribes, when the very speaking of Ephraim had great power, and took great impression upon whomsoever he spoke to. 1. It is an honour to have respect from others when we speak, to have what we say received with reverence and respect, showing that it impresses the hearts of others, and is not cast out as a vain and worthless thing. Let children, servants, and all inferiors, learn to give due honour to those whom God has set above them. 2. Those who are in place of power over others account it their honour, not only that those under them should regard, but that they should tremble at what they say. Man greatly delights to lift himself above others, and to lord it imperiously over them. 3. The subjection of the hearts of men to those in authority is a work of God, and God is to have the glory of it. 4. The meaner the beginnings of men are, the more imperious they often prove when in power. 5. Sin will bring men's honour down. Let men take heed of trusting their former repute, for let them have done what they will heretofore, yet if they depart from God, their honour will depart too. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *God's gifts dependent on man's moods*.—Over and over again Hosea denounces Ephraim for their infatuated idolatry. All through the history idolatry, like a hideous disease, disfigured the national life, but yet in varying degree. With their faith went their strength, and in those days individual prophets or pious kings were powerless to stem the wave of destruction that overwhelmed the land. The lesson is for all time. "God matches His gifts to man's believing." They who tremble, acknowledge their guilt before Him, are made strong. They who go after idolatry are heavily punished or swept away. Idolatry has changed its symbols, but it has not changed its nature. What are our own temptations to idolatry in England at the end of the nineteenth century? One of our chief dangers is idolatry of the visible. The difficulty of believing that love means something besides ministry to the body and mind. But national benevolence and national progress will never make up for national apostasy. Once lose hold on the unseen, once rest satisfied with our good intentions, and we, as a nation, shall cease to carry on our mission. For a nation to be true to itself is for it to be true to its best. The national faith is the first thing to preserve. (*W. R. Hutton, M.A.*)

Ver. 2. **They sin more and more.**—*Steps in apostasy*.—There is no stop in apostasy. Let men once apostatise from God, there is no stop then; they cannot tell whither they may go, when once they begin to roll down. Steps in an apostate's departure from God are—1. Some slight sin against knowledge, though never so little, for sin of mere infirmity I cannot call apostasy; but if it be ever so little a sin against knowledge, it breaks the bond of obedience. When you will venture to do that which you know is against God, this bond of obedience being broken, no marvel though you fall, and "sin more and more." 2. Every act of sin tends to increase the habit. Corruption grows by acting; as with grace, every act of grace extends grace in the heart of a man; and the way to grow in grace is to act grace much; so that when you are acting your grace, you do not only that which is your duty, but you are growing in grace: so when you are acting of corruption, you are not only doing that which is evil, but you are increasing the tendency to it; and therefore every sin that causes us to decline from God, makes us to go more and more from God. 3. Every sin against conscience weakens the work of conscience. The authority of conscience will quickly be weakened when it is once broken; break but off the yoke of conscience, and conscience will be weaker than it was before. The first time a man sins against conscience, his conscience, having a great deal of strength in it, mightily troubles him; but having had a flaw, as it were, it grows weaker. Every sin does somewhat weaken conscience, and therefore one that falls off from God will "sin more and more." 4. A man loses his comfort in God according to the degree of his departure from Him. 5. When one has sinned against God, holy duties become very unsuitable to his soul. It is a more difficult thing to engage his heart in them than before, and so he comes to neglect duties, and by neglecting them his corruption grows. 6. The presence of God is terrible to an apostate. He cannot think of God without some terror; before he would often think and speak of God, but now he puts off the thoughts of God. It must needs be that he must wander up and down even more and more, be as a Cain wandering away from the presence of God. 7. The thoughts of whatsoever might turn an apostate's heart to God are grievous to him. 8. One sin cannot be maintained without another. As now,

you find when one man has done wrong to another, he knows not how to carry it out but by doing him more wrong, to crush him if he can. And so there are many sins that have other sins depending upon them. If a man be engaged in a business that is sinful, in order that he may carry it on successfully, he must commit a great many other sins, and so fall off more and more. 9. The pride of men's hearts is such that they will attempt to justify transgression. Men love to justify what they have done; when they have sinned, they will grow more resolute and violent, that all people might think that their hearts recoil not in the least. 10. When men have gone far in sin, they grow desperate. They little hope ever to recover themselves, and therefore "sin more and more." 11. God in His just judgment withdraws Himself from apostates. 12. God gives up apostates to their corruptions, and to the power of the devil. Oh, stand with all your might against the beginning of sin; tremble, and stop on the threshold! (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *Sinning more and more*.—1. The start in life is fair and promising. 2. There is a wish to be a man before the age of manhood has been reached. 3. There is an aversion to religion, and an appetite for what is evil. 4. There is indulgence in vicious habits. 5. There is the silencing of all the remonstrances of conscience. 6. There is the defiance of irreligion and immorality. (*G. Brooks.*) *And have made them molten images of their silver, and idols according to their own understanding, all of it the work of the craftsman.—Idols wholly human productions*.—The emphasis is where you would not expect it to be; it is upon the words "all of it." There is not one sacred spot in any idol; there is not one faint signature of the living God upon anything that man has made with his own hands to worship; it is as if eyes of fire had searched the idols through and through, and as if the hands of critics had written their record, and reported in these words: The idol is all base, all dross, all material; all of it is the work of the hands of craftsmen. Men cannot step from the finite to the infinite. A finite creature cannot make an infinite idol. Whatever is made is less than the maker. If a man has made a god, he is greater than the god he has made. To have genius and power to make it is to have another genius and power equal to condemn it. Men get tired of what they have made. Ambition may arise and say, Make a better; then comes the displacement of the former god, amid every sign and token of contempt. These words should be cried out poignantly, bitterly, sarcastically. A man is standing before the idol, and he has gone through it atom by atom, so to speak, lineament by lineament, and he says at the end—"all of it": there is not one speck of heavenly gold in all this handful of earthly rubbish. "They say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves." It was said in Israel concerning the calves, "These be thy gods, O Israel." To kiss was in the ancient times a sign of homage, either human or Divine. Men kissed their gods. When they could not kiss their gods, as, for example, in the instance of the heavenly bodies, they kissed their fingers, and waved their kissed hands to the objects of worship. The Divine Being does not hesitate to accept this action, and give it its highest meaning, hence in the Second Psalm there is one who says, "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way." That man should have descended to kiss a god of his own making is the consummation of weakness, and the very climax of ignorance and blasphemy. All this happened in ancient times. That is true, but all this happens letter for letter to-day. Man cannot get beyond the tether of his race. It is man that is tethered; not a man, some man, a particular and dying man, but humanity. We are all in one condemnation; the act of homage has not ceased, the object of desire may have changed. Men live in circumstances, and are lost in details, and therefore it is probable that they may imagine if they have substituted some other object for the calves of Israel, therefore they have left the old idolatry. That is not so. If a man be trusting to his own right arm, he is as great an idolater as any that ever lived in Israel. Whoso says he has money enough to keep out the difficulties of time, the slaves of want, and therefore he need not concern himself with providence in any spiritual or metaphysical sense, is as much an idolater as he who in uncivilised lands bows down to stock or stone, or lifts eyes of wondering ignorance to the blue heavens that he may fix them upon something of which he will make the image of a god. Yet all these heathen practices admit of the highest applications. Let no man reject nature, it is God's handiwork; no craftsman made the sun; no hireling servant set the stars in their places. If any poor heart, ill at ease, should pick out some fair-faced star and say, Be thou god to me, it might be the beginning of a higher religion, the truer and nobler faith. These

are mysteries, and are not to be spoken about scornfully. He does not know the human heart who says to men who know no better, that idolatry is a sin. It was a sin in Israel, because it involved backsliding from the true God; but find a man in a savage land who has never heard of God or Christ, and to whom the words, father, mother, brother, sister, carry no dew of blessing, no colour of poetry, no suggestion of wider and eternal fellowships—find a man there clinging to but a handful of mud in the expectation that there is something in it that can help him, and it is no sin: it should be the business of those who know better to teach him better: let what he has seized be the alphabet out of which to make words, and music, and wisdom. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *The gold god*.—I was travelling recently with an old Jewish merchant, who had commenced his career in a Western city fifty years ago, and who has been accumulating money all these years until he is now a millionaire, though as hot in the chase for the dollars as in his younger years. His whole thought and being seemed absorbed in the matter of getting money. He told me his wife was very different from himself; she was fond of music and books and art. "She came to me the other day," said he, "with a book on astronomy in her hands, and said: 'Jacob, there is going to be a new star; let me read to you about it.' But," said the old man, "I answered her by lifting both hands and exclaiming: 'Don't bother me, Rebecca! I care more about the price of overalls than about all the stars in the sky.'" It seemed to me a striking illustration of the power of the money-getting instinct when given full sway in a man's life to drown out all desire for higher things. (*A. Banks, D.D.*)

Ver. 3. As the morning cloud . . . early dew . . . as the chaff . . . as the smoke out of the chimney.—*The life of the wicked*.—I. IT IS DECEPTIVE. "Like the morning cloud." In Palestine and countries of the same latitude, dense clouds often appear in the morning, cover the heavens, and promise fertilising showers that never come. A life without moral goodness is necessarily deceptive. It deceives itself and deceives others. How many lives seem full of promise! But they result in nothing but disappointment. II. IT IS EVANESCENT. "The early dew that passeth away." In such latitudes too, the copious dews that sparkle on the hedges and the fields soon evaporate and disappear. The millions that make up this generation are only as dewdrops, sparkling for an hour and then lost and gone. III. IT IS WORTHLESS. Like chaff stowed away from the threshing-floor. Chaff, empty, dead, destined to rot. How empty the life of an ungodly man! IV. IT IS OFFENSIVE. "As the smoke out of the chimney." The ancient houses of Palestine were without chimneys: the smoke filled the houses, and smoke is a nuisance. A corrupt life is evermore offensive to the moral sense of mankind. To what conscience is falsehood, selfishness, carnality, meanness and such elements that make up the character of the wicked at all-pleasing? To none. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 5-9. I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought.—*Wilderness-knowledge*.—God knows His people where nobody else will take any notice of them. You do not know a man until you know him in the wilderness. There is but little revelation of character in laughter. So long as a man is living in rioting and wantonness, in great abundance and prosperity, having only to lift his hand to command a regiment of servants, you cannot really tell what his true quality is. Men show themselves in the darkness; men cry out of their hearts when they are in distress; it is in the nighttime of life's bitter sorrows that men's true quality is revealed. God never forsakes His people in wilderness and in desert places; He is more God and Father to them there than ever. No man knows God who only knows Him theologically. It is impossible to read much about God; you must read the writing in your own heart. The world is within you; you carry the universe in your own bosom. Unless you have the faculty and genius of introspection, and the power to read the small print that is being daily typed upon your inmost life, you can never be scholars in the sanctuary of Christ, you can never attain to high degrees of wisdom in the school of heaven. Men seek God in the wilderness. The wilderness is the school of discipline. In the Bible there lies one great desert land, and it is called "that great and terrible wilderness." There could not be two such in any globe; there could not be a duplicate experience in any life. Some things can be done only once; no man can be twice in Gethsemane;

no man can be twice crucified. There are acts in life which, having been accomplished, enable the sufferer to say, The bitterness of death is passed; come what will now, it is but a day's march into heaven. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *Known in time of distress*.—God knew Israel in the wilderness.—(1) In respect of their sin, which He visited. (2) In regard of their wants, which He provided for. (Observe)—1. Man's wickedness strangely contrasts with God's goodness; God knew their sin and yet destroyed them not; they receive mercies, and yet sin. 2. It is a great mercy for God to know a man in time of distress. This is God's way. Men know in prosperity; but let us make God our friend, He will be a friend otherwise than men will be. 3. We should not be dejected in times of trouble; that is the time for God to know thee: be willing to follow God in any estate. 4. God's knowing us in distress is a mighty engagement. Let us look back to the times when we were in trouble. 5. Let us know God's cause when it suffers, and know our brethren in their sufferings. 6. God's knowledge is operative and working; it does us good. Our knowledge of God should be so too. To sin against our knowledge of God is evil, but to sin against God's knowledge of us is worse. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *God present with His people in the wilderness*.—I. THE LOW AND WILDERNESS STATE OF GOD'S PEOPLE. 1. It refers to their spiritual wants, weaknesses, and troubles. In their first convictions of sin. In their first beginning to walk in the ways of the Lord. In after temptations. In seasons of dejection. 2. To their temporal wants, weaknesses, and troubles. In poverty and want; in pain and sickness; in the dangers of life. II. WHAT KIND OF KNOWLEDGE OR NOTICE IS IT THAT GOD TAKES OF HIS PEOPLE IN THAT STATE? 1. It is with pity and compassion. 2. So as to manifest His love to them. 3. So as to bestow His comforts on them. 4. He grants His presence to them. 5. He affords them help. III. LAY DOWN THE PROOF AND EVIDENCE OF THIS. 1. The Word of the Lord often declares it. 2. God's dealings with His people in all ages further confirm it, e.g., Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Jonah, Hezekiah, ancient Israel. Application—1. Let us be concerned to have this God for our God. 2. When in a wilderness state, let us trust in our God. 3. Remember God's kindness in appearing for you. 4. Despise not those who are in a wilderness state, but "weep with those who weep," &c. (*T. Hannam.*)

Ver. 6. According to their pasture, so were they filled . . . therefore have they forgotten Me.—*The conjunction of secular prosperity and spiritual perversity*.—Here are men in good physical circumstances, in rich pastures well fed, getting thereby proud in heart and forgetful of their God. I. It is a COMMON CONJUNCTION. Wealth in the sinful heart tends—1. To promote self-indulgence—the pampering of appetites and the gratification of sinful lusts. 2. To foster indolence. It weakens and generally destroys the motive to industry. II. It is an INCONGRUOUS CONJUNCTION. Secular prosperity ought to lead to spiritual devotion. 1. The more temporal good we have, the more means we have for the promotion of spiritual excellence. Property puts us in possession of a power to procure books, leisure, teachers, and all other aids to spiritual improvement. 2. The more temporal good we have, the more motives we have for the cultivation of spiritual excellence. The Bible urges the mercies of God as an incentive to holy life: "We beseech you by the mercies of God," &c. 3. The more temporal good we have, the more obligations we have for the cultivation of spiritual improvement. Thus the incongruity of the conjunction. III. It is a SINFUL CONJUNCTION. The curse of heaven is on it. "It is sinful"—1. Because it is an abuse of God's blessings. 2. It involves an infraction of God's laws. He has commanded us in everything, by prayer and supplication, to make known our requests unto Him. (*Homilist.*) *Poisoned pastures*.—The grazing land was beautifully green, and appeared most desirable for flocks and herds. A farmer turned his sheep into the meadow, but after a short time some of them fell sick, and eventually all of them were affected. No one could understand the reason, until it was discovered that a flock of diseased sheep had previously occupied the field, the grass of which had become tainted and the pasture poisoned. How careful all should be of the books they read, the companionships they form, and the amusements in which they indulge! Do they taint the mind and poison the soul? For according to their pasture so is their life.

Ver. 9. O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thine help.—*Man the self-destroyer, and God the Saviour*.—1. THE LOST STATE OF

MAN, BOTH BY NATURE AND BY PRACTICE. Observe to whom the words were spoken. Of His ancient people, the Lord, by His prophet, declares that "they had destroyed themselves." He had warned them, but they had despised His warnings; He had threatened them, but they had made light of His threatenings; He had reproved them, but they would have none of His reproof. Is it not so now with God's Israel, His Christian Church? Who is there whose account of sin is summed up in birth-sin only? Who is there that is guilty of imputed guilt only? Who is there that has only sinned in having the inclination to sin—the disposition to break God's commandments—the capability of doing wrong? We are sinners not only by nature, but by practice. We have sinned in our thoughts. The very principle of mind being corrupt, whatever arises therefrom must be corrupt also. And what have our words been? Often insincere, flattering, proud, corrupt, empty. Words lead on to actions. He cannot act aright who does not first think aright.

II. THE MEANS OF HIS RECOVERY AND RESTORATION. Can we save ourselves? Let any man try of himself, and by his own unassisted strength, to think but one good and holy thought, and he will find the question answered. Is there no hope? In Me is thy help—in Me, the Almighty Father, the eternal Son, the Holy Spirit, the Creator, the Redeemer, the Sanctifier, the Just, the Merciful, the Holy God. (*W. W. Champneys, M.A.*) *The sinner his own destroyer*:—Our text gives the decision of God, who cannot be deceived, and who cannot deceive. Men do not believe His declarations. They cast the blame of their destruction from themselves upon God. Sometimes it is His decree which constrains them: sometimes it is the withholding of His grace which excuses them; sometimes it is the force of temptation and their own inability which exempts them from blame. The destruction of impenitent sinners is procured by themselves.

I. ESTABLISH THIS TRUTH BY ARGUMENTS. 1. Drawn from the attributes of God. Where would His justice, His mercy, His veracity be, if He were the procuring cause of man's destruction? 2. Drawn from the Word of God. What terms does it use when it speaks of the nature of God? If God be to blame for the sinner's perdition, all these tender expostulations must be only a pompous display of unreal feelings. God gives many unequivocal assurances that He would "have all men to be saved." If God is to blame, these assurances must be untrue. 3. Drawn from the conduct of God. Observe the way in which He has acted towards our race in general, or toward each one of us in particular, and we must be convinced that if we are lost, the blame of our perdition must rest entirely on ourselves. 4. The sentiments of all believers establish this same truth. 5. The testimony of believers is corroborated by the confessions of sinners themselves. Nevertheless, sinners object to this truth.

II. ANSWER THE OBJECTIONS. 1. From the decrees of God. This objection is drawn from a subject of which we have very inadequate conceptions, and in which we soon get beyond our depth. 2. The principle on which this objection is founded is not a just one. It is that when two doctrines are affirmed in the Scripture, which to our limited capacity appear irreconcilable, we are authorised to embrace the one and reject the other. Show why this principle is unjust. 3. From the inability of man. It is said that God requires of men certain duties which they cannot perform. But inability is of two kinds, natural and moral. Natural inability consists in a defect of rational faculties, bodily powers, or external advantages. Moral inability consists only in the want of a proper disposition of heart to use our natural ability aright. And this is the essence of sin. If the sinner lies under the first inability, he is excusable; but if under the second, he is inexcusable. Moral inability is viciousness of heart, and depravity of disposition. By reason of wilfully cherishing this moral inability, you are inexcusable, you "destroy yourselves." (*H. Kollock, D.D.*) *The sinner's self-destruction and only remedy*:—I. HIS SELF-DESTRUCTION. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself." 1. That the ground of condemnation is personal character. The Bible puts it nowhere else. "If I had not come and spoken unto them they had not had sin." "Ye will not come to Me that ye may have eternal life." 2. God governs every man as a free agent. He is left to choose between good and evil. But God will not force his choice, not even to save him. 3. The provision of grace is ample for all who will accept it. None are excluded from its scope. "Christ tasted death for every man." 4. Life is tendered to you and urged upon you; the means of enlightenment, of conversion and training for heaven are all in your hands.

II. THE ONLY REMEDY—the only way to escape the eternal doom of the self-

destroyer. "In Me is thine help." The sinner can destroy himself, but he cannot save himself. Salvation from sin and death is all of grace. It is a supernatural provision outside of and independent of human device and human merit. (*J. M. Sherwood, D.D.*) *The cause of the destruction of impenitent sinners:*—Others cannot destroy us unless we contribute by our own negligence to our own destruction. The Israelites ought to blame none but themselves if judgments from heaven should overwhelm them, giving them up to the Assyrians in this life, and to punishment after death. Here God condescends to exonerate His conduct in regard to sinners by declaring that they ought to take the whole blame of their own destruction upon themselves. The difficulties of this subject proceed either from our notion of the nature of God; or of the nature of religion; or of the nature of man. I. THE NATURE OF GOD. As Creator and Author of every being that exists, and of everything that results from their existence, God seems the only cause of the miseries of His creatures. There are two ways in which we may satisfy ourselves on this subject. One is, to obtain a complete idea of the decrees of God, and to compare them so exactly with the dispositions of sinners, as to make it evident by this comparison that sinners are not under a necessity of committing such crimes, as cause their eternal destruction. The other is, to refer the subject to the determination of a being of the most unsuspected knowledge and veracity, whose testimony we may persuade ourselves is unexceptionable, and whose declaration is an infallible oracle. The first of these ways is impracticable, and always must remain so. Who can boast of knowing the whole arrangement, all the extent and all the combinations, of the decrees of God? Try the second. The question is whether, allowing the decrees of God, God doth any violence to sinners, compelling them to commit sin? God Himself declares that none of His decrees offer violence to His creatures; and their destruction can proceed from none but themselves. He has given this answer in those pathetic expostulations, in those powerful applications, and in those exhortations which He employs to redeem the greatest sinners. He has given the answer by tender complaints concerning the depravity of mankind; by express assurances that He would have all men to be saved; and by such passages as the text, that there are no difficulties insurmountable in our salvation, except such as we choose to seek there. II. THE NATURE OF RELIGION. 1. As to evangelical morality—how clearly it is revealed. Heresy may attack our religious mysteries, but propositions that concern moral virtues are placed in a light so clear that nothing can diminish its brightness. Religion clearly requires a magistrate to be equitable, and a subject obedient; a father tender, and a son dutiful; a husband affectionate, and a wife faithful; a master gentle, and a servant diligent; a pastor vigilant, and a flock teachable. Religion clearly requires us to exercise moderation in prosperity and patience in adversity. Our moral relations are regulated in a manner so clear, distinct, and intelligible that we not only cannot invent any difficulties, but nobody hath ever pretended to invent any. 2. The next character of Christian morality is dignity of principle. Why did God give us laws? Because He loves us, and would have us love Him. How pleasant it is to submit to bonds which the love of God imposes on us. 3. Another character is the justice of its dominions. All its claims are founded on justice and equity. 4. Another feature is a character of proportion. 5. Power of motive is another. III. THE NATURE OF MAN. There are implied four vague and erroneous notions of human depravity. 1. When we speak of our natural impotence to practise virtue we confound it with an insurmountable necessity to commit the greatest crimes. 2. We confound the sure virtue that religion inspires with other virtues, which constitution, education, and motives of worldly honour are sufficient to enable us to practise. 3. We confound the natural depravity of a man born a pagan, and with only the light of reason, with that of a Christian born and educated among Christians, and amidst all the advantages of revelation. 4. We confound the condition of a man, to whom God hath given only exterior revelation, with the conditions of him to whom God offers supernatural aid to assist him against his natural frailty. (*James Saurin.*) *Pandora's box; or, the cause of all evils and miseries:*—I should tremble to rehearse the text in your ears, if there were not comfort in it as well as terror. You may discern in it a double glass; in the one we may see our hurt, in the other our help. Israel is destroyed. Who hath destroyed Israel? Why is Israel destroyed? I. THE ACCIDENT TO THE SUBJECT. "Destruction." Destruction is opposed to construction, as corruption to generation.

In the text destruction is the pulling down of the state, and downfall of the kingdom of Israel. All politic bodies are in some sort subject to the condition of natural bodies. As these, so they, have their beginning or birth, growth, perfection, state, decay, and dissolution. If the state of kingdoms and monarchies is so fickle, what folly, or rather madness, is it for any private man to dream of perpetuities and certainties! To compose the seeming difference between God's promises to Israel and His threats against Israel, we must distinguish divers kinds of promises made to Israel, and divers Israels to whom the promises may appertain. II. THE SUBJECT OF THIS ACCIDENT. Israel may signify, properly, either the whole posterity of Jacob, or the Ten Tribes which were sent from Rehoboam; figuratively the spiritual kingdom of Christ over the elect. There is a threefold Israel. 1. According to the flesh only. 2. According to the spirit only. 3. According to the flesh and spirit. Some of the promises are absolute, some conditional, some temporal, some spiritual. III. THE CAUSE OF THIS ACCIDENT IN THIS SUBJECT. Praise God, O Israel, for thy former prosperity, but now thank thyself for thy imminent desolation. Are not all mixed bodies corrupted on the disagreement of elements, and the elements themselves by the strife of contrary qualities within them? Are not all metals defaced with their own rust? God is the cause of our woe, and we are the cause of our woe. God punisheth us, and we punish ourselves. 1. Let us then confess our sins to be the fuel of God's wrath, and the fountain of all our miseries. 2. Let us compose ourselves to endure that with patience which we have brought upon ourselves. 3. Let us forsake our beloved sins; let repentance be our practice, and a speedy reformation our instruction, so God's judgments shall not be our destruction. (*D. Featley, D.D.*) *Israel self-destroyed*.—The Gospel of our salvation serveth at once to humble and to exalt us. Like certain medicines for the body, it first opens and searches the wounds which it is intended to heal. The former of these operations is as necessary as the latter, though far from being so pleasing. It is much wiser for us to submit to all the pain which a reflection upon our past conduct may now occasion to us, than to shut our eyes against real danger. I. ISRAEL IS IN A STATE OF DESTRUCTION AND MISERY. Consider this charge with regard to all mankind. If the misery is real, it must be felt. It may be felt, however, and yet not be acknowledged. Men are often ashamed to confess their real feelings on this subject. Can it be denied that man is in a state of wretchedness and destruction? II. HE IS HIMSELF THE AUTHOR OF HIS OWN DESTRUCTION. He hath himself entirely to blame for all the misery which hath come upon him. Sin has brought the curse upon this lower world. "The soul that sinneth it shall die" is an irreversible decree of the Divine government. As long as a man continues a sinner, he must be miserable in the very nature of things. To bring the matter a little nearer us, let each of us put the question to his own breast, Canst thou plead exemption from that general corruption which hath universally affected the human race? (*James French.*) *Sin a universal disease*.—With us all the occasional derangements to which persons of the strongest health are liable teach every one the importance of knowing particularly of his own bodily constitution. But why is all this wisdom bestowed on the body, and disregarded in the corresponding case of our spiritual sickness? Every man bears the seed of spiritual disease in his inward frame. How important that he should understand his own symptoms. To brave infection, to despise precautions, to neglect predispositions, to shut his eyes to growing disease, to refuse proper remedies, where the life of the soul is concerned, is no less a blind folly and a fatal rashness in the case of the soul than in that of the body. Are not sins diseases—fatal diseases, if they lead to death? The text is addressed, in the first instance, to a whole people, personified or spoken to as an individual person. In Israel is typified all mankind, for all are concluded under sin, all are guilty before God. Sin is surely the symptom of fatal disorder in the soul, for it is God's revelation that no sin on God's earth is forgiven without blood shed for it; and that there shall in no wise enter heaven anything that defileth—no sin, small or great, unconfessed, unforsaken, unforgiven. Where there is sin on the conscience, whether known or unknown, that soul has destroyed itself. Where is the soul that has not some time sinned? And where is the conscience that has washed out that stain for itself? And what is the washing that can take the stain of a sin out of an immaterial soul? We do not speak now of open vice and wickedness. We do not address the conscience that is seared with red-hot iron. There are sins which are not so gross, which lie so

deep that they may long remain unseen; not so hateful to men, and yet as dangerous to the soul; for the root of dislike to God and enmity to godly things very often lies hidden among such secret forms of sins. How much real godliness of heart do the generality of professing Christians exhibit? Can there be a more fatal disorder of the soul than formality, indifference, hypocrisy, profession without practice, lip-service without heart-service? If you have enmities and cherish hatred, if you love idle gossip and carelessly utter slander, &c. &c., you must admit that these are fatal symptoms of something miserably wrong in the soul. It is a sure sign that persons have "destroyed themselves" when they have no hearts to praise God. Sin is not *only* the commission of particular stated offences; it is the state of the heart, it is being without a sufficient love, a sufficient liking, for God's goodness, and having more liking for things. Sin is the transgression of the law. And this is the law—to love my neighbour as myself. But if we have destroyed ourselves, is there no hope, is there no help? Few words will suffice to disclose that mighty remedy which is in our God alone. "In Me is thy help." (*Brereton E. Dwaris, M.A.*) *The sinner his own destroyer*.—Self-destruction is a crime of awful and unparalleled turpitude. A few facts will make this clear beyond peradventure. I. NO MAN IS DESTROYED IN HELL FOR EVER SIMPLY BECAUSE HE IS A SINNER. All have sinned, and all would inevitably perish had not Omnipotent Love intervened to prevent it. The sinner that dies at last, dies not because he is a sinner, but because being a sinner he refused the pardon and grace offered. II. A FREE AND FULL SALVATION HAS BEEN WROUGHT OUT AND IS PROFFERED TO EVERY SINNER. The physician is at hand. There is "balm in Gilead" to heal sin's dreadful malady. III. GOD WAITS LONG AND GRACIOUSLY TO WELCOME THE SINNER BACK TO LIFE. He restrains His anger. He affords every opportunity. He sends forth His messenger. IV. GOD PUTS NO HINDRANCES IN THE SINNER'S WAY, IMPOSES NO RESTRAINT ON THE FREE EXERCISE OF HIS WILL. V. EVERY POSSIBLE INDUCEMENT IS HELD OUT, AN AMAZING SYSTEM OF MEANS AND AGENCIES IS PUT IN FORCE, to morally constrain him to obey and live; so that, if he destroys his soul at last, it can only be by personally resisting and overcoming the combined efforts of God and man to prevent it! (*J. M. Sherwood, D.D.*) *Self-destruction,—God salvation*.—There is no more mournful spectacle in history than that of a nation concerning which this has to be said, "Thou hast destroyed thyself." It is bad enough when a nation is destroyed by other powers. But there is something sadder, if our eyes were only opened to see it. The sadder spectacle is that of the human soul of whom it can be truthfully said, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself." It is bad enough to be destroyed by Satan; but it is worst of all to feel that we ourselves are the instruments of our own ruin. There is a whole multitude of different kinds of powers which are brought to bear upon the ungodly man for his ruin. But no existing force can ruin the human soul unless it is false to its own interests. As long as man is true to himself, and therefore true to his God, so long is he invincible. But let that man once turn his back upon that Being from whom he has derived his origin, and on whom he is wholly dependent, then the man is paralysed and stripped of all moral power. Why do I desire to bring the accusation of the text home? Because there is a tendency in the human heart to lay the blame of its own sins on somebody else, and pre-eminently on God Himself. Do not let us try and throw off the blame from our own shoulders on to God. The blame must ever be ours, and because the blame is ours, therefore the pain is ours. Some shift the blame on to God by misrepresenting application of His foreknowledge. Because God foresees a thing, He does not make us perform it. The fact that God foreknows arises from the fact that God inhabits eternity, and that we live in time. The vaster region in which God lives and moves encloses that smaller and more restricted region in which we live. As soon as you think God interferes with your own moral freedom, you may turn round and lay the blame of your sin upon God; but so long as God constitutes you a free, responsible agent, do not add to your other sins the sin of blasphemy, by making the everlasting God the source of the sin which has disgraced your life. How does Christ "help" us? He stoops to the very sepulchre where we are lying, and lifts the poor corpse right up from the very jaws of destruction by the power of His own resurrection. He infuses into our lifeless nature a new vitality, which comes from Himself; and triumphing over our foe, He exclaims: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I

will redeem them from death." (*W. Hay Aiken, M.A.*) *The sinner self-destructed*.—As regards the race of Israel, the prophet's statement is self-evident. The national ruin of the chosen race was clearly due to national disobedience. But is not man in all cases the author of his own perdition? That it was so with our first parent admits of no doubt. His ruin was chargeable solely on himself. Is man a self-destroyer? Consider this question—I. IN ITS RELATION TO THE NATURE OF GOD. We cannot comprehend God. Between the Creator and the creature there is an immeasurable distance. If God foreknows that this or that man will finally perish, how can it be affirmed that he destroys himself? In reply we ask, Does the foreknowledge of God as to any particular action imply that He is the *Agent*? All that can be said is that God permits these actions to be wrought. We must not confound what God foreknows with what He appoints. The future punishment of the wicked is represented in God's Word as the product of sin,—sin the grain sown, punishment the harvest to be reaped. If, then, the sin is the sinner's own, and the punishment is the legitimate product of the sin, is not the conclusion just, that it is the man himself who commits the sin who destroys himself? Suppose that the decrees of God are apparently inconsistent with the doctrine that man destroys himself. There are two methods by which the question might be set at rest. One is through our being made fully acquainted with all those decrees, in all their relations to time and to eternity. But this method is inapplicable in our case, for we have not the capacity to comprehend the decrees of God. The other is our accepting the assurance that the purposes of God are not at variance with our personal responsibility. Life and death are before us, and we can choose. Therefore man's undoing must be of himself. God's decrees we cannot comprehend, His invitations we can. II. THE QUESTION IN ITS RELATION TO THE PROPOSALS OF THE GOSPEL. Some have attempted to show that the requirements of the Gospel are in effect the main hindrances to its acceptance. They are so rigid and unyielding, that practically they operate as a barrier to our embracing the proposals of mercy which the Gospel brings. With the requirements of the Gospel it is certainly no easy matter to comply. No man can comply with them in his own strength. But we must remember that the Gospel is of God. It is the plan which infinite wisdom contrived, and shall feeble man presume to say that the wisdom of Jehovah has erred? Bear in mind that the precepts of the Gospel are framed for the happiness and well-being of mankind; and note how carefully the Gospel adapts itself to our moral constitution in the appeal which it makes to those motives which have the most power to influence human conduct. It may, however, be further objected, that there is such an inherent weakness and depravity in human nature that practically it is impossible to attain to the standard of obedience which the Gospel demands. Least of all will this plea serve. We fully admit the depravity of human nature. But bear in mind the nature has been redeemed. The Son of God has taken our nature into union with the Divine, that He might redeem and sanctify and save it. Say not, then, that it is the nature of man which makes it impossible for him to be saved. The nature has been redeemed, and the redemption would be incomplete if it left any man in this life beyond the reach of being saved. If there had been no interposition in behalf of the fallen; if mankind had been allowed to multiply, and no movement on the part of God had been set on foot for their deliverance, there might then have been ground for the excuse. There is, however, nothing in the nature of God, nothing in the proposals of the Gospel, nothing in the moral nature of men, to render salvation impossible. (*R. Bickersteth, D.D.*) *Israel's relief from God*.—"In Me is thy help." That is—(1) It might have been. "I would have helped and healed thee, but thou wouldst not be helped and healed." This will aggravate the condemnation of sinners, that they opposed the offers God made them. (2) It may be. "Thy case is bad, but it is not desperate. Come to Me and I will help thee." This is a plank thrown out after shipwreck, and greatly magnifies the power of God, but also the riches of His grace. Dr. Pocock renders, "Presuming upon God and His favour has emboldened thee in those wicked ways which have been thy ruin." (*Matthew Henry.*) *Help in God for sinners*.—When sinners are seeking salvation it is very important that they should know where to find it. There is no subject on which men are so likely to err as the subject of salvation. Nowhere else does the heart exert such an influence over the mind. Men have "carnal minds which are at enmity with God." Men do not "seek first the kingdom of

God," putting eternity before time. Since unregenerate men are so apt to be dissatisfied with the rules of God everywhere else, we might expect them to be dissatisfied with the plan of salvation, and make many mistakes when they are seeking to be saved. Sinners are apt to lose sight of the essential truth of the text. God says, "In Me is thy help." The meaning of this is unlimited. The sinner's only help is in God. He cannot help himself. He will never have a heart that is right with God, he will never be reconciled to Him, he will never be a new creature in Christ Jesus without God's help. The first proof of this is found in the language of the Bible. The second is found in the nature of the unrenewed heart. The third proof of the necessity of Divine influence is found in the inefficiency of all other influences. The fourth in the inefficacy of all motives. You may not always be sensible of your resistance; but the reason is, that you consider these things so little, and examine your own hearts and lives so little, that you remain in almost entire ignorance of yourselves. Many of you are waiting for stronger motives. Sinners do persuade themselves, and they are able to persuade themselves, that some stronger, more powerful motives would influence them to turn to God. Motives do not convert men. Your help is in God, not in motives. Practical improvement and profitable direction from this doctrine.

1. The folly of those who seek salvation in themselves. It is all very true that the sinner who seeks salvation must strive against sin, shun temptation, deny himself, guard well his heart, or he will not be saved. But when he relies upon himself and not on God, when he seeks to help himself instead of seeking help from God, he is leaning on a broken reed. Man must depend, and work while he depends.
2. The reason why so many of those who are awakened to a sense of Divine things, and begin to seek salvation, never attain it. They wish to take themselves out of the hands of God.
3. We learn why sinners who are making some attempts to be saved sometimes continue so long in affliction and trouble before they find peace with God.
4. We learn what is the great struggle of the sinner in coming to salvation. It is to give his wicked heart to God.
5. Sinners when awakened are often doing, or attempting to do, something directly contrary to what they suppose.
6. They are often guilty of resisting the Holy Spirit.
7. Sinners are their own destroyers. (*J. S. Spencer, D.D.*)

Man's destruction, of himself; his salvation, of God.—To understand things in their causes, and to trace them back from their first causes into their principles, has always been deemed the highest kind of knowledge. However agreeable and entertaining this kind of knowledge may be, it is not always the most needful and useful. We are now in a world of action, rather than of science. And usually we have more to do with the reality than with the philosophy. But in regard to our destruction and salvation, it is absolutely necessary that we should know the causes, in order that we may be enabled properly to levy the praise and the blame. God must not incur the infamy of our destruction, and we must not usurp the glory of our salvation. Two propositions are derivable from the text. I. **MAN'S DESTRUCTION OF HIMSELF.** What is this destruction? It is not a temporal loss; not the loss of the body, but the loss of the soul. Not the loss of its physical being and faculties, but the loss of its well-being and its happiness and its hope. At whose door is the blame to be laid? We make five appeals.

1. We appeal to the cause of your continuance in the state in which you are. If it were so, that you were not accessory to your own depraved and mortal state, surely you are accountable for your continuance in it. God has provided a fountain for sin and uncleanness open and free always; but if you love your pollution better than cleansing, your destruction will be of yourselves.
2. To the nature of Christianity. If in the Gospel call any had been overlooked, you might fear that you were in the number. If hard conditions and meritorious qualifications were required to be performed and possessed, you might despair. If the truths of Christianity were hard to be understood, you might complain of ignorance. If these benefits were sold at a high price, you might complain of poverty. If these duties were to require for their performance a power that was nowhere to be found, or was unattainable by you, you might complain of weakness. If upon making trial you could not succeed, if upon praying you were refused, you might then complain of the providence and the grace of God: but what can you complain of now?
3. We appeal to experience. Your experience: the experience of a sinner, the experience of the true penitent. The true penitent is not only awakened, he is enlightened; and in God's light he sees light.
4. To the Divine testimony. Let us dofer at once to a Being whose judgment is always according to truth. Ask God whether

we are compelled to sin, and whether, if we perish, the blame will be our own ? 5. To the proceedings of the last day. Then every one must give account of himself to God. What will you do when He rises up, and when He judges ? The hour cometh when "every mouth will be stopped, and all the world shall be found guilty before God," whatever they now allege in their own defence or extenuation.

II. OUR SALVATION IS OF GOD. Sinners of themselves cannot repair the consequences of their transgressions. The reason why so many think of being their own saviours is, because they have such defective views of their fallen state itself, and because they have never seriously and earnestly made the trial of their supposed ability to deliver themselves. God's help is—1. The most gracious in its source. Whence did this scheme arise ? Compulsion is out of the question. But may not merit have some influence ? Alas ! all our desert is on the other side. Has desire had no influence ? Why, the scheme was not only formed, it was accomplished too, long before we had any being. "According to His mercy, He saved us." 2. The most wonderful in its procurement. Not only is the agency entirely the Lord's, but He accomplishes the thing in a way the most peculiar. God does not save us by the mere volition of His will, or a mere exertion of His power. We see the "Word made flesh and dwelling among us," and suffering for sin, "the just for the unjust." 3. The most suitable in its supply. Is light adapted to the eye ? Is melody adapted to the ear ? Is food adapted to the taste ? So correspond the blessings of the Gospel with all our wants and woes and weaknesses. Here is wisdom for the ignorant, pardon for the offending, renovation for the depraved, strength for the weak, riches for the poor ; a sun if you are in darkness, a shield if you are in danger. 4. The most perfect in its efficiency. He who "speaks in righteousness is mighty to save." 5. The most extensive and accessible. None of you are excluded unless you exclude yourselves. This subject should preach—(1) Candour. Persons differ in their opinions, and all are not equally clear in their religious views ; but if they keep between the two grand lines of the text they cannot materially or essentially err. (2) Terror. Self-preservation is the first law of nature. You can "destroy yourselves." (3) Encouragement. Not to those who wish to continue in sin, but to those who are desirous of deliverance from it, and of obtaining salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ. What compassion there is in God, who hath remembered you in your lost estate ! (4) Admonition. Though there is help in Him, there is help in Him only. In Him only is the hope of Israel. And there is only help *now*. "Now is the accepted time." (*William Jay*.) *Moral self-destruction*:—If a man is lost he has only himself to blame. It is told of some poor heathens that, to please their god, they put themselves to death in the following way. They took a little boat, went out into the deep water, then took a little vessel in their hand, put it over the boat, filled it with water, and then poured the water into the boat. So they went on and on ; the boat kept filling and filling, presently it began to tremble, and then sank, and thus they died. This is just what the sinner does. He goes on in sin for a month. What is he doing ? He is putting water into the boat. He goes on for a year. He is putting water into the boat. He goes on yet longer. Take care ! Take care ! The boat is filling. The sinner is filling it. Stop ! or it may sink for ever. (*Thomas Jones*.) *What man has to give thanks for*:—One thing of which the Lord casts the entire blame upon His creatures, and another thing of which He takes the entire glory to Himself. I. MAN HATH TO THANK HIMSELF FOR HIS OWN DESTRUCTION. That man is, by nature, in a destroyed and ruined state is too clear to be denied. Men do indeed try hard to soften down the fact. They strive to put the fairest face they can upon their situation and their prospects. Whatever other charges man is open to, self-hatred surely is not one of them. Yet man is said to be a self-destroyer. Both these things are true—man is a self-lover, and man is a self-destroyer. In proof see this. We have turned our backs on our best friend. We have rushed into the arms of our worst enemy. We have done, with our eyes open, things of which we have been perfectly well aware, that they work the death of the poor soul. And he is of all self-murderers the most determined who, having inflicted the wound, will not let it be bound up. II. SINNERS HAVE TO THANK GOD FOR THE WORK OF THEIR SALVATION. In this work man has no part or lot. What a humbling truth ! Why cannot we help and save ourselves ? Because we have reduced ourselves so low. The words of the text mean : "I am qualified to help you. There is in Me all the sufficiency your case requires." Nor is it a help up only which the Saviour offers, but a help forward. (*A. Roberts, M.A.*) *Man his own*

destroyer; God alone his Saviour.—Whatever changes may be made by time, we are sure of one thing, that our God changeth not, and that the principles involved in His counsels and threatenings, in His warnings and promises and invitations, are immutable and everlasting as Himself. I. *SELF-DESTRUCTION IS POSSIBLE TO US MEN*; even the destruction of the highest, noblest, and Divinest part of our nature. Man, too, is the only being upon the earth to whom self-destruction is really possible; the being whose capacities are the noblest has the power of self-injury. A man cannot put out his life, but he can blight and blast all that is bright and blessed, happy and holy in his nature and life. II. *THE ONLY POWER* by which we can destroy ourselves is the power of sinning. Sin does its work most rapidly and completely. Sinning darkens the understanding, impairs the judgment, makes a man a fool, disorders the imagination, deadens the best susceptibilities of the heart, and sears the conscience. It enslaves the will, and prevents peace of mind. It depraves the whole spiritual nature. And sinning is the breach of God's law of love. God takes notice of every breach of His law. III. *EVERY FINALLY DESTROYED MAN IS SELF-DESTROYED*. God will not destroy a man except as punishment for sin. The devil cannot permanently hurt you, except as you combine with him to hurt yourselves. Two things are certain. The sin which finally destroys men is sin for which they are responsible. And the sin which inflicts most injury is the sin which men love, and which, because they love, they think lightly of. IV. *THE SELF-DESTROYED MAY BE SAVED FROM DESTRUCTION*. "In Me is thy help"—thy deliverance, thy salvation. 1. A man cannot save himself. All that he can do for himself is to submit to be saved. At first all men try to save themselves. 2. No fellow-man can save the sinner. God never sends a man to His priest; He invites the man to Himself. 3. Think of the encouragement to return to God. While God is speaking to you of salvation, you may have it. Self-destruction by sinning is the natural order. Salvation does not come in any natural order, but as the result of an extraordinary provision on the part of God. If after God has spoken to you, you be finally destroyed, your destruction will be self-destruction—wilful, inexcusable, and unbearable. (*Samuel Martin.*) *Sinners are self-destroyers, but salvation is of God*.—I. *SIN IS A MOST DESTRUCTIVE EVIL*. Sin is the grand disturber of the world. It disturbs the conscience, families, churches, cities, and nations. II. *SINNERS ARE SELF-DESTROYERS*. It will be found that the blame is all our own, that there is an obstinate persistence in sin against the remonstrances of conscience and the admonitions of God. III. *THERE IS SALVATION IN JESUS CHRIST, EVEN FOR SELF-DESTROYING SINNERS*. There is sufficient help for every purpose of our salvation. There is grace abounding for the greatest sinners. (*G. Burder.*) *The moral ruin and recovery of man*:—I. *MAN'S RUIN IS OF HIMSELF*. Many believe that God is in some way the author of evil. This is impiously false. God is not the author of man's ruin. Being the first cause of all good, and independent, He is good, and only good. Satan is not the author of man's ruin. He cannot force the will nor constrain the mind to sin without concurrence and consent on our part, and in the concurrence and consent consists the sin that causes our ruin. (1) Our personal conduct shows this truth, and evinces that our sins result from the free choice of our wills, because there can be no responsibility where there is no freedom of choice. (2) The state of our mind shows the same truth. This evidence indeed is cognisable only to our own conscience; but this is as it ought to be. What is the nature of the ruin? Loss of rectitude, or the Divine image; exposure to Divine wrath now, and in the world to come. These are the outlines of the misery we have brought on ourselves through sin. II. *MAN'S RECOVERY IS OF GOD*. "In Me is thine help." The doctrine here is, that the salvation of man is of the grace of God. "By grace ye are saved." He delivers us from the evils which involve our ruin. The guilt of conscience, the defilement of the heart, the disorder of the faculties, the dominion of the passions, the bondage of sin. He restores to us the blessings that involve our happiness. (*D. V. Phillips.*) *How sin destroys*:—One of the most famous pictures in the world is the Last Supper by Leonardo da Vinci. Jesus sits at the table with His twelve disciples. It is said that the artist sought long for a model for the Saviour. He wanted a young man of pure holy look. At length his attention was fixed on a chorister in the cathedral named Pietro Bandinelli. This young man had a very noble face and a devout demeanour. Leonardo used him as a model in painting the face of the Master. Soon after this Pietro went to Rome to study music. There he fell among evil companions and was led to drink,

and then into all manner of debasing sins. Year after year the painter went on with his picture. All the apostles were now painted save one—Judas, the traitor. Da Vinci went from place to place, looking for some debased man who would be suitable as a model. He was walking one day on the streets of Milan, watching the faces of evil men he chanced to meet, when his eyes fell on one who seemed to have in his features the character he sought. He was a miserable unclean beggar, wearing rags, with villainous look. The man sat as the artist's model for Judas. After the face was painted Da Vinci learned that the man who sat for him was his old friend Pietro Bandinelli, the same who had sat a few years before as the model for the Master. Wickedness had debased the beautiful life into hideous deformity. Sin distorts, deforms, and destroys the human soul. It drags it down from its greatness until it grovels in the dust. **In Me is thy help.**—*Help for all* :—The first thing that a man does after waking up to his sinful condition, is to try to help himself. How are we to come to moral and spiritual health? As long as the heart is wrong the life will be wrong. **I. GOD IS WILLING TO HELP US BY GIVING US THE HOLY SPIRIT TO SHOW US JUST THE POSITION WE OCCUPY.** What is the use of conviction? Without it, a man does not want Christ and His salvation. The Holy Spirit coming into the heart, a man wakes up to see his true state. **II. GOD IS READY TO HELP US, BY GIVING US REPENTANCE.** There is a great difference between seeing my sin and turning from it. Conviction and conversion are not the same thing. **III. GOD IS WILLING TO HELP US, BY ENABLING US TO EXERCISE FAITH IN CHRIST.** The most exhausting work to which I ever put the energies of my soul was to believe in Christ. Indeed, it is so great an undertaking that no man can accomplish it of himself. **IV. GOD IS WILLING TO HELP US, BY GIVING US THE PARDON AND PEACE OF THE GOSPEL.** He can save you. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) **Man's destruction and God's restoration** :—**I. CONSIDER THE DESTRUCTION OF SIN.** 1. Adam ruined himself and all his children by sin (Rom. v. 19, 21). 2. We have destroyed ourselves by actual transgression (Rom. iii. 23). 3. The intellect or understanding is ruined (Jer. viii. 7). 4. The will is become a rebellious faculty (Rom. viii. 7). 5. The conscience is rendered past feeling (1 Tim. iv. 2, 6). The passions and affections of the soul are equally defiled (1 John ii. 16). 7. He is destroyed both in body and soul, but for Christ (Ps. ix. 17). **II. CHRIST IS OUR SALVATION AND HELP.** 1. Christ is the true light (Mal. iv. 2). 2. He shines in our hearts and understandings (Psa. xxxvi. 9). 3. He restores to us an enlightened conscience (Heb. x. 22). 4. The soul is now sensible of the least transgression (2 Cor. i. 12). 5. He strengthens our memories to retain Divine things (John xiv. 26). 6. He rectifies and restores all our affections (Psa. lxxiii. 25). 7. Provision is made for the everlasting life of the Church (John vi. 37). 8. He is our help in delivering us from the wrath to come (John xiv. 3). **III. THE IMPROVEMENT.** 1. This help is omnipotent in its energy (1 Cor. i. 24). 2. It is prompt in its manifestation (Isai. lix. 19). 3. It is always successful in its undertakings (Col. ii. 15). 4. It will not admit of any co-operation in the work (Eph. ii. 8, 9). 5. It is unceasing in its application (Isa. xli. 17). (*T. B. Baker.*) **Man self-destroyed, but not self-saved** :—That man is a fallen and ruined creature is generally acknowledged. The moral condition of the world is a certain demonstration of this distressing truth. It is confirmed by the unrighteous propensities, by the vices of character, and by the aberrations from virtuous conduct which are exhibited more or less frequently even in the best of men. Man does not impute his ruin to himself; and yet, for the most part, he expects his recovery from himself. The first of these errors blinds him to the necessity of repentance; the second prevents the exercise of faith. **I. MAN'S RUIN IS FROM HIMSELF ALONE.** Our first father sinned voluntarily. But is it our fault that our natures are depraved? If the fault be not yours, it must be imputed to God, or to the tempter, or to Adam. The first would be no less impious than absurd. The second cannot be entertained. Satan cannot constrain. The fault must lie between Adam and yourselves. And you cannot separate yourselves from him. 1. Adam was the head and representative of the entire human race. The consequences of Adam's sin are witnessed in all his posterity. They all sin, invariably; they all die, invariably. Do you complain that, instead of giving man a general law, God entered into special covenant with him? Then you complain of that which is, in fact, the strongest argument of Divine goodness and condescension; for a law contains no promise. But a covenant holds out the certain prospect of a recompense in case of fidelity. Would it have been better that the fate of the human race

should not have been entrusted to the hands of one ? It is not only a fact that we are implicated in the first sin, but that fact is demonstrably consistent with the righteousness and goodness of God. Instead of evading the charge, we are called upon to confess its truth. 2. Men have universally followed in the footsteps of the first transgression, and have thus made it their own. The original act is not repudiated and disavowed, but is repeated and imitated. There has never been one individual exception. All have sinned, are sinning every day and every hour. Every individual gives ample ground for his own condemnation. 3. Down to the present day the sins of men are committed of their own free will, and without any external restraint. Consult your own reason. Do you not feel that you are free ? You are not conscious of any foreign force, or of the pressure of inevitable necessity. It is true that you are tempted ; but the tempter can employ no compulsion. Since men sin willingly and by choice, they cannot be excupated. 4. Men have added to the guilt of a single act of disobedience an immense multitude and variety of new transgressions, clustering about it from age to age ; so that it stands not alone, but is only the first, and yet not the worst, of all sins. It is difficult to conceive how they could have done more to appropriate Adam's guilt. The torrents of iniquity have been deepening and widening from generation to generation. 5. Men choose to abide in their present depraved condition, though a method of recovery is proposed to them in the Gospel. This is the crowning evidence which ought to produce conviction. No sooner was the guilt incurred than redeeming mercy was proclaimed ; and how has that proclamation been treated by the world ? On the ground of all these considerations, we insist that all transgressed in Adam, and have, in point of fact, made themselves partakers of his sin. Man is the author of his own ruin. The recognition of this truth is necessary to excite repentance, without which there can be no escape from perdition. Whom else can the sinner accuse ? Will he lay the blame upon God, because He endued man with a free will ? That liberty of choice is the glory of human nature. Or because He subjected man to a test, in token of the homage due to His supremacy ? Or because He did not render man immutable in holiness from the very first ? Will you quarrel with the permission of evil ? Would you lay the fault upon the tempter ? Or upon Adam ? Vain evasions all !

II. MAN'S RECOVERY IS FROM GOD. This truth meets the second delusion of man. He looks generally to himself for salvation. Four considerations will set this truth in a clear and convincing light. 1. Man wants a proper sense of his own condition and danger, and therefore he never will (even if he could) take the very first step towards his own recovery. There is no adequate motive. If it had been left to man, the least effort never would have been put forth to recover the friendship of God, and to restore His lost image in the soul. 2. Man has lost all his love of righteousness, and, therefore, never would have sought recovery of his own accord. There is a great deal of virtue in the world, but whence is it derived ? Take away all that has been wrought for the morals of mankind by the indirect influence of religion, and how much will be left ? There is not to be found, anywhere in the world, any hatred of sin as sin, nor love of righteousness as righteousness, except in the man renewed and sanctified by the Spirit of God, and by the blood of Christ. If a righteous and holy God had not seen and pitied the want of righteousness in man, that want had never been perceived, never lamented ; and, for this cause, there could have been no salvation. 3. Man has no means of satisfying the justice of God for his sins ; and, therefore, even if willing, he could not be the author of his own recovery. 1. Some satisfaction is necessary. 2. Man has none to offer which can be acceptable. 3. He has not that moral strength which is necessary to the renewal of his heart and the amendment of his life ; and, therefore, he cannot be the author of his own recovery. God alone can awaken the soul to a conviction of danger, implant in it a love of holiness, provide the means of reconciliation, and by the influence of His Holy Spirit renew the heart, the character, and the life. "Salvation belongeth unto the Lord." (*Daniel Katterns.*)

Religious unreality :—I have long been convinced that many of our opinions and practices of these days differ enormously from the simple Gospel which Christ preached. I see but little hope for the re-animation of the true Christian ideal until God in His mercy raises up amongst us some prophet like Savonarola or Luther, or John Wesley, or some saint like St. Paul, or St. Francis, who is a saint indeed. Nothing is easier than to forget that religion means a good mind and a good life. Give me righteousness and not talk, conduct and not opinions, character and not ceremonies, love and not

shams. I. DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE. In every religion there must be doctrine and practice. Christ came to show us that God's will is our sanctification. The age, the nation, and the Church, supremely need this lesson. "Get sincerity. Simplify your lives, simplify your religion; return to the simplicity which is in Christ Jesus." Whatever our belief may be, whatever our worship may be, unless we keep innocency, and do the thing that is right, we have missed the one thing, and only thing, which will bring any human being peace at the last.

II. THE BRIDGE OF LIFE. There is on every side of us a false life, and on every side of us a sham religion. There is open to us all a blessed life and a real religion. Christianity in nearly all of us produces fruits so crude, so scant, so hunger-bitten, as to be little better than a store of Levitism or a godless heathenism. Christianity smitten through and through with the curse and the blight of our unreality,—that is the reason why it makes such little way, and is losing its hold of the masses of the population. Yet let us not despair. God judges not as man judges. III. HELP IN GOD. Life is short. There is nothing which the world, the flesh, or the devil can offer us which is not profoundly unsatisfying. Yet God who giveth more grace, can deliver us from that fraud or subtlety of the devil or man, which is the only final irremediable curse of our mortal lives. He can give us holiness; He can give us peace; He can give us happiness in Him. There is nothing to complain of in life, but only in ourselves, who pervert, and dwarf, and degrade, and poison it; and so God ever calls to us, and pleads with us through His Son, our Lord. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thy help." (*Dean Farrar.*) *Christ, the sinner's refuge*:—These words bring before us two subjects—man's state by nature: and his restoration by God.

I. WE HAVE DESTROYED OURSELVES. Most men, though self-destroyers in a spiritual sense, yet appear to be quite unconscious of it. By many sin is thought to be a thing quite harmless, altogether innocuous; but a more dangerous or poisonous reptile does not exist. You must be judged by the rigorous demands of the law of God, and that law requires obedience, in thought, word, and deed, and that without the smallest deviation. You cannot discharge the debt you owe to this law. You are in this respect helpless, hopeless, remediless. II. WE CANNOT HELP OURSELVES. Our own obedience to the law cannot possibly justify, and consequently cannot save us. This fact the Scriptures declare. Some say, but God is merciful. Will He show mercy at the expense of justice? He delights in mercy when His justice is satisfied. III. WHEN AND HOW DOES GOD BECOME THE SINNER'S HELP? When the sinner believes on Christ to salvation. He could not obey the law perfectly, so as to be justified thereby, but when he believes in the Saviour, Jesus becomes to him justification. He could offer no sacrifice to God for his sins. Jesus is to the believer an all-sufficient sacrifice. The sinner could not redeem his soul from death. Jesus becomes to the believer "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." (*G. M'Clelland, A.B.*) *Man's ruin and God's remedy*:—These words are prophetic of the great disasters and that awful ruin which came upon God's chosen people, when the Assyrian led them into captivity, and desolated their land with fire and sword. They were spoken in a time of comparative security, when the cities of Israel were teeming with inhabitants, and the broad harvest fields were offering their rich reward to the labour of the husbandman. Amid the glitter and promise of material civilisation, God had discerned and denounced the real tendencies of this rebellious people. He declares that the ruin should be the natural consummation of the nation's progress, that they should be self-destroyed by the simple operation of the principles which they had adopted, and the institutions which they had founded. This brief address proclaims the solemn truth, that as he stands amid the bounties of God's providence and the natural arrangements of the world, man is continually perverting them from their Divine intent, and thereby bringing ruin upon his highest interests; and the only remedy for his abuse of mercies and disarrangement of established order is found in the constant interposition of Jehovah's arm in the processes of nature, providence, and grace. Our subject then is, the destructive tendency of human progress, and the remedy supplied by God to counteract the ruin. A weakness of the present age is the temper in which men are wont to glorify its institutions, its achievements, and its progress. As if by general consent the nineteenth century has been established upon a throne of honour, and around it have gathered the high priests of science and the leaders of opinion, to proclaim its successes and its destiny. But the object of all this idolatry is no less a shadow and a deceit than is that crowned and jewelled mortal

whose life is flowing on to death, while his flatterers are extolling his immortality.

I. THE NATURAL PROGRESS OF MAN IN THE WORLD IS A STEADY LAPE TOWARDS CORRUPTION AND DESTRUCTION. In spite of the arts, institutions, and triumphs of civilisation, the natural development of the race is a descent towards misrule, oppression, anarchy, and ruin. Reason, revelation, and history make this evident. 1. Consider the nature of the ideas of civilisation and progress as they are held by men, and as they operate in the world. That there is a "law of progress" in relation to man's material interests cannot be overlooked, and ought not to be denied. On behalf of his various needs, man is a ceaseless worker. Thus there is progress in the art of living, in mechanical inventions, in the range of the fine arts, and the scope of great enterprises, and in the fellowship of nations. One age profits by the mistakes and successes of those which have preceded it. Great results are produced, dazzling to the eye, and flattering to the pride of man. But when this process is closely surveyed, and its real tendencies are accurately noted, what is it more or better than a reconstruction of the tower of Babel, in which railroad iron, and telegraphic wires, and social comforts, are substituted for asphaltic brick, and the fine arts for the builder's lofty plan, but the intent of which is equally with that of the ancient enterprise, to exalt man upon the earth, and screen him from the scrutiny of God? Expand it, modify it, or disguise it as you will, the fact remains that a process of development which rests upon these ideas and aims at these results is rotten to the core, and from it there can only spring corruption. In material prosperity we have the real end of progress, so far as it is sought by any human institutions, and in this there cannot be a single element of conservative effect, or a single principle of enduring force. 2. This view is confirmed by the lessons of history. "History is philosophy teaching by examples." In the light of the solid facts of history we learn the real tendencies of that refinement and civilisation of which those who see things in the present only, are so prone to boast. Every nation that has culminated in such a civilisation as has been described, has found therein the elements of its decay and ruin. Illustrate from Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Rome, India, Ottoman Empire, States of Italy, South American Republics, &c. 3. Refer to our own land, and the influence of our own institutions. We have received a goodly heritage. Our institutions were founded in the hatred of oppression and the love of right. The broad Atlantic rolls between us and the corruptions which have vitiated the older nations of the world. But what has been the direction of our progress? Has there been ascent or descent in the march of empire? It is true that, in our national career, we have gained in territory, and increased in revenue, and advanced in culture and refinement, but amid all this the primal vigour and intensity of the nation's life has wasted. Republicanism does not check depravity. Consider the fierce partisanship of politics, the strife of interests between different sections of the Union, the corruption of our legislators, the apologies for oppression, the insecurity of our cities, our eagerness in the pursuit of wealth for its own sake, the recklessness of our expenditure, and the fearful increase of crimes of darkest hue, and you cannot but acknowledge the general tendency towards license and corruption.

II. AMID THESE DESTRUCTIVE TENDENCIES THERE IS HOPE FOR MAN IN THE HELPING HAND OF GOD. God is continually averting perils, reconstructing ruined institutions, and infusing new life into the organisms which man has corrupted. Among the vivid creations of the Scandinavian mythology there is one which represents Life under the similitude of a Tree. Igrasil, the ash-tree of existence, has its roots deep down in the very kingdom of death. At its base sit the three Fates, who water these roots from the sacred well, while its trunk mounts high towards heaven, and its branches spread into every land. Its boughs are the histories of nations. Its rustle is the sound of human life, swelling onward from of old. It grows there in spite of death below, and storms above, the true emblem of man's life and progress, by means of the forces through which God sustains him in the midst of moral evil. Out of the very elements of death He is evolving a progressive revelation which will change the tendencies of the race. The process by which this is being accomplished is not natural, as men understand the laws of nature. It is a process of miraculous effect, and supremely glorious to the grace of God. The formal statement of this Divine method we find only in the Word of God. It is by implanting living ideas of truth and righteousness, and by renewing sinful human hearts in the Divine likeness, that man's ruin is turned aside. In the spiritual influences of the Gospel lies the help which His Word has promised, and which His hand affords. Christianity is the one power

of real progress in the world. Christianity saves the world from corruption and destruction. By it society would be truly civilised, the State be reared on the great principles of righteousness, and the highest welfare of the world be secured by a prosperity which should be at once material and spiritual, temporal and eternal. (*R. R. Booth.*) *Men's misery from themselves—the remedy in God:—* In the history of the Jewish race are set forth the waywardness and the misery of men under alienation from God. In the mingled tenderness and severity of its treatment, we have a representative instance of the general dealings of providence regarding the disobedient and rebellious. The kingdom of the Ten Tribes had fallen upon evil times. Their sufferings were no doubt judicial—the awarded judgments of the Supreme Ruler; but they were likewise the natural and inevitable consequences of their conduct. These are equally true propositions, that no evil is from God, and that all good is from Him. Help and deliverance upon repentance and amendment are precisely as much in the course of things as is suffering after sin. I. THE FIRST PROPOSITION. "We have destroyed ourselves." 1. By the immediate effect of sin. When once holiness departs from the soul, life itself departs, in its highest sense. The destruction attributable to sin is brought upon us by ourselves. No constraint was laid on man's will. St. James gives the whole history and progress of iniquity in the heart, in his first chapter. God is so far from being the cause or author of sin, that He has, by an infinity of methods, endeavoured to draw us away from it; and is, on the contrary, the giver of every gift tending to life and holiness. As little can we excuse ourselves by alleging any fatal necessity; there can be no such constraining power, independent of the Divine purposes. 2. By incurring the punishment and misery due to sin. It is an eternal law that misery follows transgression; and that law is God's law; but His it would not be, were it not founded in justice and benevolence, the essential basis of His holy character; and not in any despotic exercise of bare authority. In this consideration we discover the inconvenience of looking on the means and instruments of the punishment of reprobate sinners, as belonging wholly to a place, and not likewise to a state. There is positive punishment; but the loss of our original privileges, which may be called the negative part of punishment, is not of much less fearful character. It is the state of degradation and ruin, into which, while here on earth, the sinner plunges himself. By the practice of habitual sin, the activity of the conscience is at length suspended, the eye of the understanding is closed, the ear is shut, the heart is hardened, the Holy Spirit retires. But if God withdraws His grace, He must not be thought the cause of the destruction. We "quench" the Spirit—we expel, we drive Him away, when we pollute His temple with sin. The Word of God confirms the fact that the destruction of those who perish is from themselves; and is a thing wholly alien from the intention and desire of the Almighty. This is implied in the precepts and commandments, wherewith Scripture abounds. The same is expressly urged in persuasions, exhortations, entreaties, remonstrances, and reproaches. II. THE SECOND PROPOSITION. "In Me is thy help." Emphasis is put on the word "Me." It is pointedly exclusive. Can a conscience pierced by guilt be healed by indulgences that will heap upon it more guilt? Is it in the power of pleasure effectually to banish remorse? If we have "destroyed ourselves,"—if we have burdened our consciences, corrupted our hearts, ruined our peace, there is but one source whence the remedy is to be obtained; but it is a source deeper than our unworthiness, more abundant than the sins of the whole world; a source ever present and ready to send forth its healing waters. It is the bosom of God. Whatever our distress, God has the power to help. He is almighty, and can do all things; unless the will of the creature be obstinately opposed to His will and influences. And in Him is willingness to help. And He has provided the requisite means and methods of help. They are ever within the reach of those who need and will apply them. His help is never too late, never ineffectual. No case is without hope, if there be repentance. If the destructive workings are but little advanced, God's help may arrest its progress. Should it, unhappily, have proceeded so far as to have corrupted our hearts and seared our consciences, He can convert, restore, and renew us. (*R. Cattermole, B.D.*) *Destroyed sinners finding help in God:—* God's eye sees at once all events, past, present, and future. Hence He saw Israel labouring under the woes which He had threatened. He saw them scattered and peeled and eating abundantly of the fruit of their own devices, and He tells them that the blame was all their own. Israel, in coming under the stroke of Divine vengeance, fell a victim to her own

rebellion and obstinacy. Yet God did not cease to pity them. God had first threatened Israel. Then He views her as overwhelmed by His judgments. He blames her for having brought them upon herself. He laments over her. He opens anew the door of hope, by declaring "in Me is thine help." **I. THE MEANS BY WHICH SINNERS DESTROY THEMSELVES.** 1. They do so by departing from God, whose favour is their only safety. Apart from God there is no security for man. The world may pretend to throw over him the shield of its protection, but it will prove as the spider's web before the wrath of offended heaven. The favour of God is a strong tower, to which the righteous run and are safe. But unregenerate men have turned their backs upon this hiding-place and rock of defence. They are utterly destitute of an asylum as long as they disregard the favour of God. And this destitution is chargeable wholly on themselves; because God has graciously used all kinds of agencies in order to influence them. 2. By indulging in sin, which is ruinous in its very nature. We argue the nature of a thing from its uniform effects. If we find sin always pouring forth streams of misery, we say it is ruinous in its very nature. Wherever sin has trod with unholy foot, there misery in some form and degree has been spreading its withering and deadly influences. Test sin by what it did to the Lord Jesus. See what it has done to man as a race. It has scattered desolation, mourning, and woe, over the face of the whole earth. 3. By exposing themselves to the destructive judgments of God. God has armed Himself against sin with righteous but fearful judgments. Many of these overtake the sinner during his earthly career. All the miseries which come upon men in time are only the first-fruits of the abundant harvest of wrath, which those shall reap who continue to sow to the flesh. 4. By refusing to obey the Gospel, which brings the only remedy for their miseries. Notwithstanding all His wrath against sin, God has set before sinners an open door of escape from its guilt and consequences. The sinner can close this door against himself by rejecting the Gospel of God's Son. And there is no other way of escape than that God has provided. Sometimes the sinner sets himself to work out a righteousness of his own. Sometimes he comes after the Lord has arisen and shut to the door. **II. WHERE HELP IS FOUND FOR US IN GOD.** There are many quarters in the Divine character to which we need not look for help. None is to be found in His absolute holiness; or His absolute justice; or His absolute power; or His absolute and general mercy. 1. There is help for us in the gracious mercy of God. By this we mean His free and undeserved compassion, exercising itself through Christ for the deliverance of lost sinners. Christ has removed all obstacles arising from the absolute holiness and justice, and the general mercy of God. Hence comes to us—along the channel Christ provided—the forgiving and sanctifying mercy of God. 2. There is help for us in the gracious power of God. God's power, in Christ, is the strong arm sent down from above to draw the sinner from the depths of sin and misery. It is the mighty energy by which his heart is changed, his nature reversed, and by which he is drawn to the Saviour. It is the mighty rod by which God breaks the power of sin in the believer. It is the storehouse out of which God gives the believer strength to perform the duties assigned to him. It is the house of defence in which the believer may obtain protection from every calamity. 3. There is help in the gracious faithfulness of God, whose promises are so numerous and so varied as to suit all our wants and circumstances. The ground on which a man may lay hold on these promises is the faithfulness of God in Christ. 4. In short, there is help for us in the all-sufficiency of God. Learn how lamentable it is that we should have destroyed ourselves. And what reason we have for praising God with all our hearts. If God had not said, "In Me is thy help," where would we have been? (*A. Ross, M.A.*) *In God is our help*:—This gracious declaration of the blessed God involves two truths. **I. THAT IN GOD IS OUR ONLY HELP, AND THAT WE HAVE NO OTHER MEANS OF DELIVERANCE BUT IN HIM.** That aversion from God which constitutes our guilt and misery, prompts us to seek relief anywhere else, rather than from Him. That might be prudent, if any dependence could be placed in those refuges which we rely on. That God is our only help is obvious from the circumstance of His having interposed on our behalf. Infinite wisdom can do nothing unnecessary. We could not by any means accomplish our own deliverance. Reason and conscience tell us that no future repentance, though we were disposed to repent, can atone for the guilt of a single transgression. And we do not want to repent; we are unwilling to return to our allegiance, or to be reconciled to our offended Judge. Some say that,

under the Gospel, the demands of the moral law are abridged, and that it is now satisfied with a sincere, though imperfect obedience. Can this be true? The fact is that we can do nothing towards relieving ourselves from that destruction and misery in which we are involved by sin. It is not in our power, though we were willing; and we are not willing, although it were in our power. It is impossible that our circumstances should be retrieved by any other means than those which God Himself hath appointed. II. GOD IS AN ALL-SUFFICIENT HELP, BOTH ABLE AND WILLING TO BRING US RELIEF. It may be said, Is not God almighty, so that He can do whatsoever He pleaseth? Yes, He is able to effect any natural act whatever. But our circumstances are such that something else than mere power is necessary to bring us relief. The power of God cannot act in opposition to His other perfections. God is not only powerful, but just and holy. A plan must be devised by which all His perfections may be illustrated at once. God must be just, though man should perish. What circumstances render the scheme of redemption, which God hath wrought for us by Jesus Christ, fully sufficient for all the purposes of our salvation? Consider the dignity of the person of the Redeemer and His resurrection. His death was not more necessary to atone for our sins than His resurrection to apply the redemption He had purchased to the souls of His people. He hath not only begun, but completed the work of redemption. (*James French.*) *God's help for the sinner.*—Well, there are those in this audience who not only feel they have a sinful nature, but that they are helpless. I congratulate you, I am glad of it that you feel you are helpless. You say, "That isn't brotherly; that isn't humane." Well, I say that in the same spirit in which Lady Huntingdon said it to a man who exclaimed, "I am a lost man." She said, "I am glad of it." He said, "That's a most unkind remark." "Ah!" she said, "I am glad of it. Because you must first feel you are lost before you will win salvation." And so if there are those here who not only know that they have a sinful nature, but that they are helpless, I congratulate you. For now comes the clarion voice of my text—it comes like ten thousand thunders bursting from the throne, "In Me is thy help."

Ver. 11. **I gave thee a king in Mine anger, and took him away in My wrath.**—*Saul.*—The Israelites seem to have asked for a king from an unthankful caprice and waywardness. The ill conduct of Samuel's sons was the occasion, an "evil heart of unbelief" was the cause. To punish them, God gave them a king "after their own heart." There is, in true religion, a sameness, an absence of hue and brilliancy, in the eyes of the natural man. Samuel had too much of primitive simplicity about him to please the Israelites; they felt they were behind the world, and clamoured to be put on a level with the heathen. Saul had much to recommend him to minds thus greedy of the dust of the earth. He was brave, daring, resolute; gifted, too, with strength of body as well as of mind. Both his virtues and his faults were such as became an Eastern monarch, and were adapted to secure the fear and submission of his subjects. Samuel's conduct in the national emergency is far above human praise. Personally qualified Saul was for a time a prosperous king. But from the beginning the prophet's voice is raised both against the people and king in warnings and rebukes, which are omens of his destined destruction, according to the text. Here, then, a question may be raised—Why was Saul thus marked for vengeance from the beginning? The question leads to a deeper inspection of his character. The first duty of every man is the fear of God—a reverence for His Word, a love of Him, and a desire to obey Him. Now Saul lacked "this one thing." He was never under the abiding influence of religion, however he might be at times moved and softened. What nature made him, that he remained, without improvement; with virtues which had no value, because they required no effort, and implied the influence of no principle. There was a deadness to all considerations not connected with the present world. It is his habit to treat prophet and priest with a coldness, to say the least, which seems to argue some great internal defect. We have no reason to believe, from the after history, that the Divine gift at his anointing left any religious effect on his mind. The immediate occasion of his rejection was his failing under a specific trial of his obedience, as set before him at the very time he was anointed. There was no professed or intentional irreverence in Saul's conduct. He outwardly respected the Mosaic ritual. But he was indifferent, and cared for none of these things. From the time of Saul's

disobedience in the matter of Amalek, Samuel came no more to see Saul, whose reason of probation was over. He finishes his bad history by an open act of apostasy from the God of Israel. He consulted the sorceress at Endor. Unbelief and wilfulness are the wretched characteristics of Saul's history—an ear deaf to the plainest commands, a heart hardened against the most gracious influences. (*J. H. Newman, B.D.*) *A gift of God's anger* :—You were so set upon it, that you would have a king; if you will, take him, saith God, and take him with all that shall follow after. So that it was (as one speaks) rather from an angry God than from an ontreated one. Saul and Jeroboam were both given in anger.

1. God may have a hand in things wherein men sin exceedingly. 2. Things that are evil may yet have present success. 3. God's gifts are not always in love. Take heed of immoderate desires for any worldly thing. I. How we MAY KNOW THAT WHAT GOD GIVES IS IN ANGER, NOT IN LOVE. It is a very hard thing to convince men, if they have their desires satisfied, that it is rather from anger than love. Men are so well pleased with the satisfying of their desires that they can be very hardly convinced but that God intends good to them in it. 1. When you desire a gift, rather than God in it. When your desires are for the gift rather than the Giver, you can have no comfort that there is love in it. 2. When our desires are immoderate and violent. 3. When God grants men their desires before the due time. They have what they would have, but they have it not in God's time. 4. When God grants us what we would have, but without the blessing. He grants the thing, but takes away the blessing of the thing, He takes away the comfort and satisfaction of it. "They shall eat, but they shall not be satisfied." 5. When that which we desire is merely to satisfy our lusts. We do not desire such and such things that by them we may be fitted for the service of God. 6. When men are so eager that they care not whether the gift comes from a reconciled or a provoked God; it is all one to them (*Num. xi.*). 7. When God regards not our preparation for a mercy. Carnal hearts take no great care themselves of it. Let me have it, say they, our fitness matters not. It is your sin and wickedness not to regard the preparation of your hearts for what you have, and it is God's judgment to give it to you before you are prepared. A gracious heart, when it would have a mercy, is as careful to get the heart prepared for the mercy as to obtain it. 8. When we rest on the means we use, and seek not God by prayer. 9. When God gives us our desires, but not a sanctified use of them. When God gives you the shell, but not the kernel, surely it is not in love. All the good things that wicked men have, are but shells without kernels. 10. When a secret curse attends what we have. 11. When we regard not what becomes of others, so we have our wants satisfied. 12. When God, in satisfying our desires, makes way for some judgment. 13. When men are greedy of things to the disregard of results; when they would have their desires satisfied in a foolish way, never minding what inconveniences may follow, but merely looking to their present comfort. 14. When men seek to have their desires satisfied, merely because they love change. 15. When our desires of further mercies make us forget former mercies. 16. When men desire new things out of mistrust of God. 17. If we seek to attain our desires by unlawful means. (*Jeremiah Burroughs.*) *Answers to improper prayers* :—The flying fish, says the fable, had originally no wings, but being of an ambitious and discontented temper she repined at being always confined to the water, and wished to soar into the air. "If I could fly like the birds," said she, "I should not only see more of the beauties of nature, but I should be able to escape from those fish which are continually pursuing me, and which render my life miserable." She therefore petitioned Jupiter for a pair of wings, and immediately she perceived her fins to expand. They suddenly grew to the length of her whole body, and became at the same time so strong as to do the office of a pinion. She was at first much pleased with her new powers, and looked with an air of disdain on all her former companions; but she soon perceived herself exposed to new dangers. While flying in the air she was incessantly pursued by the tropic bird and the albatross, and when for safety she dropped into the water, she was so fatigued with her flight that she was less able than ever to escape from her old enemies the fish. Finding herself more unhappy than before, she now begged of Jupiter to recall his present; but Jupiter said to her, "When I gave you your wings I well knew that they would prove a curse; but your proud and restless disposition deserved this disappointment. Now, therefore, what you begged as a favour keep as a punishment." (*Evenings at Home.*)

Ver. 14. I will ransom them from the power of the grave.—*For Easter morning* :—For long ages it must have almost seemed as if God had forgotten His challenge. "Death reigned from Adam to Moses"; from Moses to David, who "died and was buried"; and from David to Christ. One of the earliest chapters of the Bible (Gen. v.) is a cemetery of the old world; and in the case of each the monotonous announcement follows, "and he died." The generations of mankind spring smiling and beautiful on mother earth, like the clover crops of successive years, as if to defy or with their charms to fascinate the tyrant-reaper. But all to no avail. There were only two exceptions to the dreary monotony of death—the rapture of Enoch, and the ascension of Elijah; they were like the early crocus or aconite, which announces the coming of the spring. All the rest died. At last *He* came in human form who had been fore-announced as death's death, the destined fulfiller of the promise of paradise. At least He will not succumb. He will not see death! Or if they meet, before one glance of His eyes, "which are as a flame of fire," surely death will wane as the moon when smitten by sunlight! But contrary to all that we might have thought, it was not so. He, too, the Prince of Life, having entered the lists with the fell tyrant, allowed Himself to be led as a lamb to the slaughter. And it might have seemed therefore that none, not even God, could break the thrall of death. Such was the appearance; but not the fact. We are reminded of the old Greek story that when the city of Athens was doomed to supply each year a tribute of youths and maidens to the monster of Crete, the hero Theseus embarked with the crew, and accompanied the victims that he might beard the dreadful ogre in his den, and slaying him, for ever free his native city from the burden under which it groaned. So Christ through death abolished death, and "destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and delivered those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Here was fulfilled the Divine announcement, "O death, I will be thy plagues." Nor is this all. In the last vision vouchsafed to man of the ascended Christ, the keys of death are said to hang at His girdle, and He has the power to shut so that none can open, and to open so that none can shut. Nor is even this all. The day is not far distant when all His saints "that are in their graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth"; then shall be fulfilled the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory." Nor is even this all. The world of men is to participate in the resurrection power of death's victor. "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." They shall come from the ages before the flood; from the foot of the pyramids, where the slaves of the Pharaohs mingled their dust with the bricks they made; from the earliest scenes of life, and from the latest; from the most enlightened races of mankind, and the most degraded; from the most warlike and the most peaceful tribes; cathedral vaults shall split and give up their contents; Marathon, Austerlitz, and Waterloo shall add their contributions; the sea shall give return of the harvest sown through the centuries. Nor is this all. All enemies are to be put beneath His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed by Emmanuel shall be death itself. In what its destruction shall consist we do not know; except that in that world which the King who sits upon the throne shall create, we are told, "There shall be no more death." No funeral cortège shall wind its way over the golden pavement. How gloriously then will God realise the words that glisten before our eyes this Easter morning! Already in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead we see that the empire of death is doomed. But, in the meanwhile, is there no comfort for us who are compelled to live in the valley shadowed by death? There is, because He goes beside us; and the Psalmist, who had spoken of Him in the third person, addresses Him in the second as that shadow comes nearer: "He restoreth my soul; Thou art with me." And if this should not be the case, and we were doomed to go down, each alone, to die, yet even then we need not be without solace. Death is abolished! The wasp struck its sting into the Cross of the dying Lord, and lost it there, and is now stingless for ever. The poison fang of the viper has been extracted; Goliath beheaded by his own sword. The teeth of the lion have been drawn. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *The pæan of victory over the last enemy* :—These words of mercy are found amidst words of judgment. In wrath God remembers mercy. Ephraim had been sentenced to temporal ruin, but now God speaks of their eternal redemption. Who has not painful associations with the grave? Death is a reaper whose sickle leaves not one sheaf ungathered. How blessed the thought that the gracious Lord Jesus hath entered

upon the scene, to become the champion of His trusting people, and the subduer of their enemies. The word "ransom" signifies to rescue by the payment of a price. To "redeem" denotes the right of the nearest kinsman to acquire a thing for himself by the payment of a price. Both words describe what the holy Jesus has done. How may Christ be said to be the plague of death? 1. By the full discoveries He made concerning it. 2. In many of the miracles which He performed. 3. He is the death of death by His own death and resurrection. These were the chief means and instruments of His illustrious triumph. 4. By extending to His people all the benefits of His own death and resurrection. Neither in dying nor in living does He stand alone. He appears as the representative of others, and the fruits of His sufferings and sacrifice He imparts to every believer. 5. By raising all His people from their graves. This is the first resurrection: blessed is he that hath part in the first resurrection. (*A. Clayton Threlton.*) **O death, I will be thy plagues.**—*The ruin of death* :—By these words the prophet distinctly sets forth the power of God, and magnificently extols it, lest men should think that there is no way open to Him to save, when no hope according to the judgment of the flesh appears. Hence the prophet says, Though men are now dead, there is nothing to prevent God to quicken them. How so? For He is "the ruin of death, and the excision of the grave,"—that is, "Though death should swallow up all men, though the grave should consume them, yet God is superior to both death and the grave, for He can slay death, for He can abolish the grave." We learn from this passage that when men perish God still continues like Himself, and that neither His power, by which He is mighty to save the world, is extinguished, nor His purpose changed, so as not to be always ready to help; but that the obstinacy of men rejects the grace which has been provided, and which God willingly and bountifully offers. This is one thing. We may secondly learn, that the power of God is not to be measured by our rule; were we lost a hundred times, let God be still regarded as a Saviour. Should, then, despair at any time so cast us down that we cannot lay hold on any of God's promises, let this passage come to our minds, which says that God is the excision of death and the destruction of the grave. "But death is nigh to us; what, then, can we hope for any more?" This is to say, that God is not superior to death; but when death claims so much power over men, how much more power has God over death itself? Let us then feel assured that God is the destruction of death, which means that death can no more destroy; that is, that death is deprived of that power by which men are naturally destroyed; and that though we may lie in the grave, God is yet the excision of the grave itself. Many interpreters, thinking this passage to be quoted by Paul, have explained what is here said of Christ, and have in many respects erred. They have said first, that God promises redemption here without any condition; but we see that the design of the prophet was far different. (*John Calvin.*) *Death the plague of sinners, and Christ the plague of death* :—

There is no form of death more terrible than what is termed plague or pestilence, which are the names commonly given to any distemper that is peculiarly malignant and deadly in its character, and wide-spreading, or as the phrase is, epidemic in its progress. In the Hebrew language, destruction was another name for the grave, and is sometimes found joined with hell, when that word signifies the separate state of departed souls. **I. DEATH IS THE PLAGUE OF THE SINNER.** A plague denotes anything that is troublesome and vexatious. The idea of death is to the sinner a perpetual source of uneasiness and pain. The sting of death is sin; and therefore the sting, the torment, the curse of a sinful life is death. 1. Contemplate death in connection with its forerunners. By which is meant everything of suffering and sorrow. These all tell us of death's approach. 2. View death in its attendants. What is death but just the grand unfathomed mystery of wonder and depth and fear which lies under life from its beginning to its close? The anticipated terror of death is not its only attendant. It is accompanied with pain, the pain of separation and the pain of disease. 3. View death in its consequences. Its future and final consequences. (About which we say much, and know little.) **II. CHRIST IS THE PLAGUE OF DEATH.** Where philosophy does nothing, and infidelity worse than nothing, Christianity steps in and does everything. The Lord Jesus has well earned to Himself this most expressive designation, "the pestilences of death." 1. Christ showed Himself the plague of death, by the full discoveries He made and the clear instructions He delivered regarding it. Until He appeared a thick cloud rested on the state of

the dead. As the Sun of Righteousness, He dissipated the clouds which hung over the tomb, He poured a flood of light on the regions beyond it, He disclosed futurity in all its bliss and in all its woes. 2. Christ showed Himself the plague of death in many of the miracles He performed. Are disease and wretchedness "the concomitants of death"? It was His daily work of mercy to make distress vanish, and to chase away misery. But not satisfied with giving repeated checks to death's ministers, He trampled on the grim monster himself. See cases of raising the little maid, the widow's son, and Lazarus. 3. Christ showed Himself the plague of death by His own death and resurrection. These were the chief means and instruments of His illustrious triumph. 4. Christ has proved Himself, and will yet prove Himself, the plague of death, by extending to His people all the benefits of His own death and resurrection. Neither in dying nor in living does He stand alone; He appears as the representative of others, and the fruits of His every toil and suffering and sacrifice He imparts to His believing and beloved people. (*N. Morrew, A.M.*) *The great conqueror of the world conquered*.—Primarily, these words apply to God's restoration of Israel from Assyria—partially and in times yet future, fully from all the lands of their present long-continued dispersion and political death. 1. Here is the great conqueror called the "death and the grave." What a conqueror is death! (1) Heartless, dead to all appeals. (2) Resistless. Bulwarks, battalions, castles are nothing before him. (3) Universal, his eyes fastened on the world. (4) Ever active. 2. Here is the great conqueror of the world conquered. Who? "I am the resurrection and the life, whoso believeth in Me shall never die." How has He conquered death? Not by weakening his power or arresting his progress, for he is as mighty and active as ever, but by stripping him of his terror. (*Homilist.*) *The Saviour's final conquest*.—Our text is not all solemnity; it also wakens within the mind emotions of deep and heartfelt joy. I. THE TIME IS COMING WHEN THE RAVAGES OF DEATH SHALL BE FOR EVER ENDED. Death is always at work. He is never tired. And all alike are seized by him as his victims. The ravages of death! How the mind sinks in despondency as it contemplates what death has done! And the ravages are sometimes sudden. Then, how blessed is the assurance that the time is coming when the promise of the text shall be fulfilled. II. THEN ALL THE DESIGN OF THE ATONEMENT WILL BE FULFILLED. When Adam sinned he flung over the sunshine and joy of God's world the shadow of the tomb. When Jesus entered the world He came to dissipate that shadow, and bring back sunshine and joy by bringing life and immortality to light. The design of the atonement is to be fulfilled; it is not altogether fulfilled yet. III. THEN THE GLOOMY ASSOCIATIONS OF THE GRAVE WILL BE ALL FORGOTTEN. Now it is not possible to think of the grave without gloomy thoughts. But that grave shall one day be destroyed, and all its sad memories shall be blotted out. IV. WHEN THESE WORDS ARE FULFILLED THE WHOLE FAMILY OF GOD WILL BE REUNITED FOR EVER. The family of God is scattered now. Part is triumphant in heaven, and part is still militant upon earth. We shall all meet again, where partings are for ever unknown. (*W. Meynell Whittemore, S.C.L.*) *Christ, the Conqueror of death*.—This is bold and striking language. Death has ever shown himself to be no respecter of persons. The wide extent of death's dominion is so universally admitted that it were a waste of time to adduce any argument in its proof. In order to the right understanding of this passage we must have regard to the early history of man. During the whole period of the Old Testament history intimations were given of a coming Saviour, and every promise, as well as every type, had reference to the blessings of His kingdom. There is something peculiarly striking in the language here employed. Never does death appear in a more terrific form than when, by plague or pestilence, thousands are swept away as in a moment. Under whatever aspect death is presented to our notice in the sacred Volume, it is associated with sin; it appears as its result. It is sin that arms death with all its poison, and renders it so truly dreadful. What is it that gives to sin its condemning power? "The strength of sin is the law." "Sin is the transgression of the law." Then, how has the Son of God achieved the victory predicted in our text? For the accomplishment of man's redemption the Son of God assumed the form of humanity, endured the Cross, and rose again from the dead. For us there is a bright and glorious prospect of final triumph over the darkness and desolation of the grave. (*E. Pizey, B.A.*) *Life reappearing after death*.—There are mountain streams which, after flowing a little way in a broken current, are lost to sight. But far

down the mountain they reappear, no longer tossed and restless, but peaceful as they flow toward the sea. So our restless lives roll in rocky channels but a little way on earth; but beyond the grave they too will reappear, realising all the peace and joy of Christ, and thus flow on for ever. For since Christ has risen again, all who believe in Him have the certainty of an endless life in His presence. (*S. S. Chronicle.*) *The land beyond the mist of death:*—An untaught Englishman, standing at Dover when a mist lies over the Channel, might think an endless ocean was before him. When it lifts a resident tells him that what he sees is not merely France, but Europe and Asia. The intervening sea, though lashed by storms, is but a little thing. There was a mist hanging over the Straits of Death, and people thought them a shoreless ocean; Jesus lifted the mist, and men saw there was a boundless continent on the other side. (*Christian World.*)

VER. 15. **An east wind shall come.**—*Reverses of fortune in human life:*—This and the following verse set forth the devastation and destruction of the kingdom of the ten tribes which was to precede the deliverance promised in that which precedes. I. **Reverses in human fortune are SOMETIMES VERY STRIKING.** Ephraim was "fruitful among his brethren." The very name signifies fruitfulness. Its territory was most fertile; its people the most numerous. 1. Its riches would give way to poverty. Ephraim was at once a rich and a populous tribe; but see the change predicted: "His spring shall become dry. . . . He shall spoil the treasure of all pleasant vessels." The enemy would invade the country, impoverish husbandry, check merchandise. 2. Its populousness would give way to paucity. The enemy would reduce its numbers, and almost depopulate it. Such reverses are frequent. They teach us to hold all worldly good with a light hand, and to settle our interests on the good that is permanent. II. **REVERSES ARE GENERALLY BROUGHT ABOUT BY SECONDARY INSTRUMENTALITY.** Nations, communities, and individuals may always trace their calamities to certain natural causes. This should teach us to study natural laws, and to be diligent in checking all elements inimical to human progress. III. **REVERSES ARE UNDER THE DIRECTION OF GOD.** The change in the fortunes of Ephraim was under the superintendence of the Almighty. Both true philosophy and religion teach us to trace all the events of life to God. Learn to acquiesce in His dispensations, and to look to Him for all that is good. (*Homilist.*)

CHAPTER XIV.

VER. 1. **O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God.**—*Man's evil estate, and hope of deliverance:*—While the freeness of God's mercy is the leading idea suggested by the text, it is not the only one: the condition of our nature is accurately expressed, as is the mode by which alone it can be ameliorated. I. **THE STATE INTO WHICH MAN HAS BROUGHT HIMSELF.** There are few things more important than the fastening on the sinner all the blame of his sin. Adam might have obeyed the simple injunction, and, holding on his probation, might have won for himself and his descendants a hereafter fenced up against the spoiler. God foreknew that Adam would transgress, and prepared for the contingency. We can see that if there had been no ruin there could have been no restoration. The work of redemption takes, of course, for granted the apostasy of our race. On Adam must be fastened all the blame of his transgression. There was no extenuating plea which the offender could in justice have urged. The blame of the fall belongs individually to man. Thou hast not fallen through an inherent inability to stand; He has so constituted thee that thou mightest have stood. Thou hast not fallen through the ground being slippery, and thick-set with snares. He placed thee where thy footing was firm, and thy pathway direct. So that upon man himself comes home wholly all the effect of the fall. We argue from this the unqualified gratuitousness of God's interposition on man's behalf. In whatever degree there may be a necessity of sinning, in no degree is there a necessity of perishing. God places no man in such a moral condition that our falling into perdition is unavoidable. Let a man have once heard of Christ, and from that moment forward salvation is within arm's length of this man. Man can have

no right to take off the burthen of responsibilities and cast it on the secret decrees of his Maker. II. THE MODE OF MAN'S DELIVERANCE. "Return unto the Lord thy God." It comes not within our power to destroy or diminish God's title to our service. The fall did not do away with God's claim on man. Some teach that God proportions His demands to our impaired capacities, and will be satisfied with the honest endeavour, seeing that we cannot come up to the thorough performance. But this is making God answerable for the apostasy of man. We may, however, gather an inference of consolation as well as one of admonition. There is the groundwork of hope, that God will yet look mercifully upon us, and restore us, seeing that, notwithstanding our alienation, He is still our God. Man of himself hath no power to turn unto God; but since God invites, He surely enables. He bestows all requisite assistance, and a clear pathway has been made. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *On repentance*:—In the history of the children of Israel we see the perverseness and ingratitude of man, and the forbearance and goodness of God. Israel's sins were peculiarly aggravated by their having been committed after repeated and wonderful deliverances, after signal chastisements and mercies. At the period of Hosea's prophecy Israel's continued rebellion against God had nearly exhausted His patience toward that people. Though these words were primarily addressed to Israel, we shall consider them—I. AS CONVEYING A GRACIOUS EXHORTATION TO ALL SINNERS TO "RETURN UNTO THE LORD." 1. We must "return unto the Lord" with consideration. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways." 2. With weeping and supplication. A proper review of our past follies and perverse wanderings, and of God's mercies and patience towards us, will produce sorrow of heart, will cause tears of compunction to flow. 3. With humility. Our lofty imaginations and high opinion of ourselves must be brought low. 4. Through the Mediator. We cannot expect to find mercy unless we seek mercy through Christ. Of this righteousness, not our own, we must make mention. 5. Without delay. This may be urged from the shortness and uncertainty of life, and from the greatness of the work which we have to do. II. AS DECLARING THE REASONABLENESS OF THE EXHORTATION. "For thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." The text is applicable to the case of backsliders who have fallen from their steadfastness. But all mankind have fallen from God. Adam fell, and in him fell all his posterity. 1. Man is fallen from the favour of God, and is under the displeasure of God. 2. Man is fallen under the dominion of sin and the curse of the law. 3. Man is fallen into the snares and power of the devil. 4. Man, if not recovered by Divine grace, will at last fall into the bottomless pit. Apply to those who are still in their fallen state, and are wandering from God. 1. Yield to the solemn and affecting truth that you have fallen by your iniquity, and let this truth stir you up to inquire with solicitude, "What must I do to be saved?" 2. Listen to God's gracious invitation, and believe His willingness to receive you. 3. Contemplate what has been done to accomplish the great work of your redemption. 4. Consider the awful doom of the finally impenitent transgressor. (*E. Edwards.*) *Repentance as return*:—The Divine love is content with nothing less than return. And nothing less and nothing else will give safety. There must not only be a cessation of the present journey, but a definite and conclusive retracement of the steps. What the prophet sighs for, and what his God so earnestly commands, is not the mere inactive terror of proceeding onwards when the fiery abyss stretches to the view, nor the attempt, while that terror lasts, to breathe a hasty vow or utter a disordered prayer. What the Divine love insists on is a decided and complete retreat, such as when, conscious of peril and aware of only one refuge, and that in God, he eagerly seeks Him with the whole heart. "I will arise and go to my Father" is his earnest and practical resolution. (*John Eadie, D.D., LL.D.*) *A message to backsliding Israel*:—I. THE LORD'S ADDRESS UNTO HIS BACKSLIDING ONES. "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God." God glorifies His sanctifying grace in some, and His pardoning grace in others. Let the children of God be in what state they may, as it respects their acts of grace or sin, this makes no alteration in the Lord's love unto them. As they have the body of sin and death dwelling within them, there is a continual propensity in their fallen natures, to slide into themselves, and to backslide from the Lord Jesus Christ. Israel's case was extreme. He could not return unto the Lord by any strength of his own. He must be fallen by his iniquity into a state and kind of desperation. This was the fruit of his iniquity. It is the Lord Himself who here speaks. He does so in the language of commiseration. From these words what an infinity of

grace and blessed encouragement may be derived, so as to encourage the people of the Lord to trust and hope in Him. None but backsliders know and feel the sorrows which arise from the same. II. **ONE SUBSTANTIAL REASON FOR THE RETURN OF BACKSLIDING ISRAEL TO GOD.** "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God." It lies in their relation to Him, and His relation to them. All sin is the effect of unbelief. Every act of departure from the Lord is the fruit of it; let it be mental, or let it be open and manifest. Backsliders need great encouragement, even from the Lord Himself, to return to Him. He is pleased to give it them. The interest the Lord God hath in His people can never be broken in upon, neither can their interest in Him ever be impaired or cease. It is always the same on both sides. The intercourse between the Lord and His people may be interrupted. But God is immutable in His love and mercy. III. **THE REASON MADE USE OF TO HASTEN GOD'S PEOPLE'S RETURN TO HIM.** "Thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." The mercy of God in Christ Jesus exceeds the very uttermost of our minds to receive any adequate ideas of. Guilt in the conscience produces fear in the heart; so long as we indulge the same it weakens our faith and keeps us from Christ. (*Samuel Eyles Pierce.*) *A call to repentant return.*—In Hosea's days idolatry was first universally set up and countenanced by regal power. Here we have—I. **AN EXHORTATION TO REPENTANCE, WITH THE MOTIVES ENFORCING THE SAME.** Every word hath its weight, and in a manner is an argument to enforce this returning. "Israel" is a word of covenant. Return unto the "Lord Jehovah," who is the chief good, the fountain of all good. "Thy" God in covenant, who will make good His gracious covenant unto thee. "Thou hast fallen by thine iniquity"; thine own inventions have brought these miseries upon thee, and none but God can help thee out of these miseries. God comes not as a sudden storm upon His people, but gives them warning before He smites them. He is a God of long-suffering, and has a special regard to His own children. Another point—II. **THE BEST PROVISION FOR PREVENTING OF DESTRUCTION IS SPIRITUAL MEANS.** Of all spiritual means the best is, to return to the Lord. In this returning there must be a stop. To make this stop there must be examination and consideration, humiliation and displeasure against ourselves, judging and taking revenge of ourselves, for our ways and courses. There must be a resolution to overcome impediments. In the original it is a very emphatic, "Return even to Jehovah." Do not only begin to return, but so return as you never cease coming till you come to Jehovah. Where there is a falling into sin there will be a falling into misery and judgment. The cause of every man's misery is his own sin. Then take heed of sin. Pray to God to make our way plain before us, and not to lead us into temptation. "Take with you words." They who would have help and comfort against all sins and sorrows must come to God with words of prayer. Barrenness and want of words to go unto God are blameworthy. This is for consolation: if they can take words, and can pray well, they shall speed well. (*R. Sibbes, D.D.*) *Sin separates from God.*—You may sometimes see in the ocean a pile of rock rising steeply to a considerable height, and having on it here and there, where a patch of soil covers it, the remains of what was once a luxuriant vegetation. If you examine it, and also the mainland a few furlongs off, you will come to the conclusion that they were at one time, now long gone by, united together. They have become separated by the action of the sea. At first there was but a small inlet, scarcely large enough for a single boat to anchor in; this was gradually enlarged by the incessant beating of the surf until it became a broad bay, and at last the sea, striking with more and more force upon the cliffs every year, cut its way completely through, and now what was once part of the mainland is but a solitary and desolate isle. One of the most direct and appalling effects of sin is the breach which it makes between the human heart and God. Man is made in the likeness of God; he is an offspring of the Divine thought and love; he is endowed with the same moral and spiritual capacities as those which God Himself possesses; but let sin be suffered to find an entrance into his heart, and, like the gnawing, devouring, destructive sea, it will eat away all the holy and sacred ties which bind his heart to God, and cut him off from God, and leave him inwardly lonely and desolate. (*B. Wilkinson, F.G.S.*) *How to return to an earnest Christian life.*—As long as the bright summer sun shines into the forest glades the fungus has no chance to flourish; but when the sunshine wanes, in the months of autumn, the woods are filled with these strange products of decay. It is because we drift from God that our lives are the prey to numberless and nameless ills. Make the

best of all new starts, and returning to the more earnest habits of earlier days, or beginning them from now, give yourself to God, believing that He will receive and welcome you, without a word of remonstrance or a moment of interval. Form habits of morning and evening prayer; especially in the morning get time for deep communion with God, waiting at His footstool, or in the perusal of the Bible, till He speaks to you. Take up again your habits of attendance at the house of God: in the morning and the evening go with the multitude that, with the voice of praise, keeps holy-day, and in the afternoon find some niche of the Christian service, in your home or elsewhere. Then, inasmuch as you do not wish to be a slip-carriage, which, when the couplings are unfastened, runs for a little behind the express, but gets slower and slower till it comes to a stand, ask the grace of the Holy Spirit to confirm these holy desires, keeping you true to them, causing you to be steadfast, immovable, and set on maintaining life on a higher level. (*F. B. Meyer, B.A.*) *God always watching for our return*:—Bianconi, the introducer of the car system in Ireland, on leaving his home in Italy, found his most trying leave-taking in separating from his mother. She fainted as he left her. Her last words were words which he never forgot: "When you remember me, think of me as waiting at this window watching for your return." We may think of God in the same way if we have departed from Him at all. In spite of all our faults, all our sins, He is always watching for our return, for "His mercy endureth for ever." *For thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.—Our fall by sin*:—The sight of fallen greatness is exceedingly affecting to the mind of a thoughtful man, and excites inquiries concerning the cause or causes of it. The prophet looked on the kingdom of Israel fallen from its past strength and honour, and declares the cause of the fall to be—iniquity. **I. THE FALL BY SIN IS THE MOST GRIEVOUS IN HUMAN EXPERIENCE.** 1. The fall by sin is from the highest relationships the soul can enjoy. No relationships, how distinguished and valued soever, can equal those of God. There are none so essential to the soul's good and safety. Without holiness no true relationship with Him can be sustained. 2. The fall by sin is from life's great purpose. Short as life is, it has a great mission to fulfil. Eternal life has to be secured. The world's truest good has to be promoted. Sin causes a lamentable failure. 3. The fall by sin is a loss of truest power. A right life wields a great influence. No power can be compared with that of a holy character. This power is lost by sin. 4. The fall by sin is from truest content of soul. The hallowed quiet and peace depart. Painful misgivings and pangs of remorse tear the breast. The consciousness of guilt prevents the light and joy of hope. **II. THIS FALL IS THE INEVITABLE RESULT OF SIN.** The course of sin is the act of man's free will. But if he choose the path he cannot escape the ruin. 1. The path of sin leads to ruin. (1) The pleasures of the way cannot avert the consequences. (2) The fall may be delayed, but it will come. 2. None can pursue the path of sin and escape the ruin. The individual cannot; the Church cannot; the nation cannot. **III. FOR THIS FALL MAN HIMSELF IS RESPONSIBLE.** He falls by his own iniquity. 1. None can compel another to sin. 2. As none can compel another to sin, so none can compel his fall. Apply—1. Sin with such power and consequences should have our intensest hate, and should be guarded against. 2. He who is fallen should forsake his sin, and seek mercy and grace from God. God's mercy can cover the past, and His grace can sanctify and secure the future. (*Rombeth.*) *Message to the remnant*:—So the admonition of Hosea has ended, and the note of destruction has been sounded. It only remains to look for a remnant out of the fallen nation, which by repentance and faithfulness may plead with God for their own rescue if not for the nation's restoration. Hope, unwilling to be quenched in the pious patriarch's breast, suggests words of returning to God, to relinquishment of human politics, and reliance on His faithfulness. To such a remnant, be it small or great, the everlasting mercy of God offers out of the jaws of ruin, as out of death and the grave, the possibility of return to Him who is not afar from every one of us. If there are any that will understand, let them not charge their Maker with folly. He has dealt justly by sinful Israel, and will deal mercifully with all men repentant. (*Rowland Williams, D.D.*) *God's call to the fallen*:—God seems to find an argument in the very fact of our fall. He is moved with compassion at the spectacle. He sees from what a height to what a depth man has fallen. 1. The call to return implies that we had wandered away. Our fall has indeed been occasioned by our wandering. All sin originates in the apostasy of the human heart from God. Sin would never have entered human hearts, and defiled the

lives of men, if man had been true to his primal relations with God. As with the race, so with the individual. Moral deterioration and corruption naturally and necessarily ensue from the apostasy of the soul from God. Evil works naturally flow from the corrupt condition. The fallen soul not only loses contact and fellowship with God, but comes under the influence of a certain feeling of aversion, and almost of antipathy, towards God which leads him to shrink from the very thought of God. The apostate man is fallen not only in position, but in character. Innocence has been forfeited instead of being developed, and sin reigns where moral beauty should be crowned. Man needs no revelation to convince him of his fall. He alone of all the animals fails to live up to his own proper ideal, and violates in many cases systematically the laws of his own nature. Fallen in position and character, he is fallen in conduct also. Then the first thing needful for the fallen and falling is to return to God. He who invites us wants us to come back to Him. (*W. Hay Aiken, M.A.*)

Ver. 2. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord.—*Turning to God in prayer*:—This passage teaches us how we are to come back to God. "Take with you words and turn." We are to come in prayer to God. We are to come in supplication, to come and acknowledge that we have nothing, and with an entreaty that He will furnish us with that which we require. The prophet gives us the very prayer we are to offer. That must be an acceptable prayer which God Himself has indited! Here is the sum and substance of every acceptable prayer that has ever been offered to God. Two things which this prayer presents to us—1. It teaches in what character we are to draw nigh to God; who they are that are warranted to come to the Father of mercy and God of all grace—sinners. 2. In "Receive us graciously" we have our Saviour presented to us. It is in Him that the grace of God is manifested. In the latter part of the text and in the succeeding verse there is presented a sort of supplement to this prayer. It contains the promises of the servant, the vows which he offers to the Most High, and which he is determined to pay. The besetting evil of the Israelites was their trusting to the neighbouring heathen nations for help, and forming associations and unions with them. We too have our besetting evils. We trust to anything rather than to God in our various emergencies and distresses. We use all the means that are placed within our power to relieve us in our distresses, but we use them without reference to God. When in repentance we turn to the Lord, then in His strength we determine to abandon our sins. (*Dr. Thorpe.*) *Israel's petition in time of trouble*:—The blessing of Ephraim was fruitfulness. And throughout this prophecy the judgments of God against Ephraim are expressed by needs, emptiness, barrenness, dryness of roots, of fruits, of branches, of springs, &c. **I. AN INVITATION TO REPENTANCE.** The matter of it is conversion; which must be to the Lord, and spiritual. It must be a full, thorough, constant, continued conversion, with a whole, fixed, rooted, united, and established heart. The motives to this duty are, God's mercies and God's judgments. **II. THE INSTITUTION: HOW TO PERFORM IT.** 1. A general instruction, "Take unto you words," which importeth the serious pondering and choosing of requests to put up to God. He expects there should be preparation in our accesses to Him. Preparation of our persons; by purity of life. Preparation of our services; by choice of matter. Preparation of our hearts; by finding them out, and stirring them up. We must attend unto His will, as the rule of our prayers. Unto His precepts and promises, as the matter of our prayers. Unto the guidance of His Holy Spirit, as the life and principle of our prayers. There is a kind of omnipotency in prayer, as having an interest and prevalence with God's omnipotency. 2. A particular form. A prayer for two benefits: the removal of sin, the conferring of good. A promise of two things. Thanksgiving, and a special care for the amendment of their lives. Observe especially the ground of their confidence so to pray, and of their resolutions so to promise. "Because in Thee the fatherless findeth mercy." (*Edward Reynolds.*) *Israel exhorted to return unto the Lord*:—**I. AN AWFUL FACT STATED.** "Thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." Israel had—1. Fallen from their allegiance to God. 2. Fallen from His worship. 3. Fallen from the enjoyment of His favour. **II. AN AFFECTIONATE EXHORTATION URGED.** "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God." Observe—1. The persons addressed. "Israel." 2. The nature of the address. "Return." 3. The object to whom they were to return. "The Lord thy God." **III. INSTRUCTIVE DIRECTION ADMINISTERED.** "Take with you words." Words of sincerity. Appropriate

words. Words of humble confession. Words of petition. "Take away all iniquity"—1. From our affections, that we may no longer love it. 2. From our consciences, that we may no longer labour under the burden of it. 3. From our lives, that it may no longer have dominion over us. 4. From our hearts, that we may be dead to it. "Receive us graciously." Receive our prayers. Receive our persons. Receive us into Thy favour. IV. RETURNS OF GRATITUDE EXPRESSED. "Render calves of our lips." 1. Gratitude is a debt which all owe to God. 2. Gratitude is a debt which gracious souls are ready to pay. Learn—(1) That neither our civil nor religious privileges will preclude the possibility of falling by iniquity. (2) That those who have fallen by iniquity should be induced to return to the Lord their God. (3) Those whose iniquity is taken away should bless the Lord. (*C. Simeon, M.A.*) *The need for expression in words*:—What need God words? He knows our hearts before we speak unto Him. God needs no words, but we do, to stir up our hearts and our affections. Our words must not be empty, but such as are joined with a purpose of turning to God. To turn to Him with a purpose to live in any sin is the extremity of profane impudence. The petition is, "Take away all iniquity." Because where there is any true goodness in the heart, that hatred which carries the bent of the soul against one sin is alike against all. Because the heart which desires to be at peace with God desires also to be like God, who hates all sin. "Take away all" sin; both the guilt and the reign of every sin, that none may rule in me. Forgive the sin, and overcome the power of it by sanctifying grace, and remit the judgments attending it. They pray for the taking away of their iniquity; for take away this and all other mercies follow after; because this alone stops the current of God's favours, which removed, the current of His mercies run amain. Many say, How shall I know whether or no my sins are forgiven? You may know by something that goes before, and by something which follows after. Before, a humble and hearty confession. After, when a man finds strength against it; for where God forgives He gives strength withal. Another evidence is some peace of conscience, though not much perhaps, yet so much as supports us from despair. Again, where sin is pardoned our hearts will be much enlarged with love to God. And forgiveness frames the soul suitably to be gentle and merciful, and to pardon others. Therefore let us labour for the forgiveness of our sins, that God would remove and subdue the power of them, take them away, and the judgments due to them, or else we are but miserable, though we enjoyed all the pleasures of the world. "Receive us graciously, and do good to us." So it is in the original. All the goodness we have from God, it is out of His grace. God's mercy to His children is complete and full. God not only takes away ill, but He doth good. We cannot honour God more than by making use of His mercy in the forgiveness of sins; and of His goodness, in going to Him for it. The prayer is an acknowledgment of our own emptiness. The best that we can bring to thee is emptiness, therefore do Thou do good to us, fill us with Thy fullness. Do good to us every way. "So shall we render the calves of our lips." Here is the re-stipulation or promise. They return back to God. There should be a rendering according to the receiving. This promise of praise is a kind of vow. "So will we render." To bind one's self is a kind of vow. The Church therefore binds herself that she may bind God. It is good thus to vow, if it were but to excite and quicken our dulness and forgetfulness of our general vow; to put us in mind of our duty, the more to oblige us to God, and refresh our memories. The "calves of our lips" implies not only thankfulness to God, but glorifying of God, in setting out His praise. In glorifying there are two things, a supposition of excellency, and the manifestation of this glory. The yielding of praise to God is a wondrous acceptable sacrifice. Besides this "the calves of our lips" carries us to work. The oral thanksgiving must be justified by our works and deeds; or else our actions will give our tongue the lie. Why doth the prophet especially mention lips, or words? Because—1. Christ, who is the Word, delights in our words. 2. Because our tongue is our glory, and that by which we glorify God. 3. Our tongue is that which excites others. (*R. Sibbes, D.D.*) *A form of prayer for backsliders*:—It pleased the Lord to draw up for them a form of prayer, which He puts into their mouths, and with which He sends them, that they might present themselves before Him at His throne and mercy-seat, and there repeat it. I. THE CONNECTION OF THESE WORDS WITH THE FORMER. Israel is fallen by her iniquity. What is requisite in this case? Most assuredly, a return to the Lord. But Israel might say, "I know not how to return." To prevent despairing

thoughts the Lord gives suitable words for those who would return but hardly know how to do so. The words are cogent and most particular, and exactly suited unto and expressive of the grace which those persons stood in need of.

II. OPEN AND EXPLAIN THE EXPRESSIONS MADE USE OF IN THIS PRAYER. They contain for substance the whole grace and gracious design of the everlasting Gospel. If all iniquity were not taken away there could be no expectation of being received graciously, therefore the order, propriety, and connection of these words, with the vast subject and importance of them. III. THE SUITABLENESS OF THEM TO SUCH AS ARE IN A STATE OF BACKSLIDING, OR ARE ON THE VERGE OF THE SAME. There is a continual change, a flux and reflux, in the frames, temper, cases, and feelings of the people of God. None are safe one single moment, but as they are kept by the power of God. IV. THE MOST GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENTS OF THESE SUPPLIANTS. "We will render the calves of our lips." When the Lord is pleased to overcome our minds by the manifestations of His pardoning mercy, we cannot but open our mouth, and with our lips shew forth His glorious praise.

(*Samuel Eyles Pierce.*) *The prophet's call to repentance*:—We are furnished in this chapter with a most vivid picture of God's unchangeable love towards His people. No sooner are the children of Israel brought to a sense of their helpless wretchedness, and led to betake themselves to the footstool of their God, to ask for pardon and mercy, than they obtain grace, and find help in the time of need. They no sooner assay to go to Him than He anticipates them; binds up their broken hearts, pours the balm of consolation into their wounded spirits.

I. THE PROPHET'S CALL TO REPENTANCE. This is pathetic to a degree. "O Israel!" What boundless instances of unspeakable love does this single expression imply! "In Me is thy help." Return, only return, and it shall be well with you again. You must have learnt, long ere this, the hopelessness of the prodigal, without a father's love and protecting care. But let that return be a sincere, earnest, and permanent return. Let it be a truthful and spiritual return. Only genuine repentance can do us any effectual good. The wording of the call suggests that the prophet's appeal is dictated by mercy and judgment. Mercy. "Return unto the Lord thy God." Jehovah is still thy God, and not yet thy Judge, still gracious and merciful, long-suffering, of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil. It is by the attribute of mercy that God first appeals to His covenant people to return to Him. What a glorious motive for repentance! The Lord Jehovah is still ready and willing to be your God, in order to smooth the way for your return to Him. Judgment. "For thou hast fallen by thine iniquity," and art therefore amenable to the just punishment which is the portion of all those who transgress God's law. If mercies do not work upon your love, let judgment work upon your fear. II. THE NATURE OF GENUINE REPENTANCE. "Take with you words," &c. The penitent is not left to frame words according to his own fancy or imagination, but the Holy Spirit actually puts words into the sinner's mouth. We must also be prepared personally, we must endeavour to begin a pure and holy life. It was for lack of a personal preparation that Israel's prayer was rejected. It is also necessary to endeavour to be possessed of such a state of mind as to entitle the suppliant to the benefits of paternal compassion. We need preparation of the heart. This fourfold preparation must be obtained from Him alone who is almighty. Of ourselves we can do nothing. From the simple expression, "Take with you words," we learn—1. That God's will must be our rule in prayer, for it is under such circumstances only that we need expect our supplications to be accepted. 2. That God's precepts and promises must be the subject-matter of our prayer. We are too short-sighted to know what is good for us, or what God in His inscrutable dispensations has appointed for us. 3. That the help of the Holy Spirit must be the life and principle of our prayer. The Spirit who now abides with us must be our teacher in all things, and bring all things to our remembrance. He will teach us what is the will of God. Observe now the "sound form" dictated for the use of the penitents, when really and truly returning unto the Lord their God. "Take away all iniquity," &c. In this passage there is a petition and a promise. The petition is subdivided into two distinct requests, an entreaty for the pardon of sin, and a solicitation for granting unmerited favours. The promise consists of thanksgiving. "So will we render the calves of our lips"; and of amendment of life. "Asshur shall not save us," &c. The text concludes with a reason for the petition and promise. "For in Thee the fatherless findeth mercy." Note that repentance cannot exist without thanksgiving, nor can sincere thanksgiving be found in

an individual not truly penitent. "Asshur shall not save us," means, we give up all human succour. Genuine repentance takes the heart from all carnal confidence. Many are the gods and lords which the unconverted create for themselves. Men of power deify strength. Men of wisdom deify knowledge and prudence. Men of morality and virtue deify their good works. (*Moses Margolionth.*) *How to return to God*.—God not only invites us to return, but He tells us how to do it. He puts the very words in our mouth. The first act of the awakened is usually an act of prayer. The very act of expressing our need has a tendency both to bring about clearer views of what it is that we need, and to intensify our desire. A true conversion involves, above everything else, personal transactions between the penitent, on the one hand, and his wronged and injured God on the other. Now the very act of prayer tends to bring to the front and impress upon our consciousness this personal aspect of the case. It is, however, of the utmost importance that the awakened soul should abstain from anything that might be called making a prayer. I would to God that men were more simple and definite in their prayers. God knows our needs before we utter them. But do we know them? Indefinite notions as to what we require at the hands of God must paralyse our faith and rob our approach of all reality. Notice the urgency of the prayer which God's love puts into the mouth of the penitent. It is also the expression of a distinct change in our moral attitude towards God. It seems asking a great deal to say, "Take away all iniquity." Can it *all* be taken away? (*W. Hay Aiken, M.A.*) *Israel exhorted to return unto the Lord*.—I. AN AWFUL FACT STATED. "Thou hast fallen," &c. The term "fall" is used literally, when we speak of a body descending from a higher to a lower situation. When the fall of angels or of men is mentioned, we understand the term figuratively. Thus Israel had—1. Fallen from their allegiance to God. 2. Fallen from His worship. 3. Fallen from the enjoyment of His favour. II. AN AFFECTIONATE EXHORTATION URGED. "Return unto the Lord." Observe—1. The persons addressed. "Israel." No reproachful name is used. 2. The nature of the address. "Return." This implies previous wandering. 3. To whom they were to return. "The Lord thy God." III. INSTRUCTIVE DIRECTION ADMINISTERED. "Take with you words." Not bullocks or sacrifices. Words of sincerity. Appropriate words. Words of confession. Words of petition. They were to pray for the removal of iniquity. 1. Take it away from our affections, that we may no longer love it. 2. From our consciences, that we may no longer labour under the burden of it. 3. From our lives, that it may not have dominion over us. 4. From our hearts, that we may be dead to it. Receive our prayers graciously. Receive our persons graciously. IV. RETURNS OF GRATITUDE EXPRESSED. "So will we render the calves of our lips." (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *The iniquity of the people*.—The Gospel itself has gone no further than the elements which constitute this closing chapter. The nation is addressed in its unity. "Return unto the Lord." Come back; do not any longer pursue the way of folly and the path of darkness; turn round; be converted, be healed, come home. That is an evangelical cry, that is the very passion and the very meaning of the Cross of Christ. "For thou hast fallen by thine iniquity." Man is not called to come down, but to come up. Thou hast fallen flat upon the earth. This is a call from a fall. The fall is not to be argued into a man; the fall is an experience which must be confirmed by the consciousness of the heart itself. The experience of the heart about this matter of the fall is a varied, conflicting, tumultuous experience. "Take with you words." When men are in earnest their words are themselves. Leave all ritualism, and take with you yourselves speech of the heart, prayer of the soul, cry of the felt necessity. "Take away all iniquity." Here is confession. "Receive us graciously." Here is petition. "So will we render the calves of our lips." Our sacrifice shall be a living sacrifice. But can Israel so pray and so promise, and then repeat yesterday as if nothing had occurred in the night-time of penitence? Israel must be complete in confession, and complete in renunciation. A man must at some point say good-bye to his ruined self. If any man be in Christ he is a new creature. Now we come upon words never excelled by John or by Paul for sweep of thought and tenderness of pathos. "I will love them freely," literally, "I am impelled to love them." When God sees the returning prodigal, He sees more than the sin—He sees the sinner within the man, the man within the sinner, the God within the man. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *The penitent returning to God*.—Not only is the obliga-

tion to repent universal, the main features of real repentance are invariably the same. It is the like corruption of heart and practice over which the contrite sinner of every age and country has to mourn; it is the same mercy-seat he has to approach; it is the same God to whom he has to be reconciled. I. AS TO THE GENERAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF MANKIND. The expression, "Thou hast fallen," applies primarily and directly to the case of the Jews. They had fallen in every sense of the word. Their vices had been their ruin; their city was destroyed, their temple consumed, and they themselves were captives in a strange land. The work of devastation had reached their minds as well as their bodies. Many of them clung still to their sins and idolatries. Consider, more generally—I. The state of degradation to which man has fallen. How often have we, in contemplating our own hearts, or the conduct of others, to blush for the creature who was originally formed in the image of his God. 2. The state of corruption and depravity into which human nature has fallen. It is quite possible to overstate the limits of this corruption. But we may say that spiritual qualities are absolutely extinct in the unconverted mind. 3. The state of suffering to which we have fallen. Some compare the world to a vast hospital, and others to a huge prison. 4. The state of danger and condemnation to which we are fallen. Look at the strong bias of the heart to evil—at the snares of the world, and the temptations of the devil. II. THE DUTY OF MAN UNDER SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES. Our Heavenly Father has been pleased to give us, in our guilty and lost circumstances, certain express directions for returning to the God from whom we have fallen. In our text the injunction is—I. That we should "turn to the Lord." With the help of the Spirit, and by a strong effort on your own part, you should set your face heavenwards. 2. "Take with you words, and say unto God, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously." Feel that your first business and object, in the presence of the Lord, is to seek by earnest and devout supplication, a release from guilt, and wrath, and punishment. This release and pardon you are to seek, not on the ground of any merits of your own, but from the free and unmerited love of God. 3. You are to say unto God, "We will render the calves of our lips." Or as the apostle puts it, "The fruit of our lips giving praise to Him." The feelings of heartfelt gratitude, and praise are to accompany prayer. 4. We are to renounce all dependence upon and all allegiance to other masters. Our sincerity will be testified by an abandonment of the paths of sin. A change in the direction of our affections and our services will uniformly follow real conversion. III. THE ENCOURAGEMENT SUGGESTED BY THE TEXT FOR THUS TURNING TO GOD. It is stated in those simple but beautiful words, "For in Thee the fatherless findeth mercy." Apply to the despondent; to the believer; to the contrite sinner. (J. W. Cunningham.) An exhortation to repentance:—I. THESE VERSES IN THEIR PRIMARY REFERENCE TO ISRAEL. 1. The prophet calls upon the people to return unto the Lord their God. He was their God in an especial manner. He had never been wanting to them while they owned and served Him as the Lord their God. He directs them in what manner and with what spirit they should return. They were to take with them words, and make their petition to this effect, that God would be pleased to "take away all iniquity." To take away the guilt of it, and grant them His gracious pardon: to take away the power of it, and grant them His effectual grace to resist and subdue it. They were to pray that God would receive them graciously, graciously implying that merit was not to be pleaded in any degree by the petitioners. They were to promise the tribute of their lips, grateful language flowing from a grateful heart. In returning to the Lord the people were further to express their renunciation of all former and false confidences. And they were frankly to acknowledge that Jehovah alone was the effectual succour of the helpless and destitute. II. CONSIDER THESE VERSES AS OF MORE GENERAL EXTENT IN THEIR APPLICATION. Kingdoms and nations may "fall by their iniquity." 1. There is a call to wandering sinners to return unto the Lord their God. A door of hope is left open for them. 2. God uses inducements. He assures the sinner that he has "fallen by his iniquity." Every sinner is fallen from that state of happiness and holiness in which God originally created man. 3. You are to take words and pray. The removal of sin must take place in order to our restoration. If the guilt of it is not taken away by pardoning grace, the wrath of God must abide on us. If the power of it is not broken, and the love of it subdued in the soul, it must exclude us from the holy and happy society of God and glorified spirits above. 4. You are to entreat that God would "receive you graciously"; take you into His

favour, and admit you into His family. 5. Such surprising grace will demand the most fervent affections of your hearts, and the most devoted and obedient submission of your lives. 6. You are to approach the throne of grace with a solemn and deliberate disavowal of all forbidden dependencies, and an acknowledgment that the God of grace is the only helper of helpless sinners. Glorify God by acknowledging the freeness and fullness of His grace, and by accepting the blessed and complete deliverance offered to you in the Gospel. (*S. Knight, M.A.*) **Total repentance.**—The prophet entreats them not only to turn back, and look toward the Lord with a partial and imperfect repentance, but not to leave off till they were come quite home to Him by a total and sincere repentance and amendment. He bids them *return quite* to Himself, the unchangeable God and their God. "Great is repentance," is a Jewish saying, "which maketh men to reach quite up to the throne of glory." (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) **Repentance or reformation.**—I. ITS NATURE AND METHOD INDICATED. 1. Its nature. "O Israel, return unto the Lord your God." The description contained in the first and third verses of this reformation implies three things—(1) That the soul is away from God. (2) The renunciation of all dependence upon creatures. "Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses." This means, we will not trust to Asshur—that is, Assyria—for help. (3) Utter abandonment of all idols. "Neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods. For in Thee the fatherless findeth mercy." 2. Its method. "Take with you words, and turn to the Lord." Why take words to God? (1) Not because words can inform Him of anything of which He is ignorant. (2) Not because words can induce Him to be more kind to us than He is. "Then will we offer the calves of our lips." And before Him pray. Pray for two things—(a) His forgiveness. "Take away all sin." (b) His acceptance. "Receive us graciously." II. ITS CAUSE AND BLESSEDNESS SPECIFIED. 1. Its cause—God. "I will heal their backsliding. I will love them freely. I will be as the dew." I will act upon the soul silently, penetratingly, revivifyingly—"as the dew." All true reformation brings with it God's silent but effective agency. 2. Its blessedness. (1) Health. "I will heal their backsliding." The soul is diseased. God is its great Physician. (2) Divine favour. "I will love them freely, for Mine anger is turned away from them." (3) Growth. "He shall grow as the lily." (a) The growth is connected with beauty. Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like it. (b) Its growth is connected with strength. "Cast forth his roots as Lebanon." (c) Its growth is connected with expansiveness. "His branches shall spread." How a Divinely formed soul expands. Its sympathies become world wide. (d) Its growth is connected with fragrance. "His beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon." How delectable the fragrance of a holy life! (e) Its growth is connected with social usefulness. It shall offer protection to men. "They that dwell under his shadow shall return." Not only protection, but beneficent progress: "They shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine." (*Homilist.*) So will we render the calves of our lips.—By "taking with us words," in speech or in sacred song, we can render to God the calves, i.e., the sacrifice of our lips. There is—I. A SACRIFICE OF SILENCE. It is a great thing to know how to serve our Lord and our neighbour by keeping our lips closed. To be silent when we are tempted to speak, but when the closed mouth is wiser and kinder than the uttered word. II. THE SACRIFICE OF TRUTHFULNESS. We are bound to truthfulness by the express commandment of God, and by the claims of our fellow-men. We render this sacrifice, not merely by refusing to stoop to downright, deliberate falsehood, but by avoiding the utterance which is fitted to convey a false impression; by avoiding the evil and pernicious habit of exaggeration and caricature. Others should be able to trust our word absolutely. III. THE SACRIFICE OF PRAISE. We can hardly conceive of Divine service without the element of praise, and this is the best and truest Christian form of the sacrifice of the lips. Unitedly, intelligently, heartily, spiritually should we render this most pleasant, most acceptable sacrifice. IV. THE SACRIFICE OF PRAYER. By utterance of our thought we help ourselves to pray; for expression kindles, sustains, directs devotion. And by uttering our thought we help others to pray. V. THE SACRIFICE OF HUMILITY AND CONFESSION. Humility is the gateway that opens into the kingdom of Christ. When with deep and true penitence of spirit we take with us words, we offer an acceptable sacrifice, and "with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." VI. THE SACRIFICE OF HELPFULNESS. By the timely, thoughtful, helpful word,

we may render service to man and sacrifice to God. 1. The word of warning. 2. The word of comfort. 3. The word of encouragement. 4. The word of challenge. Thus by timely and helpful words shall we "render the calves of our lips." (*Sunday in Church.*) *A living sacrifice*.—Our sacrifice shall be a living sacrifice; we have nothing to slay; we will live unto the Lord. The "lips" here stand for life; the "calves" must be regarded as representing symbolically the old sacrifice in a new form,—not the unintelligent and irresponsible calves of the meadow, but the calves of our lips, the living sacrifice, the personal offering. What a prayer, thus modelled and outlined! Here is confession, here is hope, here is poetry, here is consecration, here is communion with God: yet is there no bargain-making. Man is not inviting God to enter into a covenant in which there shall be so much for so much. Forgive us, and we will obey. Pardon us, and reckon then upon our worship;—the worship does not come as payment, but as a necessity of nature; it will be the utterance of gratitude; it represents the irrepressible music of spiritual thanksgiving. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 3. *Asshur shall not save us.*—*Giving up our vain confidences*.—It is a great point of wisdom to take advantages with the stream of our temper to praise God. It is one branch of redeeming the time, to observe what state and temper of soul we are in, and to take advantage from thence. Add some encouragements to incite us to praise God. We honour God by it. It is a gainful trading with God. It is a most noble act of religion. We have more cause to praise God than to pray; having many things to praise Him for, which we never prayed for. Praise being a larger sacrifice than prayer, we ought to be abundant in it. If we be much in praising God, we shall be much in joy, which easeth misery. How shall we know that God accepts these sacrifices of praise? Under the old law God witnessed by fire from heaven. If we find our hearts warmed, cheered, and encouraged with joy, peace, and comfort in praising God, this is as it were a witness by fire from heaven, that our sacrifices are accepted. Here is also a promise of new obedience, which hath two branches. 1. A renunciation of the ill courses they took before. "Asshur shall not save us." The people of God, in any distress, had recourse for help to the Assyrians or the Egyptians, as if God had not been sufficient to be their rock and shield. Learn—1. That man naturally is prone to put confidence in the creature. 2. That the creature is insufficient and unable to yield us this prop to uphold our confidence. 3. That God's people when they are endowed with light supernatural, to discern and be convinced hereof, are of that mind to say, "Asshur shall not save us." As a preparative for the treatment of these points, notice that reformation of life must be joined with prayer and praise; and that true repentance is of the particular sin which we are most addicted to and most guilty of. The particular sin of this people was their confidence in Assyria, horses, and idols. Naturally we are apt and prone to confidence in outward helps and present things. Because having lost communion with God, somewhat we must have to stay the soul. Because Satan joins with our sense and fancy, by which we are naturally prone to live, esteeming of things not by faith and by deeper grounds, but by fancy. These outward things cannot help us, and so are not to be relied on. "Asshur shall not save us." He is but a creature. He is an enemy. He is an idolater. "A horse is a vain thing for safety." When God alters and changes and moulds anew the heart of a man to repentance, He altereth his confidence in the creature. "In Thee the fatherless findeth mercy." When a man hath once repented, there is a closing between God and him, and he seeth an all-sufficiency in God to satisfy all his desires. Therefore he will use all other things as helps, and as far as it may stand with His favour. How shall we know whether we exceed in confidence in the creature, or not? We may know it by adventuring on ill courses and causes. When there is such confidence in the creature, as for us to outdare God, then there is too much trust in the creature; and that trust will end in confusion. By security and resting the soul in meaner things; never seeking to Divine and religious helps, when we are supplied with those that are outward. Let us take heed of carnal confidence. All is but vanity. Things do not yield that which we expect they should yield. There is a falsehood in the things; they promise this and that in shows, but when we possess them they yield it not; as they have no strength in deed, so they deceive. Then there is mutability in them. And they are snares and baits to us, to draw us away from

God, by reason of the vanity of our nature. Let this be the end of all, touching this carnal confidence, to beware that we do not fasten our affections too much upon any earthly thing, at home or abroad, within or without ourselves: for "God will destroy the wisdom of the wise." Let us use all outward helps, yet so as to rely upon God for His blessing in the use of all. (*R. Sibbes, D.D.*)

Penitence.—We have here the true portrait of real penitents. 1. Here is a renunciation of all help and succour in all creatures, and all dependence for salvation on anything inherent. It is good to observe here that we have all the initials of true Gospel sorrow and godly grief for sin, with all contained in that repentance which is unto, and belongs unto, everlasting life. Turning to the Lord; acknowledging our case; deploring our sinfulness; praying for the Lord's gracious acceptance of us, a declaration of our future acknowledgment of these gratuitous acts of the Lord towards us; and then a full renunciation of ourselves, with the sole ascription to the free grace of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; this involves and includes all contained in godly sorrow for sin. It was one of the national sins of Israel to trust in the Assyrians for help and succour, when in trouble and distress they looked to them. So "Asshur shall not save us," means, we will no longer seek relief in human means. It is a very important effect of our truly turning to the Lord to renounce ourselves wholly and altogether. 2. A declaration of having no more to do with any works of their hands. The terms used are very expressive of the rejection of idols and idolatrous worship. 3. The reason which is assigned for this. "In Thee the fatherless findeth mercy." Mercy is in the Lord. It is inherent in Him. It is a perfection of His glorious nature. In the display and manifestation of it He takes delight. (*Samuel Eyles Pierce.*)

For in Thee the fatherless findeth mercy.—*God merciful to the fatherless.*—And it is well that they do find mercy there, for very often they find little mercy among men. The text contains a statement of facts with reference to former dispensations, and a promise of blessing in the future. I. THE VALUABLE BLESSING HERE BESTOWED—MERCY. Not riches, not honour. Mercy is the Divine perfection, by which God is inclined to pity and succour such as are in distress. It relates only to the miserable; there can be no manifestation of mercy without misery. But though misery was in the world and mercy was the character of God, there existed a strong impediment to the exercise of that mercy. That impediment was justice. That justice has been satisfied. God can be a God of mercy through the merits of His own Son. Why should this blessing of mercy be singled out as given to orphans? 1. It is a comprehensive blessing. It pardons all sin. It prevents evil. It supports in danger. It supplies all wants. It guides in doubt. It heals all diseases. It sustains in death. It comforts in sorrow. It delivers in difficulty. It saves the soul. You cannot think of mercy without thinking of a train of mercies following it. 2. It sweetens all other blessings. Health, property, social comfort, the fireside, are mercies, but to have all these sweetened by the mercy of God, flowing from Him through Christ,—that gives sweetness to all other mercies. Mercy sweetens even the Divine attributes. Mercy sweetens every affliction. Mercy paints a rainbow on the darkest clouds of affliction and distress. There is mercy put into every cup, and this makes it ever delightful to the sinking spirits. Mercy prepares individuals for contentment in every situation. 3. It is a fruitful blessing. What clusters of fruit gather on the tree of mercy! The first-fruit will be an humbled spirit. It will break down the pride of the heart. So sure as mercy is manifested to the soul, the soul will love in return. It creates a spirit of thankfulness. 4. It is an enduring mercy. One psalm is entirely devoted to this blessing (*Psa. cxxxvi.*). What a comfort it is that amid all the changing things of time there is one thing that "endureth." II. THE ENCOURAGEMENT PRESENTED IN THE CHARACTER OF GOD. 1. It is part of God's character to be merciful. 2. What assurances there are that we shall find mercy if we seek it. 3. See that orphans especially are required, and even entreated, to have this mercy. Seeing what a choice blessing this mercy must be, both to spiritual orphans and to those who are literally so, let us all seek to possess it. But remember that nothing provokes the Divine anger so much as abusing His mercy, or slighting His love. (*James Sherman.*)

The Church as fatherless.—1. It is the Church's lot to be very desolate and orphan-like in the world. 2. God's compassion and the sweet manifestation thereof are especially reserved for His people's low condition and their greatest need. 3. The confidence of God's respect to His humble people, would be cherished by the needy and penitent, to encourage them to come to Him

and call upon Him. 4. Such as do apprehend and believe the mercy of God toward His needy people will renounce all carnal and sinful confidences. (*George Hutcheson.*) *The fatherless finding mercy in God* :—I. THE DISTRESSED CASE HERE SUPPOSED. The word "fatherless" is sometimes used in its natural sense ; and sometimes in a figurative sense, for afflicted and destitute persons in general. Our text supposeth that the case of orphans is truly pitiable, and that, above all others, they stand in need of assistance and mercy from God. II. GOD'S KIND REGARD TO THE FATHERLESS. 1. God has commanded others not to injure, but to assist them. He made provision in the law of Moses that they should not be wronged. 2. He hath expressly declared Himself their friend and guardian. He is their reliever, helper, judge, redeemer, and father. 3. He hath in the course of His providence often shown mercy to them. In cases of families deprived of their heads, we have known how remarkably providence has taken care of them and raised them up friends. Application. 1. How amiable a view doth this give us of the blessed God, and of His wonderful condescension. 2. Let us imitate God in showing mercy to the fatherless. 3. Let parents take encouragement to commit their children to the care of God. 4. Let the fatherless and orphans seek mercy from God, and humbly commit themselves to Him. (*J. Orton.*)

Ver. 4. *I will heal their backsliding.*—*The awful state of backsliders* :—In the history of the Israelites there is no feature more striking than their frequent rebellions and backslidings. It is amazing to think that a nation which had witnessed such signal interposition of the Divine power in their behalf could be found backsliding to such a degree. Oh, the unfathomable depths of Divine compassion ! God has mercy to heal the backslidings of His people. I. THE CASE OF THE BACKSLIDER. It is the most awful to be found within the pale of the professing Christian Church. There is a wide difference between his case and that of the unawakened and unconverted sinner. For a man to become an apostate ; to relapse into deliberate sin ; with all his light, knowledge, and advantages, to sin openly and wilfully,—what ingratitude is implied in this, what treachery and baseness ! The most awful condition on this side hell is that of him whose once awakened conscience is now seared as with a hot iron ; whose once melted heart is turned into worse than its original flintiness ; whose once enlightened mind is given over to judicial blindness. Yet even such a case is not beyond the reach of Divine compassion. To human eyes it is indeed incurable. It is a cancer which spreads its fibres through the entire system, the disease which mocks at human cures. But God says, "I will heal their backsliding." II. THE MEANS GOD EMPLOYS IN HEALING THE BACKSLIDER. He is not limited in the selection or use of means ; but He acts, generally speaking, by bringing the backslider into the wilderness of affliction, and by turning the idol which seduced him away from his God, into his scourge. It may be the idol of sensual pleasure, of fame, or of gold. By and by he will awaken to a full sense of his danger and misery. His God forsaken, his Saviour betrayed, his hopes of heaven blasted ! He let go the substance to grasp at the shadow. The idol which led him from God has become his curse. As he journeys on in this wilderness, in despair and wretchedness, thinking he has turned his back for ever on happiness and peace, then it is that a new and unexpected prospect bursts upon his sight ! An unthought-of opening presents itself. Through the long vista he catches a glimpse of a bright and glorious expanse. God gives him his vineyards from these. "The valley of Achor becomes a door of hope." God brings the backslider to himself by another route than he ever thought of. Let us remember, for our own warning and heart-searching, that there may be many a backslider in heart, where there is no open and manifest defection from the ways of godliness. (*Denis Kelly, B.A.*) *The Lord's healing* :—Their alienation was not only offensive to God, it was also hurtful to themselves. It had brought spiritual malady upon them. Jehovah assumes the function of healer, and He effects what He promises. The God whom they had offended does not suffer them to perish, nor spurn them away as loathsome ; but He revives and quickens them. The gangrene disappears, and they return to soundness and health, with the assured prospect of coming at length to the fulness of the stature of perfect men. (*John Eadie, D.D., LL.D.*) *Backsliding healed* :—In this verse is set down an answer to that prayer, repentance, and reformation which the Church made. Where God doth give a spirit of prayer, He will answer. God answers exactly

unto all that is prayed for, beginning first with the ground of all comfort, the forgiveness of sins. Backsliding is an aggravation of sin. Sins rank thus—1. Sins of ignorance. 2. Sins of infirmity. 3. Sins against knowledge. 4. Sins against the Holy Ghost. In that God's promise is "I will heal," observe that sin is a wound and a disease. Sin, as disease, arises either from ourselves, as we have a seminary of them in our own hearts; or from the infection and contagion of others; or from Satan, who hath society with our spirits. In regard to its effects, sin is like a disease. Diseases neglected breed death; they become incurable. This is the end of sin, either to end in a good despair, or in a fruitless, barren despair. How may we know that we are sick of this sickness and disease of sin? If the soul be inflamed with revenge and anger, that soul is certainly diseased: the temper of the soul is according to the passions thereof. If a man cannot relish good diet, then we count him a sick man; so when a man cannot relish holy discourse, nor the ordinances of God. A man may know there is a deadly sickness upon the soul, when he is senseless of his wounds; and senseless of that which passeth from them. A man is desperately soul-sick when oaths, lies, and deceitful speeches pass from him, and yet he is senseless of them. Let us know and consider, that no man who lives in sins unrepented of and uncured is to be envied, be he never so great. Let there be no dallying with sin. God is the great physician of the soul. Healing implies taking away—1. The guilt of sin, which is the venom of it, by justification. 2. The rage of sin, which is the spreading of it, by sanctification. 3. The removing of the judgment upon our estate. Sense of pardon only comes after sight, sense, weariness, and confession of sin. Let us remember this, lest we deceive our souls. (*R. Sibbes, D.D.*) *Backsliding* :—This word imports a departing or a turning away again from God. It is quite contrary, in the formal nature of it, to faith and repentance, and implies that which the apostle calls a "repenting of repentance." For a man, having approved of God's ways, and entered into covenant with Him, after this to go from his word, and fling up his bargain, and start aside like a deceitful bow; of all other dispositions of the soul, this is one of the worst; to deal with our sins as Israel did with their servants, dismiss them and then take them again (*Jer. xxxiv. 10, 11*). It is the sad fruit of an evil and unbelieving heart. Yet God says, "I will heal their backslidings." To understand this aright, we are to know that there is a twofold apostasy. 1. An apostasy arising out of impotency of affection and prevalency of lust, drawing the heart to look toward the old pleasures thereof again: it is a recidivation or relapse into a former sinful condition out of forgetfulness and falseness of heart, for want of the fear of God to balance the conscience and to fix and unite the heart to Him. Though exceedingly dangerous, yet God is sometimes pleased to forgive and to heal this disease. 2. An apostasy which is proud and malicious, when, after they "have tasted the good Word of God," men set themselves to hate, oppose, and persecute godliness, to do "despite unto the Spirit of grace," to fling off the holy strictness of Christ's yoke. Observe—(1) We should beware of backsliding, above all other sins. (2) We should not be so terrified by any sin, which our soul mourns and labours under, and our heart turns from, as thereby to be withheld from going to the Physician for pardon and healing. (*Jeremiah Burroughs*.) *I will love them freely*.—*God's promise of forgiveness* :—We observe God's acknowledgment or consideration of all the three points embraced in the supplication of the truly penitent. God healeth in four different ways, and each mode embraces all the others. 1. By a gracious pardon. 2. By a spiritual and effectual reformation, by enabling us to walk in newness of life, by making us holy, even as He is holy. 3. By removing judgments which sin brought upon the sufferer, whether nationally or individually. 4. By comforting. This mode of restoring health to the soul is one of Christ's principal works. The Lord is very minute and distinct in marking every article in the penitent's prayer. Ephraim not only besought mercy to have all his iniquity taken away, but also that He who took away all sin, should, at the same time, receive good gifts in his behalf. Jehovah, accordingly, does not only promise, "I will heal their backsliding," but proceeds to say moreover, "I will love them freely." This is the fundamental principle of Gospel truth. Ephraim gave a reason for his entire dependence, henceforth and for ever, upon the Lord, which was, "For in Thee the fatherless findeth mercy." We can do nothing on our part to obtain the mercy vouchsafed unto us; for God said, "I will love them freely." It is out of man's power to deserve God's love. Another consideration must be borne in mind, not to incur God's wrath again. (*Moses Margoliouth, B.A.*)

The free grace of God :—Here the heart of our Heavenly Father is opened to us in the declarations of His free, royal, and incomprehensible mercy. This as far surpasses our sins and sinfulness as His self-existent Godhead does our creature capacities. 1. The Lord's free grace in healing the backsliding of His people. 2. The manner in which this is made known to them. 3. The way and means by which they receive the inward sense and benefit thereof. (*Samuel Eyles Pierce.*) *Loving freely* :—St. Austin says, "Those that are to petition great persons, they will obtain some who are skilful to frame their petitions; lest by their unskilfulness they provoke anger, instead of carrying away the benefit desired." So it is here with God's people, being to deal with the great God, and not being able to frame their own petitions. God answers them graciously with the same mercies which He had suggested them to ask. His answer is full, "I will love them freely." This He does because—1. It is His name and nature to be gracious. 2. No creature can deserve anything at God's hands. God did not then begin to love them, when He said, I will love them freely, but to discover that love which He carried unto them from all eternity. Whatsoever is in God (manifested in time) is eternal and everlasting in Him, without beginning or ending; for whatsoever is in God, is God. His love, discovered in time, must needs be from all eternity. This free love and favour of God is the cause of all other mercies and free favours, whereby He discovereth His love unto us. 1. It is the cause of election. 2. Of vocation. 3. Of forgiveness of sins. 4. Of the grace of love. 5. Of justification, sanctification, &c. 6. Of eternal life. If we would have God to manifest His free love to us, let us strive to be obedient to His commandments, and stir up our hearts by all means to love Him, who hath so freely loved us. The reason for the discovery of this love is thus given. "For Mine anger is turned away from him." There is anger in God against sin: because there is an antipathy between Him and sin. God's anger is the special thing in afflictions. Judgments are called God's anger. God will turn away His anger upon repentance. It is His nature to do so. Learn to observe God's truth in the performance of His gracious promises. (*R. Sibbes, D.D.*) *Loving freely* :—The word means, impelled thereto by himself alone, and so (as used of God), moved by His own essential bountifulness, the exceeding greatness of His goodness. God loves us freely in loving us against our deserts, because He is love. He loves us freely, in that He became man, and having become man freely shed His blood for the remission of our sins, freely forgave our sins. He loves us freely, in giving us grace, according to the good pleasure of His will, to become pleasing to Him, and causing all good in us; He loves us freely in rewarding infinitely the good which we have from Him. "More manifestly here speaketh the person of the Saviour Himself, promising His own coming to the salvation of penitents, with sweetly sounding promise, with sweetness full of grace." (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *The promises of God for the comfort and encouragement of the penitent* :—I. I WILL HEAL THEIR BACKSLIDINGS. Sin is the malady of the soul. Here is the assurance that it shall not be fatal. Healing denotes recovery from the disease. The condemnation shall be removed, and the dominion of sin subdued. II. I WILL LOVE THEM FREELY. Which implies conferring upon them everything good and desirable. III. I WILL BE AS THE DEW. God will visit the souls of His penitent people with His refreshing grace and sanctifying Spirit. In consequence they shall flourish and increase in knowledge and goodness, adorning their religious profession, and appearing before the world in the beauty of holiness. 1. Dew refreshes the face of nature. 2. Dew makes the ground fruitful. The soul shall become as a fair and fragrant garden, as a comely and flourishing plantation. IV. HE SHALL GROW AS THE LILY, &c. All the excellences of the vegetable world are here collected to express the effects produced by the dew of God's grace on the penitent's soul; beauty, fragrant, vigour (or strength), and fertility. The salutary influence of God's blessings should reach surrounding nations. (*S. Knight, M.A.*) *Privileges of the pardoned soul* :—Were it not then the wisest course to begin with making our peace, and then we may soon lead a happy life? It is said, he that gets out of debt grows rich; most sure it is, that the pardoned soul cannot be poor; for as soon as the peace is concluded, a free trade is opened between God and the soul. If once pardoned, we may then sail to any port that lies in God's dominions, and be welcome; where all the promises stand open with their treasure, and say: Here, poor soul, take full lading in of all precious things, even as much as thy faith can bear and carry away. (*J. Spencer.*) *Love for the unlovely* :—The greatest sins do most and best set off the freeness and the riches of God's

grace; there is nothing that makes heaven and earth to ring and sound out His praise so much as the fixing of His love upon those who are most unlovely and uncomely, the bestowing of Himself upon those who have given away themselves from Him. (*Thomas Brooks.*)

Vers. 5-7. **I will be as the dew unto Israel.**—*Divine relationship and human responsiveness*:—Through the picturesque forms and utterances of Hebrew prophecy there breaks a very deep and generous sympathy with the world of nature. For Israel itself, fallen and debased by grievous backslidings, smitten as with a plague of shameless apostasy and spiritual corruption, yet sorrowful, repentant, and growingly responsive to the exhortations of Jehovah's servant, no simile could more vividly illustrate the effect of Divine influence on the degenerate nation, or the restoring impulses it would give to its better life, than that to which Hosea turned. "I will be as the dew unto Israel." **I WILL BE AS THE DEW UNTO ISRAEL.** A more tender and beautiful comparison for God's association and fellowship with His people is not to be imagined. The points of correspondence are very obvious, and can scarcely be invested now with any sense of novelty. The silent stealth of the dew to its resting-place, its reviving and invigorating effect on fields and gardens, its plenteous supply of moisture for the bosom of the earth, and its most beneficent adaptation to needy physical conditions, are all so many well-worn and widely accepted lines of interpretation. What a sense of impenetrable mystery there is about the dew! Who shall make plain to us the process of its generation? And yet how mild and familiar this mysterious economy of nature has become, inspiring no dread, arousing no suspicion, creating no fear, but simply accepted as a gracious providential arrangement that, despite the fact that it is so incomprehensible, may be safely left to its close and constant contact with our earthly life! What marvellous combination of force and gentleness there is in the dew! It does not strive nor cry, nor lift up any contending voice among the powers of nature. See again the service of the dew in replenishing nature's waste of fertilising power. The very existence of the dew indicates a loss sustained by nature, and a provision in nature for repairing that loss. **II. FERTILITY IS BEGOTTEN OF THE DEW.** Where it was given it was natural to expect growth. The response of fields and vineyards to its productive presence was fruitfulness and plenty: and so, in a figure, the result is applied to Israel in this splendid picture of human responsiveness to God's gracious influence. "He shall grow as the lily." There will be growth, stability, breadth, usefulness, and fragrance—the pervading sweetness of the holy life, a characteristic of our growth before God, which must ever be most pleasing to Him. (*W. H. Tetley.*) *The dew of the Holy Spirit*:—**I. TO WHOM THE BLESSING IS PROMISED.** To Israel. Not Israel only after the flesh. The name Israel brings before us Jacob, concerning whom there are two remarkable circumstances recorded. 1. God's special choice of him. 2. His power with God in prayer. **II. THE NATURE OF THE BLESSING SET FORTH.** "As the dew." 1. Dew is refreshing and fertilising. 2. Dew is, in many Eastern lands, the only means for producing these effects. 3. Dew is mild and grateful in the manner of its influence. 4. Dew is generally imperceptible in its approaches. 5. Dew comes only in the night. (*Joseph Jowett, M.A.*) *Dew to Israel*:—Before, He had said, "his spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up." Now again He enlarges the blessing; their supply shall be unfailing, for it shall be from God; yea, God Himself shall be that blessing. "I will be the dew; descending on the mown grass," to quicken and refresh it, descending, Himself, into the dried and parched and sore hearts of men, as He saith, "We will come unto him, and make our abode with him." The grace of God, like the dew, is not given once for all, but is day by day waited for, and day by day renewed. Yet doth it not pass away, like the fitful goodness of God's former people, but turns into the growth and spiritual substance of those on whom it descends. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *The Lord as the dew* (a talk with children):—When there are clouds to lessen the heat of the sun, there is less need of the dew at night, and so God ordains that if clouds cover the heavens, there is little dew to be found. The clouds prevent the escape of heat from the earth, and therefore it does not get cold so rapidly, and thus the evaporated moisture that is in the air does not so readily condense into dewdrops and settle on the grass. When there has been a burning sky all day, and it continues clear even at night, the heat escapes rapidly from the earth, and the moisture that is in the warm air

when it touches the colder earth condenses rapidly, and so the dews are generally profuse. Thus there is a very wise provision made by God. According to the burden and heat of the day, as a rule, is the amount of dew at night. The dew does not descend upon all things equally. The moisture does not condense so rapidly upon the gravel paths as upon the grass. The grass needs it most. The dew in descending makes no noise. It is a gracious blessing that comes silently without trumpeting of any kind. It visits every bud and blade of grass. It does not visit the big trees and forget the tender little plant. God provides for the little ones as well as the great ones. The dew comes so gently that the feeblest blade can bear it. It takes hours to develop a dewdrop. No blade can be injured by the dew. Even the most beautiful bloom on the fruit would not be damaged by it. I want you to feel that as God is so gentle and loving and kind, your sin against Him is all the greater for that. But even when you sin, He comes gently still, so patient and long-suffering is He. He comes to refresh your strength when you get tired and sad and impatient. God is constantly coming like the dew: not once, but time after time. It is according to the need that the dew comes. So the Saviour comes to us even in the darkening hour when no one seems to expect the blessing; comes and refreshes our strength so that we may be the better able to bear the heat and burden of another day. As you grow up to be men and women you will have special need of strength: you will have new cares, new duties, new sorrows. But if God refreshes your strength and fits you for every duty as it shall come, all is well. Your duty and privilege is just to wait upon God, and trust in Him for every needful blessing. (D. Davies.) *Divine influence*.—The dew is the emblem of Divine grace.

I. DIVINE INFLUENCE, LIKE THE DEW, IS UNSEEN. The greatest things we know of are unseen. II. IT IS SILENT. The most delicate ear cannot hear the descent of the dew. So it is with the coming of Divine grace. III. IT IS GENTLE. It falls upon the weakest flower without hurting it. Gentleness is a property of Divine grace. Every true believer is ready to say, "Thy gentleness hath made me great." IV. IT IS REVIVING. The source of many and great blessings. So Divine grace, upon a soul withered up by sin, imparts a freshness and a beauty to its faded life. V. IT IS ABUNDANT. It bespangles all the fields, forests, and gardens of our beautiful world. The humblest flower has its own drop of dew. In Christ there is grace to enlighten, to pardon, to strengthen, to comfort, to glorify every human spirit. VI. IT IS FREE. It falls as freely on the barren rock as on the fertile soil; as sweetly upon the rough fern as upon the delicate rose. The most precious temporal blessings we possess are free to all. Even so Divine grace is universally free. The jewel of Divine grace is as free to all as the light, the air, the water, or the dew. (John Dunlop.)

The measure of blessing in spiritual influence determined by human disposition.—Dew is but very sparingly deposited on hard metals, while on glass, straw, grass, cloth, and similar substances it forms abundantly. The nature of the substance determines the amount of moisture that rests upon it. And the nature of our feelings towards God, and the disposition of our spirits towards holy things, determine the amount of God we are privileged to enjoy. Too often men blame their surroundings and accuse others of being responsible for their spiritual poverty. But our environments are not so responsible as are our own dispositions. The callous, unbending, resisting spirit is but little blessed, while the soul that is submissive to the Divine will, lovingly disposed towards God and His ways, and possessing a sympathetic affinity to the Divine, is saturated with rich and satisfying blessings. (E. Aubrey.)

God's silent blessings.—I. THE DEW IS A TYPE OF THE SILENT BLESSINGS OF GOD. He descends with spiritual graces, coming silently even as the dew falls upon the tender grass. God works no less mightily because He works in silence. This mode of Divine working is profoundly effective. There is something strangely impressive in perfect silence. Man's heart is a tough and stubborn piece of mechanism. Nevertheless it is susceptible to the influences of gentleness, persistently and lovingly laid upon him, and by these influences God is constantly working. II. THE DEW TEACHES THE TIMELINESS OF THE DIVINE BLESSING. The dew comes in just where and when it is most needed, adding greatly to its benefits by the timeliness of its coming. And this is in accordance with the modes of Divine working among the children of men. The souls who most need the Master's tender care are those whom He most seeks to bless. God does not seek us because we are saints, but to make us saints. Human sorrow is small attraction to men, but is the lodestone that draws to us the Spirit

of God. III. THE DEW TEACHES THE TRANSIENT CHARACTER OF MUCH HUMAN GOODNESS. "As the early dew it goeth away." Of how many persons may this sad complaint be spoken? How many resolves made since this year was born have already been dispelled as dew by the morning sun! The dew vanished and left a blessing. These broken resolves, do they leave the heart any better? Nay, the heart is harder and the mind more perverted because of these failures to fulfil vows. (*H. C. M'Cook, D.D.*) *Christ is as the dew*.—This comparison of the dew is made use of for illustration in sundry places of Scripture (*Hos. vi. 4; Psa. cx. 3; Mic. v. 7; Psa. cxxxiii. 1, 3*). I. WHAT LIKENESS IS THERE BETWEEN JESUS CHRIST AND THE DEW? The dew has six properties, all fitly applicable, without straining, to the Lord Jesus Christ. 1. The dew is Divine and heaven-born. 2. The dew descends, comes down. 3. The manner of the descending of the dew is not observable. It descends silently, makes no noise. 4. It is the nature of the dew to soften as far as it goes. 5. The dew moistens. 6. The dew makes fruitful. II. WHO IS THE ISRAEL TO WHOM HE WILL BE AS THE DEW? There is a twofold Israel spoken of. Israel the person, Israel the people; this includes Israel according to the flesh, and Israel according to the spirit. Understand this latter. 1. Of the Gospel Church in general, and 2. Of particular believing souls. III. WHEN ESPECIALLY HAVE WE NEED OF THIS DEW? 1. We have all need of it while we are in an unconverted state and condition. 2. When the conscience is parched at any time with the sense of guilt, through some wilful omission or commission. 3. Under the withdrawals of the light of God's countenance. 4. When a fit of barrenness prevails, through the stirrings of some corruption, the success of some temptation, or through the want of quickening means and ordinances, the Word, sacraments, Sabbaths, solemn assemblies. 5. In a time of outward trouble and calamity. 6. When we come to die. 7. When we go to an ordinance. The dew is necessary to prepare the ground for the plough. 8. When we have been to an ordinance. IV. WHAT IS OUR DUTY IN REFERENCE TO THIS? 1. Mix faith with it, as a Divine truth; that there is certainly such a thing as this dew, and that the Lord Jesus Christ is in it. 2. Be more sensible of your need of it every day in everything. 3. Ask it of God; and having asked it, expect and wait for it, in the use of appointed means. 4. Observe whence all your spiritual refreshments come, and all your fruit. It is from Christ as your dew; and let Him have the glory of it. (*Philip Henry.*) *Improvement in religion the fruit of a Divine influence*.—God has so framed mankind, and so disposed the affairs of human life as that, on the one hand, our dependence on Him should not at all lessen our obligations to diligence; and that our diligence should not preclude our regards to the influence of Divine providence. No inference is to be drawn from the belief of a providence that is the least unfavourable to industry. But he acts a part equally foolish and sinful who builds his future prospects wholly upon his own prudence and labour. It is an undoubted truth that the concurrence of an external influence, which is not under our control, is absolutely necessary to secure success. Let a man be as industrious as he will, if he pays no regard to the providence of God, his conduct is as unreasonable and criminal, as if through a pretended reliance on that providence, he were to abandon himself to sloth and indolence! In vain do we profess faith in the influence and operations of the blessed Spirit, while we live in the slothful neglect of appointed duties. The text is the gracious assurance of God to penitent and returning Israel. By the blessing here promised we are to understand the influence of Divine grace. I. WHY ARE THE DIVINE INFLUENCES COMPARED TO THE DEW? The dew is a mist, or thin small kind of rain, which falls upon the earth morning and evening in a very gentle, gradual, imperceptible manner, and so refreshes the ground and makes it fruitful. It has always been esteemed a great blessing. It is a natural emblem of the Spirit. 1. As to its origin. The dew comes down from above. It is called the "dew of heaven," and the heavens are said to "drop down dew." It is no effect of human art or power. So the influences of the Spirit come down from God. They are absolutely at God's disposal, and under His direction and control. Who shall question this? To deny that there is a secret invisible mighty influence, which at some seasons especially quickens the heart of a good man and animates him to his duty, is in effect to deny all religion. The means of religion are manifestly adapted to produce the effects which have been mentioned, just as the sowing and cultivating the ground to make it fruitful. But these means are not alike successful with all who enjoy them. The benefits which some reap

from the means of religion must be owing to the kind and seasonable influences of Divine grace which accompany them. 2. As to the manner in which it falls upon the earth. It descends gradually, imperceptibly, seasonably, and sometimes very plentifully. So do the influences of the Holy Spirit descend upon the Christian. They were given richly to early Christians who had to establish Christianity and to endure persecutions. These early disciples were filled with the Spirit. 3. As to its use. These are the effects of the Divine influences. (1) Divine comfort and refreshment. (2) Establishment and confirmation. (3) Fruitfulness. (4) Beauty and glory put upon the real Christian. What ornament so fair and beautiful as that of a meek and quiet spirit—a mind endued with patience and contentment, with benevolence and love? II. TO MAKE SOME SUITABLE IMPROVEMENT OF THE WHOLE. 1. Does this dew come down from God; of Him then let us earnestly seek it, and to Him let us offer our humble thanks for it. 2. Though we receive this dew from above, let us not expect it but in the way of duty. If we do, it is not to be wondered at that we are disappointed. 3. How vain are all their pretences to a large experience of these dews of Divine grace who bring forth no suitable fruit in their lives! 4. Let the humble, serious, and timorous Christian be comforted—the Christian whose concern it is to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, though through many discouragements he is sometimes ready to question whether he is the happy subject of Divine influence. 5. How unspeakable will be the bliss and glory of the heavenly world, where the effects of these Divine influences shall be enjoyed in their utmost perfection. (*S. Stenner, D.D.*) *As the dew*:—These sweet promises in their order follow immediately upon this, that God would freely love them, and cease to be angry with them: then He adds the fruits of His love to their souls, and the effects of those fruits in many particulars. 1. God's love is a fruitful love. Whosoever He loves, He makes the things lovely. Our hearts, in regard to themselves are barren and dry, wherefore God's grace is compared to the dew. The dew falls insensibly and invisibly. It falls very sweetly and mildly. Grace is compared with dew in regard to its operations. It cools the air when it falls, and then with coolness it hath a fructifying virtue, for falling especially on tender herbs and plants, it soaks into the root of them and makes them fruitful. So it is with the graces of God's Spirit. 2. Notice the unresistibleness of the dew and of God's grace. Christians grow like lilies—1. For beauty and glory. 2. In regard of purity and whiteness. Let us then labour that the dew of God may prove the dew of grace, and that God would make us lilies. Remember that there is a growing upward; a growing in the root; and a spreading and growing in the fruit or sweetness. (*R. Sibbes, D.D.*) *The metaphor of the dew*:—I. OPEN AND EXPLAIN THE DECLARATION AND PROMISE HERE GIVEN. The fountain and spring of these words originates from the former. Some interpret as a promise of the Holy Ghost. The expression, "I will be as the dew unto Israel," is indicative of Divine sovereignty. Here is the will of God expressed in a promise. In Scripture, things very delightful and refreshing are compared to dew. Unity amongst brethren is compared to the "dew of Hermon." Afflictions and sufferings are like dew and drops of the night. The metaphor as now before us is designed to show how the Church of God and the saints of the Most High are refreshed by the love of the Father, the salvation of the Son, and the gracious influences of the Holy Ghost. He falling gradually and insensibly on the souls of the elect, they are most blessedly revived and refreshed; so as to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and made fruitful in every good word and work. II. THE SUDDEN CHANGE PRODUCED BY THE FULFILMENT OF THE PROMISE. "He shall grow as the lily." The expression is used of spiritual growth. This can only be by the grace and Divine influences of the Holy Spirit. III. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THIS FLOURISHING CONDITION. "He shall cast forth his roots as Lebanon." The strength of Christ's Church, and the fixation and firmness of the same, will be such as cannot be moved. The whole of these words are an absolute promise. God's "I will" runs throughout them. (*Samuel Eyles Pierce.*) *The dew*:—This is a gracious promise to a penitent and returning people. Dew is of the greatest value to all who are engaged in agricultural pursuits. It assuages the fierce drought of the season. With its nightly baptism it invigorates the languid vegetation, and renews greenness and growth over the whole landscape. Give some analogies between the descent of the dew upon the ground and the gracious comings and manifestations of God to His people. I. THE DEW FALLS VERY QUIETLY AND GENTLY. On the

tempestuous night there is none. It is distilled beneath serene heavens. Its crystal drops are formed under the wing of silence and in the bosom of the night. So God does not usually come to bless and revive His people amid agitations and excitements, in the stress of life, in the hurry of affairs, in the crash of startling events. Times of recruiting and replenishment will probably be times of silence. Elijah heard the "still small voice." There are times in the Church's history when God comes graciously near amid agitations and alarms. But such comings of God have hitherto been exceptional. God's gracious work has gone on in sublime quietness. Many a true religious revival has been accomplished in much quietness, without any tremendous agonies or sublime raptures, without swift alternations of hope and fear—just by a growing sense of the nearness and importance of Divine things. God is waiting for the opening of your heart in the hour of quietness, that He may distil over all its affections the sweet baptism of His grace.

II. **THE DEW FALLS VERY CPIOUSLY.** In the land of Israel much more abundantly than it ever does in this country. Travellers tell us that after a still night, when the dew has been falling, they find their baggage and their tents dripping as though it had been heavy rain during the night. God's grace to a Church in a time of spiritual quickening is very copious and full. God's dealings are with the whole soul of a man. A man can find this engagement of his whole nature only in religion. The copiousness of Divine influence is seen not only in this wholeness of effect upon the individual, but also in its diffusion over the whole Christian community. God's dew does not come in streams; it is distilled from all the air. It lies clear and cool on every growing thing. And God's grace in like manner comes to many hearts. It runs from heart to heart by the chain of sympathy.

III. **THE DEW IS VERY REFRESHING.** It makes dying nature live. The husbandman looks despondingly over his fields, and fears for the safety of his growing corn. But then begins the silent, copious baptism of the dew. And the farmer can think with hope of the coming harvest day. When God comes in fulfilment of the promise of the text, there is a recovery of sinking strength, a rekindling of dying graces, a returning to first love, a doing of first works. To those who are so visited there is a newness of religion every day.

IV. **THE DEW IS FERTILISING.** This silent, copious, refreshing agent works fruitfulness out of all growing things. They are thus aided in the accomplishment of the very end of their existence. And God's final end with His people is that the plants of His right hand's planting may become fruitful. Our Divine Master speaks much and very solemnly on this subject of fruitfulness. And Christian fruitfulness is a manifold and various thing. It is not all of one kind. Let each "planted" soul rejoice to feel rooted in Him! And then let each grow freely according to His will—not fearing, but gladly daring to branch and blossom and fructify according to the law of individual life. Lily, olive, corn, vine, cedar, all are growing in God's garden; and there is room and dew for them all.

V. There is yet another analogy **IN THE NEARNESS TO US IN BOTH CASES OF THE REVIVING INFLUENCE.** God does not fetch the dew from stars or from fountains in the skies. He condenses and distils it out of the atmosphere. A little change in temperature does it all. This reminds us how we are surrounded by a very atmosphere of grace, which holds all precious things in readiness to be dropt upon us when God shall command it so. May God give us His Holy Spirit to work so on our hearts that we shall become quickly and largely receptive of the unsearchable riches of Christ. (*A. Raleigh, D.D.*) *God promises to restore fruitfulness to Ephraim:*—Here is a continuation of Jehovah's answer to Ephraim's prayer, especially to the second part of it. "Receive us graciously," or, "Receive good gifts," both temporal and spiritual. Ephraim shall once more realise what his name signifies, even fruitfulness, not only in earthly things, but in every good word and work. The outpourings of all these blessings spring from the dew of God's mercy, and from no other source. How infinitely more abundant is God's grant than Israel's request. God answers our petitions more than we think or ask. The reasons are two. 1. God knows our wants far better than we do. We, in spiritual things, resemble children in temporal things. 2. God answers prayer consistently with His majesty. Man answers his fellow-man, like the treacherous echo, only by halves. "As the dew." Ephraim, on account of backsliding, was cursed with barrenness and bleakness; but the gift of dew shall restore his blessings. Dew embraces several significations, comfort, refreshment, encouragement, fecundity, and suchlike. Dew, in a spiritual point of view, means Christ. What dew is to the earth, that is God's grace to the soul.

We are naturally heart-hardened, and therefore barren, as regards the fruit of righteousness; but the dew of God's grace disposes our hearts, by softening them, in the first place, for the purpose of receiving the seed of the Word; and, in the second place, to make that seed fruitful. Many are the reasons why the grace of God should be likened to dew. 1. Because none can give it but Jehovah-Jesus. 2. Because it is the fruit of a serene, clear, and tranquil heaven. The grace of God is not given to a soul which is scorched or frozen, but it is granted to such an one as looks peacefully and steadily towards heaven for it. 3. Because it is abundant and immeasurable. 4. Because it is silent, and falls imperceptibly. 5. Because it is of a gentle and benign nature, and therefore sinks—though slow yet sure—deeply into the earth. So is the Spirit of God. 6. Because it is of a quickening nature. It causes the earth to bring forth her increase. When the Sun of Righteousness melts the moral frost from man's heart, and the Spirit breathes upon the parched soul, it is then that both heart and soul open to the reception of Christ. (*Moses Margoliouth, B.A.*) *Dew upon Israel*.—The prophecy of Hosea may be likened to a tempestuous summer's day. Here we have peace after storm. Consider the comparison Jehovah here employs.

1. Dew is refreshing. A godless soul is like a rainless, dewless, desert land—everything is dead or dying. There are noble faculties and Divine capacities, but they have no life. Seek, I beseech you, the benign presence of your God and Saviour. 2. Dew is beautifying. What more delightful than to go forth into the fields with the sunrise and see them lit up with millions of sparkling diamonds, and sown with myriad pearls! And how beautiful have been the characters of those in whose hearts God has dwelt. And the presence of God is the true beauty of a Church. 3. Dew is fertilising. Regions where the dew falls copiously are remarkable for their fertility. Fertility implies two things—luxuriant growth, and abundant fruit. 4. Dew is gentle. In its descent it does not break the tenderest filaments; it does not wound the most fragile blossom. And so God deals tenderly with His children. 5. Dew is impartial in its distribution. It descends upon the evil and the good, upon the just and unjust. It falls alike on the poor man's plot and on the broad acres of the rich. So impartial is the love of God, so impartial are the benefits of the Gospel. (*Joseph Halsey.*) *God's mission and expectation*.—The symbolism of the Bible is unrivalled for beauty and suggestiveness. The text suggests—I. THE MINISTRY OF THE DIVINE TO THE HUMAN. God's influence comes as close to men as the dew to the flower. It is inspiring to know that ours is not a God who lives only in the light of His own majesty, but dwells with the humble everywhere. He not only rides in the rolling chariot of the stormy skies, or sits in silence above the crested billows of the heaving ocean; but He stoops to earth, and kisses the face of the flowers with His presence, and touches the weak and the weary with a tenderness that surpasses that of the dewdrop as it rolls into the heart of the lily, and becomes there a hidden fountain of strength and refreshment. What is God to the soul that trusts in Him? Is He not, as the dew to the flower, its unseen source of strength? Men need to realise, above everything else, the readiness of God to help them. Why does the dew come to the flower? To bless it, of course. When the dew is on its petals, it breathes its whole sweet fragrance in response. It is for this that the Lord approaches humanity, that we may become better men, or, to put it in the words of the text—"He shall grow as the lily." II. THE DIVINE EXPECTATION. It is only natural for the Lord to expect us to "grow," when He has nourished us. We know how the "lily grows." Its first endeavour is to grow—1. Strong. We are to "grow" like sturdy Christians. It is the stunted growths, the dwarfs of Christianity, that bring it most discredit. But it also grows—2. Beautiful. We are to "grow" in the beauty of holiness. The Lord wants all His servants to be giants, but He does not want them to be clumsy. We are to develop symmetry as well as strength. Next, the "lily" grows—3. Useful. It has medicinal as well as floral uses. Our characters can never be complete until we "grow" after this order—strength, beauty, service. APPLICATION. The Lord is waiting to fill every life, as the dew fills every flower. And when He enters, and not till then, will our lives burst into blossom, and fragrance, and fruit. (*J. W. Bray.*) *The grace of God like the dew*.—In the text, the Lord is introduced as promising the copious and refreshing influences of the Holy Spirit, in the most unrestrained and engaging manner. I. THE PROPRIETY AND FORCE OF THE COMPARISON BETWEEN THE DEW AND THE GRACE OF GOD. As natural philosophers are not agreed as to the source whence dew

is formed, so neither can we discover what is the cause of the grace of God. The love of God in Christ Jesus procures it for us; but how that is effected we know not; nor why, in the Gospel, it is offered so universally, and yet received so indifferently. As the dew is diffused during the night, in a silent and imperceptible manner, after the sun has withdrawn its shining; so the grace of God has been extensively diffused since Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, left this lower world, and the sweet operations of the Holy Spirit are, in a silent but powerful manner, carried on, without our notice or our help. As the dew is regular in its returns, at the seasons when the earth is most in need of it, so the grace of God is regularly granted to His chosen people in every time of need, and is, in general, accompanied with the use of appointed means. As the dew is the free gift of a bountiful providence, so grace is the free gift of our most merciful Father. The dew nourishes and refreshes the whole vegetable creation, and when the grace of God descends upon men by the saving influences of the Holy Spirit, they are refreshed and revived, quickened and made alive to God and holiness. As the dew causes all things which grow out of the earth to advance to maturity, so the Spirit of God works upon the hearts of His people, making them fruitful in good works, obedient in every duty, and wise unto eternal life. It is said, "he shall grow as the lily." The lily is by nature delicate and weakly, but by the repeated visitations and refreshings of the dew, it puts forth its tender buds, and by degrees assumes strength and increases in size. The grace of God, by the agency of the Holy Spirit, enables the soul to go on towards perfection. Observe concerning the growth promised, that God will not only supply the believer's wants, but will Himself be to him all that he needs. "I will be as the dew upon Israel." The grace of God in the soul is an active principle. II. THE EFFECTS OF THE GRACE OF GOD UPON HIS PEOPLE'S HEARTS AND LIVES. Various similitudes are employed in Scripture. It is likened to "seed fallen in good ground," to being "made willing," to being "raised from the dead," to being transformed into another likeness, &c. Then remember that when we profess faith in the Divine promise, we should give evidence of it by our sincere repentance, and our obedience to the holy law of God. Application. Through faith and patience the believer shall at last inherit the promises in their fullest acceptance. "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" (*James Kidd, D.D.*) *Spiritual blessings for the true Israel of God*.—The text is part of a description of the flourishing condition of the chosen people when returned to God. It may be accommodated to the Church of Christ among the Gentiles.

I. THE PROMISE. "I will be as the dew unto Israel." We know the value of dew, but in Eastern lands much more vivid ideas are called up by it. In Palestine little or no rain is known during the summer. Were it not for the cool nights and the heavy dew all vegetation must perish. The bestowal of the dew has been accounted one of God's especial blessings—and the withdrawal of it a curse. What the dew is in the natural world, causing the earth to soften, to bring forth, to fructify, that is the Holy Spirit of God to the soul of man. It softens the heart, implants the principles of grace, sows the seed of eternal life, and puts forth all the evident tokens of a new creation within. As the dew is essential to the production and preservation of herbs and plants, so is it every way necessary to the reviving of the heart of man, that the Spirit of God work in it, because left to himself man could never change one feature of his original corrupt and unfruitful nature. As the dew descends on every plant, leaving not one leaf unwatered, in silence refreshing even the smallest blade of grass, so does the Holy Spirit work silently, warning, teaching, convincing, in the hearts of all. When in the text it is stated that Israel shall grow as a lily and cast forth his roots as Lebanon, of course it is implied that an earnest and faithful reception of the good Spirit has been given. II. THE EFFECTS WHICH ARE TO FOLLOW GOD'S SPIRIT BEING AS THE DEW UNTO ISRAEL. Whatever effects may be expected from any future outpouring of the Spirit, the same in their measure and kind are to be looked for in our immediate dispensation. "Grow as the lily." This is a beautiful emblem of the loveliness and purity of a truly Christian character. The chief attributes of the lily of the East are beauty, fragrance, and certain medicinal qualities. These qualities, morally considered, should be found in every Christian. We read of the beauty of holiness. St. Peter speaks of the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. The Christian should be noted among his brethren for the excellence of his principles, for conscientious behaviour, and for a display of love and sympathy in all his actions. Like the fragrance

of a beautiful flower, the name of the Christian ought to be acceptable to all men. There should be a loveliness, a seriousness in his manner, an habitual holiness evincing everywhere that he is a disciple of Christ. Such graces can only flow from constant communion with his God. As the lily is endowed with medicinal properties, so is the Christian to be as the "salt of the world." He must be jealous of God's honour. Sin must never be unproved in his presence. He, by his principles and practice, placed as he is in a wicked world, must preserve it from corruption. The margin says, "He shall blossom as the lily." This is precisely what God expects from us. Too many forget the truth that a Christian should be a marked man. If any of you feel your shortcomings, flee to the Saviour for grace and pardon. Copy the example of your Master; learn of Him; emulate His innocence, His purity, His fragrance, His faithfulness. He compares Himself to a lily, and thus condescends to show us His humility, His love, His "oneness" with His Church and people. "He shall cast forth his roots as Lebanon." This figure shows the stability which true religious principles impart. It is a forcible image of the security of him whose heart has yielded to the strivings of Divine grace. Here is found an argument for the necessity of progress in religion. Seasons of trouble, sorrow, inquiry; the hour of death, the day of judgment, are before us. It is needful, therefore, to have some settled principles, some well-ascertained and surely laid foundation upon which we may then rest. "It is a good thing that the heart be established by grace." (*R. H. Whitworth.*)

The progressive Christian.—I. THE SPIRITUAL INFLUENCE WHICH GOD PROMISES TO HIS PEOPLE. It is like the dew—1. In its source. 2. In its silence. 3. In its seasonableness. 4. In its abundance.

II. ITS BENEFICIAL RESULTS. 1. Growth. 2. Stability. 3. Beauty. 4. Fragrance. 5. Fertility. (*G. Brooks.*)

The dew of Israel and the lily of God.—I. CHRIST, AS SET FORTH BY THE DEW UNTO ISRAEL. Jehovah Himself is the dew. This promise implies that there is a dry and withered field somewhere. This field we are, in so far as we are not yet partakers of His life. As the dew falls in the sultry nights of summer, when the fields thirst and languish, so does the dew of God descend only upon thirsting and fainting souls. As the dew falls from heaven in the stillness of the night, so is the way of Christ. The manner and way of His coming to the soul is a mystery hidden in night; and who can unveil it? The dew of the field has a bright lustre within it, for it has communion with the light of heaven. When once Christ has come in unto us, all is bright and pellucid in the depths of our disordered nature. But Christ covers all our misery with His own self, with His own righteousness. How fruitifying is the dew! And what a life does Christ impart to the soul!

II. CHRIST COMPARES HIS BRIDE THE CHURCH, AND HEREIN EVERY BELIEVING SOUL, TO THE BEAUTIFUL LILY. The people of Palestine knew of no flower more truly sweet and lovely than the noble lily. The lily is often found growing among thorns. Thorns represent the many spiritual and temporal troubles with which the chosen of God are encompassed. Observe by what means the lily thrives and flourishes. It toils not, neither does it spin. It passively waves in the sunshine, and opens its cup to the morning dew. May, then, the Spirit of the Lord Jesus come upon each of us as dew! (*F. W. Krummacher.*)

The dew of God's grace, and its results.—I. THE INFLUENCES OF THE SPIRIT, "AS THE DEW." 1. Dew is never far off (humidity of atmosphere); waits around; makes itself felt at proper season by whatsoever thirsts for it. So the Giver of life is ever present with His own; ready to refresh, cleanse, strengthen. He is round about us (*Psa. cxxxix.*): the atmosphere of His promises, His providences, His presence. 2. Falls in quiet of evening, and believers specially realise God's presence in quietness. "Commune . . . and be still." Eventide experiences; "cool of the day." Do you serve with quiet mind? Too much excitement, worldly or "religious"; bustling, mechanical? Troubled souls, be comforted. 3. Falls in due measure; never in excess: grasses, flowers, olives, cedars; each receives in proportion to need. Similarly, the workings of the Spirit, infinitely wise, gracious. Dew of "youth," babes, elders. Class, condition, character; our responsibilities, . . . "the grace that is given to us,"—given abundantly, tenderly. 4. Falls silently; not see or hear. So with the ordinary operations of the Spirit. Stillness, secrecy of reception; gradual formation of habits; transformation (*2 Cor. iii. 18*); growth, "grace for (upon) grace"; renewing of the hidden life with energy invisible; loving influences, mighty, mysterious, silent, but sure (*Mark iv. 27*). 5. Regularly: to-day's dryness, to-day's dew. Even so we

pray for "the continual dew" of God's blessing; fresh joy and vigour from the "healthful Spirit" of His grace (Job xxix. 19). Daily hallowing. Not spasmodic. II. THE RESULTS OF THE SPIRIT'S INFLUENCES. "He shall grow . . . They that dwell . . ." 1. Believers blessed. Notice first the position: lily, cedar, olives, herbs, and grasses; mountain crest, slope, clefts, and rich soil; exposed, admired, hidden. Each plant its own place. So each member of the Church his own vocation: what we are, where we are—of God. The poor and unlearned may as truly, though not as widely, glorify God, as the high-placed and greatly gifted. Notice second, perfection; in all bedewed vegetation, luxuriance and beauty of vigorous life. Special services and pleasantness; purity and loveliness—the lily; strength and expansion—the cedar; fruitfulness—the olive; fragrance ("smell") of herbs, and scented turf "Lebanon." "Diversities of gifts" and "of operations" (1 Cor. xii. 4). A Conway, a Livingstone, a Monod, a Lyte, a Selwyn, a Hedley Vicars; "stewards of the manifold grace of God." What variety! Humility, sweetness, purity, fervour, fruitfulness, self-sacrificing patience, courage, steadfastness, &c. But be not contented with some special grace: pray to "worthily magnify" His name in full orb'd holiness. 2. Believers a blessing. "They that dwell under His shadow shall return." The influence of consistent Christian living; it wins, helps, warms, comforts. Try thus to be, more and more, a means of grace. (*Clergyman's Magazine.*) A fertilised Church:—God promised to be as dew to His chosen people. He was so. Their entire history proves it. He was the beauty of their character, their strength in battle, the wisdom of their counsels, the giver of food—as the dew. God is as dew to His people now by the operations of the Holy Spirit. Dew is a type of spiritual influence because it is essential. Nature provides no substitute. Its operations are mysterious, unlike rain. Its workings are silent. It is one of God's many quiet workers. Its influence is beautifying. It feeds flowers. It is fertilising. No drink of vegetation is more grateful.

I. THE GROWTH OF A GOD-WATERED CHURCH. In nature, stability is never reached rapidly. Strength is always crowned with hoary years. This law affects also the works of man. A new kingdom is feeble; an old one strong. In the growth of a God-watered Church we have a beautiful exception to this law of nature. In it the peculiarities of the lily and the cedar are blended. It has beauty that is not fragile. It has strength that is not of tedious growth.

II. THE POWER OF A GOD-WATERED CHURCH. Preachers often say that but two classes of persons inhabit earth—the saved and the unsaved. But the unsaved divide into those who have never known God, and those who have apostatised from Him. A God-watered Church has power with both classes.

1. It has power with the world at large. (1) This power is the power of law. (2) Of loveliness. (3) Of love. 2. It has power with relapsed Christians. (1) They revive as the corn from apparent death. (2) They grow as the vine rapidly. (3) Their growth is towards the fragrance of mature Christian life, holiness, and love. (*I. K. Jackson.*) God as the dew:—The comfortable, fruitful, sanctifying grace of God is compared to dew. 1. The dew doth come from above. It cannot be commanded by the creature. 2. The dew doth fall insensibly and invisibly. So the grace of God. We feel the comfort, sweetness, and operation of it, but it falls insensibly, without observation. 3. It falls sweetly and mildly, not violating the nature or course of anything, but rather helping and cherishing the same. 4. Grace is compared to dew, in regard of the operations of dew. What effects hath dew upon the earth? (1) It cools the air when it falls, and with coolness it hath a fructifying virtue. (2) The soul is not only cooled and refreshed, but it is also sweetened and made fruitful with comfort to the soul. 5. Dew is irresistible. Nothing can hinder the dew from falling. Use. Let none be discouraged with the deadness, dryness, and barrenness of their own hearts, but let them know that God doth graciously promise, if they will take the course formerly set down, to be "as the dew unto them." Therefore let them come to the ordinances of God, with wondrous hope, confidence, and faith that He will bless the means of His own ordaining and appointing, for His own ends. (*R. Sibbes.*) The Holy Spirit as the dew:—The Holy Ghost came down on the day of Pentecost. He comes down now also, though not in any extraordinary manner, or with any remarkable manifestation. Quietly, calmly, but mightily, now as then He comes, the Lord, the Giver of Life, to quicken the dead soul and to revive the drooping. The manner of His ordinary coming is likened to the falling of the dew, and the various effects of His coming are

likened to the luxuriance of the most beautiful plants of an Eastern climate.

I. THE COMING OF THE SPIRIT IS AS THE DEW. 1. As the dew all day long hangs suspended in the atmosphere waiting only for the fitting moment to form itself into sensible drops upon every blade of grass which is thirsting for its fall, so is the blessed Spirit of God ever moving on all sides around us, unseen indeed, but not altogether unfelt, waiting for the hour when the glare of this world shall have gone down, and man's heart, as in the coolness of the evening hour, be prepared to receive Him. The Spirit is ever in contact with our hearts, gently yet strongly, inclining them to receive Jesus as their Lord, and to live for Him. Above, beneath, around, within you is God the Spirit, and every moment He is striving with your conscience to lead you on to God. 2. There is a likeness in the seasons when the dew falls, and when the Holy Spirit most sensibly comes. The dew settles in drops upon the herbs at evening. The Spirit's seasons come when the gathering night-clouds of sickness or of sorrow, or the calm still hours of Sabbath meditation, have shut out the glare of earthly things and cooled down the heart. You were still and calm in your own spirit, and so inclined to receive the impressions of the blessed Spirit of God. 3. The manner in which the dew falls. Gently, and again and again. So while the Spirit humbles the heart of the stoutest sinner, He does not overwhelm the spirit of the most timorous and feeble disciple. He settles on our hearts, and shows us the things of Jesus. 4. The dew falls much more fully on the grass which thirsts for it than on the stones which have no longing for it. The Spirit is about us all, but His fullness of grace comes to those who really need.

II. THE EFFECT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AS PICTURED BY THE GROWTH OF PLANTS WHEN WATERED BY THE DEW. The prophet illustrates by the beauty of the lily, the fruitfulness of the olive, and the deep-rooted strength and far-spreading sweetness of the cedar of Lebanon. Each one has its own peculiar properties, but each of these properties is nourished and brought to perfection by the dew. To Jesus the Spirit was given without measure; and therefore in Jesus all graces and all gifts are combined; each is in perfection, and no one clashes with another. In meekness alike and in firmness, in depth of thought and in activity of work, He stood alone, the perfect man, and in Him alone the words of the prophet are completely fulfilled. (*Canon Morse.*)

The Divine dew and its results :—We think of God as being the dew in connection with the influences of His Spirit. These influences of the Spirit descend in consequence of the work of Christ.

I. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE DIVINE DEW AND ITS RESULTS. 1. It is a gentle influence, but has great results. The dew is never anything but gentle. It does not seem a force at all. And yet it is an arrangement by which some of the greatest effects in nature are produced. To those whose backslidings have been healed, and from whom God's anger has been turned away, there is no storm influence, there is only the influence of the dew. God is gentleness itself, and His Spirit falls on our life with no violent action, yet accompanied with the greatest results. 2. It is a silent influence, but has visible results. If plants were always in the glare of the sun they would soon wither and die. But at nightfall, after the heat of the day, the dews noiselessly descend. Every blade of grass has its own drop of dew. There has been no sound of anything going on, and yet when morning comes the effects are plainly visible. Drooping plants have revived; nature comes forth refreshed. The Divine workings cannot be traced, but the fruits of the Spirit are manifest. 3. It is a Divine influence, and yet its results are entirely human. The dew is a pure ethereal influence. It is not like the fogs or pestilential vapours from swamps, which rise only a little from earth. It is the dew of heaven. And yet it has an affinity to all forms of vegetable life on the earth. So the influences of the Spirit come from above, from a source high above us; and yet they have an affinity to us. There is that which is foreign to us, namely, sin. To that the Spirit has no affinity. As dew, He mingles with and brings out all that is truly human.

II. THE RESULTS BY THEMSELVES AND IN THEIR MUTUAL CONNECTION. It requires three things to set forth the excellence of the Christian life. The lily, the cedar, and the olive-tree are brought together to give us, in their combination, a conception of what our life should be under the dews of the Spirit. 1. The results of rapid growth, and yet solidity. "He shall grow as the lily, and cast forth His roots as Lebanon." There must be solidity as well as rapidity of growth. The cedar is especially deep rooted in the soil. We strike our roots down when we wrestle with God in prayer, when we read God's Word so as to take firm hold of it, and when, in temptation, we

steadfastly adhere to principle. 2. The results are breadth of growth and fertility. "His branches shall spread," &c. It belongs to the idea of a perfect tree that while it grows upward it grows all round, and at the same time. The cedar especially is widespreading. And so while we have heavenly aspiration we are always to be broadening in our human views and sympathies. But trees that grow to breadth do not grow so much to fatness. So one tree does not suffice to complete the idea. The olive is superior to the cedar in one respect—in fruitfulness. It spends its strength, not on spreading but on fruit-bearing. So we are to combine the cedar and the olive, and, while keeping up our breadth, we are to increase in the rich elements of our life. 3. There results a variety of beauty. There is the beauty of the lily, and also of the olive-tree. There is always a dignity and stateliness about the lily. Whatever belongs to us, whether it be more of the lily or of the olive, will be brought out under the dew of the Spirit. The results are healthfulness, and pleasantness of influence. (*R. Finlayson, B.A.*)

Grace reviving Israel:—I. THE PROMISE OF GRACE MADE TO ISRAEL, NOTWITHSTANDING ISRAEL'S SIN. "I will be as the dew unto Israel." The Christian is here compared to a plant which cannot be watered by any water that is to be found on earth, a plant which needs heavenly watering, even the dew from above. The Eastern figure of the dew has in it several beauties. 1. Grace, like the dew, often comes down imperceptibly into man's heart. Who ever heard the footsteps of the dew coming down upon the meadow-grass? And Christianity is very often imperceptible in its operations. Do not despise spiritual things, because thou hearest not a sound thereof. 2. The dew is always sufficient. If God waters the earth with dew, foolish would be the man who should go afterwards to water after his Maker. God's grace, when it comes upon a man's heart, is all sufficient. 3. The dew, when it is required, is constant. As thou wantest the dew of grace, so shalt thou find it. II. THE INFLUENCES OF DIVINE GRACE IN THE SOUL ARE HERE SET FORTH IN METAPHOR. 1. It makes us grow upward. "Grow as the lily." This refers to the daffodil lily, which on a sudden, in a night, will spring up. That is what grace does in a man's soul. Its first operation is to make us grow up. 2. After they have been growing upward they have to grow downward. "Cast forth his roots as Lebanon." God will not have His people all flower and foliage; He wants them also to take deep root, and throw out strong fibres. Growing down is quite as good as growing up. We should be rooted in humility, and growing in zeal; but usually the two do not come together. Growing downward is a very excellent thing to promote stability. Perhaps that is the exact meaning of the passage. 3. The Christian must next make a profession. "His branches shall spread." 4. The next effect of grace is, the Christian must be beautiful, as "the olive-tree." Its beauty lies in its fruitfulness. And the olive-tree is an evergreen. 5. A good report must go forth about the Christian. "His smell as Lebanon." Wherever the Christian goes he will cast a perfume about him. II. THE BENEFITS OF GRACE TO OTHERS. "They that dwell under His shadow shall return." You will not wish yours to be a selfish religion. I like an expansive religion. By a godly conversation the Christian man shall spread the sweetness of perfume wherever he goes. (*Anon.*)

What God will be to His people, and what He will make His people to be:—I. WHAT GOD WILL BE TO HIS PEOPLE. It is not what God does for His people, but what He is. What does the dew do? 1. It nourishes the growing plants. All along the course of life God comes Himself to our hearts, to keep alive and nourish the good which He has planted there. 2. The dew refreshes the drooping plant. How often have we been drooping and withering, but then God in His love draws near to us, and whispers kind thoughts of His love and pardon and help. Or perhaps we have been treated unkindly, or have been much tempted to sin. Then God comes like the gentle dew from heaven. The dew comes softly; and without being seen; and day by day. II. WHAT GOD'S PEOPLE SHALL BE THROUGH HIM. The character of the true Christian shall be likened—1. To the lily. This plant is used to signify the beauty and purity of God's sanctified ones. God will make us pure in heart and life, afraid of what is wrong, with a tender conscience, disturbed at little sins, and that we shall be continually striving after greater holiness. 2. To the cedar of Lebanon. Which has deep roots, a strong trunk, great height, and spreading branches. God will make us to be so firmly fixed on God's truth and love that we cannot be turned away from it by false teaching or temptation to evil. 3. To the olive-tree. Which is always fresh in appearance and abundant in fruitfulness. God

will add to His other gifts, continued joy from continual intercourse with Himself. As God leads us on, nearer to Himself, dropping His grace and Holy Spirit more unceasingly into our hearts, He makes to spring up within us an overflowing well of joy and peace in believing. And He will make us abound in all good works. He will make us do good things abundantly, acts of kindness, and forgiveness, and helpfulness to others. 4. To the smell of Lebanon. The country immediately around this mountain smells sweetly of the many fragrant flowers which bloom at its foot. God by His grace makes us to do what is right in His own sight, and He condescends to be pleased with it; and other Christians are pleased with the good they see in us—so that to God and man we are pleasing, like the delicious scent which rises up in our faces from fragrant flowers. How does God do His work of grace? As the dew He comes—not like the noisy, violent thunderstorm. The dew comes very gently, stealing softly and unobserved. Its work is very gradual, but it is continuous, day by day. It is in secret unobserved ways that God works His great work in our hearts. Then use all your opportunities diligently. Do not seek for excitement. Seek to draw near to God in all the ordinary and even little ways. He will surely come to you to do you good. (*W. H. Ridley, M.A.*)

On Divine influence:—The figure here is borrowed from one of the finest and most efficient operations of nature. The promise was made to Israel, not at a time when God had reason to commend, but to reprove them. We would not lessen, in your estimation, the evil of sin; but it must not be concealed that the spirit, burdened and oppressed with guilt, may derive from this fact abundant consolation. I. THE ORIGIN OF THE DIVINE INFLUENCE. "As the dew." 1. This influence cometh from God. Hence we call it Divine influence. Of all the operations of nature, there is nothing more independent of human agency than the dew. 2. This influence cometh from God as reconciled in Christ. The dew is the offspring of an unclouded sky, the benediction of a placid atmosphere. Is not God a consuming fire? How then can He be as the dew? Inspiration answers the question: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." Brought into a state of unity, and having peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, there descends upon our souls that influence of His Spirit which is here beautifully compared to the dew. 3. This influence comes from God, as a sovereign and distinguished blessing to His chosen people. It is not a common, but a peculiar blessing. It belongs not to the world, but to the Church. II. THE PROPERTIES OF THIS DIVINE INFLUENCE. It is like the dew, which is silent, copious, penetrating, irresistible, and fertilising. III. THE RESULTS OF DIVINE INFLUENCE. 1. Growth; as the lily: spiritual increase,—rapid progress in knowledge, in faith, in zeal, in love, in hope, in confidence, in whatever adorns the Christian character. 2. Stability. Lebanon is, by a figure of speech, put for the cedars which grow there. The stability of the Christian refers to three things—the security of his state, the firmness of his principles, and the perpetuity of his character. His faith, the root of his profession, takes firm hold of the holy covenant. Holy principles, like so many fibres of that root, by adherence to the truth, give a stability to His Christian profession, like that of the majestic cedar. This stability distinguishes the real Christian. 3. Expansion. "His branches shall spread." Spreading branches may denote the extended and extending influence of the Church. There is a celebrated oak which casts its shadow and sheds its acorns upon four counties of England. 4. Corresponding beauty. The beauty of the olive was as proverbial as the strength of the cedar. The proportion of its branches, the perfection of its symmetry, the perpetual freshness of its verdure, and the beauty of its colours constitute that which in nature we call beauty. It may indicate the glory which is put upon the Christian, by imputation of the Saviour's righteousness. It sometimes refers to that moral and spiritual beauty which consists in conformity to the image of Christ. It is the concentration and exhibition of all the graces of the Holy Spirit. 5. Moral fragrance. This expresses the happy effect, the delightful influence, of Christian feeling and Christian character. Two things are intended by this fragrance. (1) That which is acceptable to God. (2) That which is agreeable to men. 6. Universal excellence. The enjoyment of sacred repose. A gracious revival. The earnest of abundant fruitfulness. "Blossom as the vine." Grateful commemoration. Learn—1. The absolute necessity of Divine influence. Be solicitous to obtain a copious effusion of the Holy Spirit. 2. The end for which Divine influence is given, and for which it should be desired. 3. The ground on which Divine influence is hoped for, and the exorcises with which its attainment

stands inseparably connected. (*John Hunt.*) *The dew and the plants*:—Hosea is eminently the prophet of repentance and pardoning love. He has also a poet's eye with which he looks on nature. The text comes from a fervent and tender appeal to Israel to come back to its God. We have here, with lovely symbolism, the various aspects of the Christian ideal of character, and the productive energy which makes them all possible. I. THE SOURCE OF FRUITFULNESS. The dew in Palestine is peculiar. The strong summer sun carries on evaporation with great activity over the surface of the Mediterranean, and the prevailing summer winds bring masses of vapour, which are condensed by the cold when evening falls, and wrap the land in a moist veil which refreshes the drooping vegetation, and saves many a little floweret. It is that moistening mist, not properly "dew" as we know it, which the prophet picks out as being a fitting emblem of the secret, silent, refreshing, quickening, life-giving influences which God will bestow upon the spirit that comes back to Him in lowly penitence. Is there no fierce sunshine blazing down on us, which needs in like manner that our inward life should be moistened and refreshed by the visitations of that silent guest that will come and bring the moisture we need? The deceitful ray of prosperity is full of danger to the spiritual life, and no less cruel are the fervid beams of fiery temptation with which we have all to be tried. And where is our strength? I know but of one source of it—that we shall receive the communications of that spiritual life, the gift of which is the central blessing of the Gospel; the impartation of the life of God to our hearts and spirits, mediated by the indwelling in us of the Spirit of God which is the Spirit of Christ. II. THE PROFUSE BEAUTY WHICH WILL FOLLOW THE FALL OF THE DEW. The lily is most probably identified as the scarlet anemone. The idea conveyed in the figure "He shall grow as the lily" is twofold profusion, or what gardeners call freedom of growth and beauty. A profusion of grace ought to match the profusion with which the dew comes from God. The real beauty is goodness. That beauty of goodness will come wherever a man keeps himself in touch with God and Christ. We are all bound to try and make our Christianity attractive. A great many very good people are repellent and not attractive. There ought to be the beauty of holiness where there is the dew from the Lord. III. THE STRENGTH WHICH SHOULD GO WITH THE BEAUTY. "He shall cast forth his roots as Lebanon; his branches shall spread." To the beauty of the fragile lily we must add the strength of the stable cedar. There must be strength conjoined with beauty in a world like ours, full of conflict and strife. IV. THE FRUITFULNESS WHICH SHOULD CROWN BEAUTY AND STRENGTH. The olive is not a beautiful tree. It has a gnarled, often twisted and distorted, sometimes a monstrous stem and mean branches, and insignificant, pointed, pale leaves, with a silvery grey underside. Its beauty lies in its fruit, and in nothing else, and that fruit produces the oil which sustains and soothes, and smoothes and gives light. Our deeds, which are our fruit, are important, not in themselves so much as because they are the outcome and manifestation of what we are. Our fruit is the test of our Christianity. (*A. MacLaren, D.D.*) *Sacred similitudes*:—I. GOD HAS HERE A SIMILITUDE FOR HIMSELF. "I will be as the dew unto Israel." The dew steals down softly, unheard and unobserved by men. So silent and so secret are the operations of the blessed Spirit on the soul. It is an inward work He carries on which the world seeth not and knoweth not. The very men He condescends to visit are, for a while at least, unconscious of His presence, and are often praying for His visitations when He is actually dwelling in their hearts and helping them in their petitions. Though the dew comes softly, it comes not in vain. It brings a blessing on the fields. It is with an especial view to these kindly influences of the dew upon the ground that the Lord makes it an emblem of His own blessed influences on the soul. It is as if God said, "I will refresh the heart of a penitent and humble sinner as the dew refreshes and revives the thirsty land." It is said of the natural dew, that it "tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men." It does not depend on man's making places ready for it. So is the grace of the Divine Spirit free and sovereign in its operations. It falleth where it listeth. II. MORE THAN ONE SIMILITUDE FOR THE PEOPLE ON WHOM GOD'S GRACE IS BESTOWED. When the natural dew has fallen plentifully on the ground we expect to see a growth there—a growth among the herbs and flowers. "He shall grow as a lily." This is a quickly growing flower: and so the man on whom the dew of the Spirit is plenteously diffused is a quickly growing Christian. He is no idle, sluggish, dull professor, but is constantly gaining ground in the blessed

life which is begun in him. His faith groweth exceedingly. But the lily has only a feeble footing in the soil. Nothing more easy than to take and pluck it up. Not so with the Lord's Israel, with those who have the Spirit's dew upon their souls. This emblem, therefore, does not altogether suit them. The text resorts to another emblem in order to express the firmness and stability of the child of grace. "Send forth his roots as Lebanon." The cedar trees are vast in height, and they are as vast in depth. So is it with those spiritual trees who have the dew of grace upon their branches. They are rooted and grounded in the love of Christ, as those mighty trees of Lebanon are rooted in the soil. The cedars of Lebanon are spreading trees; and so it is said of him who is watered with the dew of grace—"His branches shall spread." This refers to the usefulness and profitableness of the Christian. The man who hath the dew of heaven in his heart is a blessing to the neighbourhood in which he lives. As far as his power or influence extends it is exerted on behalf of all around him. It is also said, "His beauty shall be as the olive-tree"; a tree fair and fruitful to a proverb, and employed to set forth the spiritual beauty and fruitfulness of true believers. He who has the dew of the Spirit in his heart has "the beauty of holiness" in his life and conversation. There is a comeliness and consistency in his behaviour which even the enemies of godliness must needs admire. The last similitude alludes to some sweet-smelling shrubs with which Lebanon abounded. "His smell shall be as Lebanon." There is a fragrantcy, as it were, in the character of him who hath the dew of grace within him. He is acceptable to his brethren. His graces, like a sweet perfume, endear to them his company, and make his communications precious to them. I am afraid that to find a suitable emblem for many of ourselves we must look not to the garden, but the wilderness. It would not be the lily, or the cedar, or the olive, but the "heath of the desert," or the prickly bramble. By the grace of God's Spirit you may become trees of righteousness, lilies, cedars, and olives, in the garden of the Lord. Learn, as Christians, what trees and flowers we should resemble in the garden where our God hath planted us. We should be as lilies in growth, as cedars in establishment, as olives in beauty, and as the sweet smelling shrubs in the odour of our lives. (*A. Roberts, M.A.*) *The dew unto Israel*:—These words follow immediately the healing of the backsliding and the proclamation of God's free love. With us the dew is little noticed. We look to the clouds to supply all that grows upon the earth with sufficient moisture. In Judæa the great heat and little rain make the dew as important as it is beautiful. Three circumstances render the dew a peculiarly appropriate symbol of God's sustaining care for His people. 1. The dew falls regularly, in summer as in winter, in autumn as in spring. 2. It comes quietly in the night, when no one perceives its advent. 3. There is a mystery connected with it,—at least in popular thought. Thus watered from on high, Israel "shall grow as the lily (or blossom)." With the lily is associated the idea of purity. The tall lily, elegant in shape, gorgeous in colouring, prolific in growth, sending forth leaves and flowers freely, forms a choice emblem of Christian beauty and fertility. But the lily is extremely fragile and short-lived. Another comparison must exhibit Israel's strength and stability. What type can better set forth firmness than the cedar of Lebanon? It retains its vigour for centuries. The roots clasp themselves around the rock, and therefore the tree stands unshaken. So the Christian is strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. "His branches shall spread." The flourishing tree sends out new suckers continually, which take root, and themselves grow into trees, to repeat the process again and again. Israel multiplies as well as grows. "His beauty shall be as the olive-tree." To an Oriental eye the olive-tree is actually beautiful. To us it is an emblem of usefulness. The very character of a true Christian renders him useful. He is ever ready to render to all men kindly service and help. "His smell as Lebanon." Travellers say that the smell of Lebanon extends to a considerable distance from its mountains and valleys, owing partly to its cedars and partly to various sweet-smelling plants which are produced profusely. The metaphor may illustrate the influence exerted by the Christian ceaselessly and often unconsciously. "They that dwell under his shadow shall return." The figure represents Israel as a widespread umbrageous tree. It may refer to the protection the Church affords. Or it may allude to the teaching and instructing power of the Church. "They shall revive as the corn." Even prosperous Israel may have his seasons of depression and apparent feebleness. The green stalk of corn may lie seemingly lifeless upon the parched earth, stricken by the

sun. But the night mists and morning dew enwrap it, so that it drinks in the blessed moisture, and once more it erects its head and recovers its greenness. Thus tribulation, or persecution, or the assaults of insidious sin may render the Christian feeble, and may cause him to fall; but the dew of Divine grace descends upon him. He who restoreth the soul vouchsafes His Holy Spirit to him, and again he rises strong in humility and trust. Through the merciful communications of God to him he may revive when his disease seems desperate and recovery hopeless. "And grow as the vine." The preceding metaphors imply power to stand alone. The vine must lean on something else. And the Christian must ever rely on a strength beyond his own. "The scent (memorial) thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon." Travellers speak enthusiastically of the manifold virtues of the wine of Lebanon, of its invigorating qualities, &c. Can a more appropriate illustration be conceived of the abiding influence of a Christian's life, example, work after he has left this world? His memory is an inspiration. His good deeds live after him. (*J. Robinson Gregory.*) *The dew and its energies* :—God is no less with us day by day, in the calmer moods of our soul, than in the experiences in which we seem with more or less of terror to apprehend His awful presence. We speak of the thundercloud as His dark chariot; let us none the less think of the floweret and the dewdrop as telling of Him. I. THIS IMAGE OF GOD'S CHARACTER—THE DEW. 1. You see the herbage languishing under the heat of the scorching sun. What hope is there for the languishing, thirsty flowers? Penetrating copious dews will bathe the dying vegetation with liquid life; and in the morning, when the sun looks forth, from myriad leaves shall flash the reflection of God's own light and glory, and upon every petal shall rest the spangled dewdrop to tell how the most blessed offices of nature are wrought in silence and secrecy. Observe that God does not always come as the dew. It is to bruised and moaning penitents God appears as the dew. God comes often, like the dew, without observation. A restoration of religious life may be unaccompanied by great startling signs. We may scarcely know by what means our spiritual pulses are quickened from their languor, so silently and stealthily comes the grace of God into our hearts. And the dew represents to us the penetrativeness of God's grace. God's Spirit works beyond escape. A shower might miss the tender life overgrown by widespreading leaves; but the dew carries its blessing to the tiny flowerets that lie concealed beneath the broad cover of the more regal growths. To lowly, humble spirits God's blessing comes, diffuse and copious, refreshing and life-giving; as well to them as to the more observed and outstanding. Many millions, in ways we know not, shall be reached by God's gracious penetrative Spirit. II. THE THREEFOLD PICTURE OF THE RESULTS OF GOD'S GRACIOUS ACTIVITY. 1. The beauty of vitality. Growth with rapidity and beauty. Some of the earlier stages of the Divine life have about them an apparent rapidity which finds its image in this growth of the lily. This lily is fitly chosen to represent the idea of beautiful, vital growth; no plant more redundant. This picture tells how, by a mighty force, our life should begin to be a prosperous life; we should grow as the lily, and become plants of the Lord, beyond all doubts, by the very rapidity of our growth and enlargement of our activity. 2. Forceful reserve. There is a hidden life, as we call it, a life away from general observation. With the change of figure, rapidity of development gives place to steadfastness, and the more tedious processes of the spiritual life—steadfastness of will and purpose—all that goes to make character. Some of the processes of Divine life, some of the most needful processes too, are out of sight, and not for observation. I pity the man who has no reserve force in him. He will endure but for a season, and then wither away. 3. Varieties of usefulness. There will be fruit and fragrance, and shelter and refreshment. Its branches will spread, and leaf and fruit in all their manifoldness will abound. Some trees are so beautiful that they utter no apology for their existence. So of the Divine life; it ought never to need an apology. It should be self-assertive; it should command admiration, not pity, never contempt. Fruitfulness and usefulness may command admiration, where even beauty and sublimity may fail. By all our systems we may fail to measure the effects of a truly productive spiritual life. The indirect blessedness flowing from a true life, who can calculate it? The "odour of sanctity" is a phrase which has come to mean something not pleasant, but the odour of real goodness and worth—think of this. And let your smell be that of Lebanon. (*G. J. Proctor.*) *Divine refreshings* :—I. GOD'S REFRESHING COMMUNICATIONS TO HIS PEOPLE. The communications of

(God to His people are fitly compared to the influence of dew, which—1. Distils silently and almost imperceptibly. 2. Yet insinuates itself into plants. 3. And thus maintains vegetative powers. II. GOD'S REFRESHING COMMUNICATIONS ARE ATTESTED BY GRACIOUS FRUITS AND EFFECTS. 1. Growth. The quickness of the growth of the lily often excites admiration. Its stability defies the assaults of earth and hell. While it spreads its branches and displays its vigor in every good word and work. 2. Beauty. Peculiar grace and beauty in the olive-tree. And such there is in the soul that communes much with God. How is the lively Christian beautified with salvation? (1) His outward conduct is rendered amiable in every part. (2) His inward dispositions of humility and love are ornaments which even God Himself admires (1 Pet. iii. 4). He is transformed into the very image of his God (Eph. iv. 23, 24). (3) Nor shall his beauty be ever suffered to decay (Psa. i. 3). The olive an evergreen. 3. Fragrance (twice mentioned in text). Lebanon was no less famous for its odoriferous vines than for its lofty cedars. (1) And does not the Christian diffuse a "sweet savour of Christ" all around him? See him fresh from the presence of God before the sun has exhaled the dew, or the world abated the fervour of his affections. How refreshing and delightful his conversation (Prov. xvi. 24). (2) How pleasing are his character and life also to his God and Saviour! "The Lord hearkened," &c. (Mal. iii. 16). Awake, O north wind," &c. (Cant. iv. 16). "Let your speech," &c. (Col. iv. 6). The nearer you live to God the better will you fulfil that duty. 4. Fruitfulness. The corn and the vine are just emblems of a Christian's fruitfulness. (1) They often wear a most unpromising appearance. (2) Yet they are "revived" by the genial influences of sun and rain. Thus the Christian may be reduced to a drooping or desponding state. But the renewed influences of the Holy Spirit will revive him. (3) They make him "fruitful in every good word and work," he yields the "fruits of righteousness." Note especially the beneficent influences a Christian exerts. They who "dwell under his shadow" are most nearly connected with him, and feel the influences of his character, will participate his blessings. *E.g.*, Master: he is considerate, gentle, wise, in relation to his dependants. Parent: Christianity sweetens family life, and blesses the children. Minister: he sheds a sacred and elevating influence—strengthening, solacing, saving. Infer—1. How honourable and blessed is the Christian state! Often is he favoured with visits from above. Glorious are the effects produced by God upon him. The whole creation scarcely affords images whereby his blessedness may be adequately represented. Who, then, is so honourable? Who so happy? Let all endeavour to maintain a sense of their high privileges; and to "walk worthily of the calling wherewith they are called." 2. How hopeful is the state of those who wait on God! The promises in the text were given as an answer to prayer. And they are made to all who, like Israel, plead with God. (1) If the "dew" be withheld from others, it shall descend on them. *E.g.*, Gideon (Judg. vi. 37, 38). (2) The Spirit's descent shall accomplish the utmost wishes of their souls. (3) They shall soon experience the fulfilment of that word: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength" (Isa. xl. 31). (*Preacher's Assistant.*) *Five good marks*:—I. THE LILY MARK. A good life is like a lily; it is a fruitful life, it does more good than anybody knows but God. Everything carries seeds about—birds and bees, roaring storms and whispering breezes. Well, so it is with a good life; it is very fruitful. Anything that touches it is the better for it. II. THE MOUNTAIN MARK. "Cast forth his roots like Lebanon." The lily is fruitful, but very soon uprooted. It is a very weak thing. Well, a good life is not only like the lily, it is also like Mount Lebanon—that is, strong, firm, and steadfast. Now, there are some people who are good by fits and starts; they are very good in the morning, but before dinner-time their goodness has gone away. They have little bits of goodness that look very nice at the time, but when a strong wind arises—that is, when they are tempted in any way, crossed or provoked—the nice little bits get blown clean away. But a really good life is like Lebanon. It has roots. Winds come and go. It remains unmoved. III. THE SHADOW MARK. "His branches shall spread." Just think of a hot day in a tropical country. A weary traveller comes trudging along, and he says to himself, "Oh, for a bit of shade! I feel so tired, the sun will kill me." And then he sees in the distance a great tree that seems to say to him, "Come here to me; I will shade you, and stand between you and the heat, and you shall rest and sleep and be refreshed." Well, now, a good life is like that, it does good to others, and it spreads its branches so that others may be benefited.

The shadow mark means usefulness. IV. THE BEAUTY MARK. "And his beauty shall be as the olive tree." What is the beauty of the olive tree? Why, it is "ever green," it is beautiful all the year round. Some trees are beautiful for a few months, but the olive tree is ever green; it is beautiful all through the seasons of the year. That is another mark of a good life. You boys will grow up to be men—old men, perhaps—and you will lose a great deal of the outward beauty you have to-day, and so will you girls, for the body will decay; but if you believe in Jesus Christ, and are like Jesus Christ, every year will be like a painter's brush adding to your beauty, every day will make you more and more beautiful to the very end. V. THE WILDEFLOWER MARK. "And his smell shall be like Lebanon,"—that is, a good life gives joy and pleasure to others. Lebanon was a mountain; it had great trees growing on it, and a great many beautiful flowers too, and these had a beautiful smell; and when the wind blew over Lebanon, and people were coming up the valley towards it, and came round a certain corner, there came a beautiful spicy breeze from Lebanon, and they drew it in and said, "What a sweet smell! the smell of Lebanon on the breeze!" Well, now, a good life is like that. It gives other people pleasure, it makes the earth a better place to live in, and makes people happier. (*J. M. Gibbon.*) *Dew unto Israel*:—This is one of the exceeding great and precious promises which God has given to His Church, in which every true believer has a special interest, and for the fulfilment of which to himself and to others he is to look, and long, and pray. I. AS TO THE ANALOGIES. 1. As natural dew in ordinary language is spoken of as descending from heaven or from above, so is the spiritual. In the blessing of Moses to Israel before his death, His heavens, it is promised, shall drop down dew; and Solomon speaks of the clouds as dropping down dew (Prov. iii. 20); and the Spirit, in His gracious influences, comes down from the highest heaven. In waiting for the promise of the Spirit, Jesus commanded His disciples to tarry in the city of Jerusalem till they should be endued with power from on high; and the prophet Isaiah declares, that on the land of God's people will come up thorns and briars "until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high" (chap. xxxii. 13-15). 2. As the natural dew comes down freely, so does the spiritual. The husbandman has generally to pay a large rent for his land; he has also to expend much in manuring and preparing the ground, and replenishing it with appropriate seed; but the dew, which contributes so largely to the return which he reaps in harvest, costs him nothing. It is also distributed over his field in the best possible way, without any labour on his part. And this is still more emphatically true of the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit. I, says Jesus, "will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever"; and again—"If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" This is an unspeakably precious gift, which no money could purchase, and without which men would labour in vain in trying to cultivate the field of their own fallen nature and the heritage of God. 3. As the natural dew comes down seasonably, and sometimes very copiously, so does the spiritual. It is after the heat and drought of the day that the dew descends during the night, to refresh and invigorate the herbs and plants of the field; and in warm, eastern countries it often descends so plentifully as not only to water the herbs and plants, but also to moisten the soil, and drench the raiment of those exposed to it. And it is in this world, in which His people are exposed to the scorching and withering influences of manifold temptations, that God sends the refreshing dew and rain of the Spirit's benign influences. "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and dry land springs of water." God is pleased to give His people the most abundant enjoyment of the gracious influences of the Spirit in the season of deep adversity. 4. As the natural dew descends very extensively, so does the spiritual. It is thus diffused not merely over all the hills and valleys, mountains and plains of one country, but of many countries in the four quarters of the globe. And the spiritual dew is also widely diffused. On how many living souls is this falling from day to day and night to night? On every living soul over the habitable globe. In respect of constancy, the analogy between the natural and the spiritual dew fails—the natural dew falls

only during the night, but the spiritual descends day and night. The natural dew does not fall amidst storm and tempest; but it is when the storms and tempests of life rage most fiercely in the experience of the believer that the dew of the Spirit's influence fall most plentifully on his soul. The natural dew only falls from a serene and cloudless sky, but the spiritual comes down when the sky of the people of God is most deeply overcast. 5. The natural dew comes down very gently, and almost imperceptibly,—and so does the spiritual. II. THE VARIOUS EFFECTS OF THE FULFILMENT OF THIS PROMISE AS HELD FORTH IN THE FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE HERE EMPLOYED. The effect of this is—1. Revival and growth,—“He shall grow as the lily.” “They shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine.” There are few more pleasing sights than a field of young corn, every blade of which stands erect with its drop of dew, as if it rejoiced in drinking in the cold moisture by which it is rendered healthful and vigorous. And such are the delightful effects of the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit on the Church and people of God. This produces health of the most precious kind—soul health. This renders the plants of grace in the believer healthful and vigorous, constituting a leading part of the beauties of true holiness. 2. The effect of this is stability and strength,—“He shall cast forth his roots as Lebanon.” It is generally known that the taller a tree grows the deeper do its roots sink into the soil. The cedars of Lebanon were distinguished for the loftiness of their stature and the extent of their boughs, and consequently for the depth to which their roots were struck into the soil, and the breadth to which they extended under the ground. This figurative language intimates very impressively the strength and stability which the influences of the Holy Spirit give to the people of God, preventing them from being driven to and fro as the chaff, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, or laid prostrate by assaults of temptation like uprooted trees of the forest after the hurricane. 3. Another effect of this is, an increase of the Church's genuine members. He shall not only grow as the lily, but as the vine, which, when in a prosperous state, abounds with branches; and “his branches shall spread.” Such was the effect of an abundant effusion of the Spirit in the apostolic age, when thousands of true converts were added to the Church in one place in one day, and when there was a fulfilment of the prediction of such rapid increase to the Church as is indicated in the question, “Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as doves to their windows?” 4. Another effect of this is, beauty: moral and spiritual beauty. “His beauty shall be as the olive tree.” Any tree richly clothed with leaves is a beautiful sight. But the olive tree, with its verdant leaves, either when adorned with its gorgeous blossoms or loaded with fruit, excels in beauty. And to this the beauties of holiness with which the saints of God are adorned, when richly replenished with the Spirit, are likened. However delightful the beauties of the landscape are to the natural, such spiritual beauty spread over the heritage of God is unspeakably more precious and delightful in the sight of God, and in the esteem of His people, in proportion as they have been made like Him. 5. The effect of this is, the diffusion of a delightful spiritual fragrance. “His smell shall be as Lebanon”; and again, “the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon.” God, in His amazing beneficence, as displayed even in nature, is pleased to furnish men with what gives pleasure to every sense—to the eye, to the ear, to the taste, and to the sense of smelling. Lebanon, doubtless, in the days of its glory, excelled in such richly garnished spots; and to this the savour of the holy, consistent lives of the people of God to the spiritual sense are compared; and such, we are assured, shall be the lives of Christians and their heavenly conversation, when God fulfils the promise largely in their experience. This last word, here rendered “scent,” has reference to memory. And of the righteous it is testified, that they shall be had in everlasting remembrance. The examples of the saints in ancient times, which have been embalmed in the inspired record, and the fragrant reminiscences of the excellent of the earth in subsequent ages, which have been preserved in authentic uninspired history, are special means by which, through the Divine blessing, the power of godliness has been perpetuated in our fallen world. Let us, then, seek to be enabled, by the Holy Spirit, so to live from day to day, and from Sabbath to Sabbath in particular, that our example and our counsels shall exert a benign influence on children and children's children, and on posterity generally. Let us try to unite in praying earnestly for an abundant fulfilment of this promise to ourselves, as individuals, as families, as congregations, and to the Church in all her branches. With what beauty of the best kind would

this adorn her! What stability would this impart to her! What a blessing would this make her among the nations, yea, to the whole world! (*Original Secession Magazine*.) **He shall grow as the lily.**—*Spiritual beauty*:—We have here—I. THE SECRET OF SPIRITUAL BEAUTY.

"I will be as the dew unto Israel," therefore "he shall grow as the lily." Not the mere outward, but the outward as it grows from the inward. The dew may wash the dust off the fine petals of the lily, but it is not this that makes it grow beautiful and causes it to unfold its grandeur, but by going down its capillaries and saturating its roots. It is, in the language of modern science, first an involution, and then an evolution. First it takes in and then gives out. Not the amount of God's blessings that rest upon us promote our spiritual beauty, but the amount of God that we absorb into our souls. If the former will, as it were, wash our faces, and it does this, as it makes national customs more pure and humane and beautiful, as it promotes a clean morality, as it gives sweetness to our habits and modes of living, yet it is the blessings that we take into our very being that make beauty a growth, a living product of the Divine within. There is a beauty of art, the result of the magic pencil or chisel of the artist, but it is not a growth; it is still, cold, and lifeless. It is a decoration and external addition, but not a production. It is the difference between the decorated Christmas-tree and the living, fruit-laden tree of the orchard. Spiritual beauty is the result of Divine blessings appropriated and converted by the Divine life within into outgrowing grandeur. The addition of external decorations is sometimes mistaken for this. Spiritual beauty is a living product, the natural outgrowth of the life within. A life dependent upon the nourishment that the Fountain of Life supplies. Be beautiful without God! Yes, when nature can wear her gorgeous apparel without the blessings and the light of heaven. II. THEN THE FIGURE SUGGESTS THE PRONOUNCED CHARACTER OF TRUE SPIRITUAL BEAUTY. "Blossom as the lily." Blossom like this. Changed into the plain prose of the New Testament it means Christians growing like Christ; beautiful with His beauty, grand with His grandeur. For as He is the unchanging standard of spiritual beauty. Making no pretensions, it frequently hides half-buried among more obtrusive and gaudy blooms, yet is known when seen. To grow as the lily is to have a beauty inseparable from real quality. The disciples in the council and Stephen before the court were too real and beautiful to be ignored, and we read that men took note of them. Such men are the living yet unconscious preachers of the nature and grandeur of the Divine character. It is unnecessary to be anxious about our appearance, about being demonstrative, about showing our character and piety; we need be anxious only about being real and the character will show itself. See that the inner life is Christ in us, filling our spirits, and the outer life will be a natural, agreeable product requiring no effort on our part to produce it. III. AGAIN WE LEARN THAT OUR SPIRITUAL BEAUTY IS GOD'S CONCERN RATHER THAN OURS. Be not concerned about your beauty, but be concerned about your goodness; not about what you are to become, but about what you are, about doing your duty to God, and He will see to your beauty. He does not bid us chisel our own beauty; it would certainly be very inferior work. The fashioning of the spiritual beauty of the Christian character is in the hands of the Master Artist of the universe, and we can profitably leave it to Him. (*E. Aubrey*.) *Spiritual growth*:—Coleridge defined genius as "the faculty of growth"; goodness belongs to the same order, and may be similarly defined. It is ever "becoming," changing into a more complete and Diviner thing. 1. There is growth in purity. Wesley said, "I believe this perfection is always wrought in the soul by faith, by a simple act of faith; consequently in an instant." But I believe a gradual work, both preceding and following that instant. The gift received in faith was preceded by a gracious preparation, the gift received in faith is slowly realised in its fullness of meaning in after years. We must look for growth in clearness of insight, for increasing freedom from pride and self, for new blossomings in purity of thought and motive and life. 2. There is growth in depth. How little many of us read, or meditate, or pray. And this is the reason that our branches are bare, that we wither at the top. We want more pondering in our heart, more of that secret assimilation which takes fast hold of the eternal grounds of reason and righteousness. The plants which grow in the Alps are, as a rule, firmly and largely rooted. It is much the same with the Christian character. Whenever we find strength or beauty of character, we may be sure that it springs from depth of soul, that the fibres have struck

deep in the everlasting truth and love. And when we gain this depth we enjoy a blessed stability and peace. The Christian life is strong and stable, hidden with Christ in God. 3. There is growth in breadth. Spreading of roots, and spreading of boughs. Not unusually we commence the spiritual life with narrow and ignorant views of the Divine character and government; but justly cultured, the soul expands in the knowledge and love of God. We sorely need to grow out of all narrow and unworthy misconceptions. There is also a growth in charity—a growth in heart. The growth in kindness, sympathy, catholicity, is the Divinest growth of all. 4. There is growth in beauty. Mount Lebanon is decked with loveliness, and it has an abundance of aromatic things and odoriferous flowers. The olive is a tree with a charm of its own. The olive is by no means a picturesque tree, it even sometimes looks stunted and shabby. But the soft, delicate beauty of the olive grows upon you, until, stirred by the wind, the shimmering silver of its leaves makes a picture. So Christian character is often not in the least brilliant, not heroic or striking. The noblest men and women living are modest, homely, simple souls; but they are marked by a mild and serious grace which is in truth the perfection of beauty. In this unconscious winsomeness we ought to grow unto our lives' end. 5. There is a growth in usefulness. What corn and wine are to men, the children of God are to the world—they diffuse life and gladness. Usefulness is the very glory of the Christian. The glory of the Christian is that he lives to bless. And we are reminded that everything is possible in the power of grace, as all beauty and fruitfulness are possible in the dewdrop. God says, "I will be as the dew unto Israel." (*Wesleyan Magazine*.)

The believer's growth in grace :—These words contain the gracious promise of God's favour and blessing upon Israel converted. The Lord gives refreshment to His people, which produces in them the firmness of the tree that is deeply rooted, the beauty and spotless purity of the lily, the fragrance of an odoriferous plant, the smell of Lebanon. The dew which is promised is grace—grace which justifies, as well as grace which sanctifies. This grace is given in order to produce certain fruits. The beauty of holiness may be fitly represented by the purity and comeliness of this flower. Then spiritual growth is not all outwards, it consists mostly in growth of the root, which is out of sight. The more we depend upon Christ, and draw our virtue from Him, the more we act from principle, the more steadfast we are in faith. Another blessing, following the operation of grace, is the increase of God's Church. There is one metaphor more. The Christian plant is pleasing to the sight; it is pleasant also to the smell. The olive-tree has the advantage of being always green. And the spiritual sacrifices, like the smell of Lebanon, are as a sweet savour unto God. The Church of Christ is compared to a garden of spices. The fragrance of true piety is felt where it is not acknowledged. (*Richard Burgess, D.D.*)

Spiritual prosperity :—The cause of all which follows is this, God by His gracious Spirit will be "as the dew unto Israel." Upon that note the prosperous success this dew of God's Spirit hath in them. "They shall grow as the lily." Objection—1. The lily grows but hath no stability. Then "they shall cast out their roots as Lebanon." With growth they shall have stability; not only grow in height speedily, but also grow fast in the root with firmness. Objection—2. As everything that grows in root and firmness doth not spread itself, he says "his branches shall spread," making him more fruitful and comfortable to others. Objection—3. Everything is not fruitful, therefore he shall be as the olive-tree for fruitfulness. Objection—4. The olive hath no pleasant smell or good taste. Therefore he adds another blessing. They shall, in regard to their pleasantness to God and man, be "as the smell of Lebanon," which was a wondrous, pleasant, and delightful place. (*R. Sibbes*.)

And cast forth his roots as Lebanon.—*Spiritual strength* :—The lesson here directs attention to spiritual strength, not in its manifestations so much as in its invisible secret growth and power, agreeing with the New Testament expression, "Strengthened with might in the inner man." I. THAT SPIRITUAL STRENGTH IS PRIMARILY AN INVISIBLE GROWTH. We see the stem of the tree coming to view, its branches spreading, its foliage budding and opening; but this is secondary. Previous to this the roots have spread themselves and absorbed nourishment, and fastened themselves to the hidden rocks. And our life in its visible beauty, in its vigour, in its fruitfulness, will be just in proportion to the extent that our desires and affections and motives grow towards God, and cling to Him and draw their nourishment from Him. A man is really outwardly what he is really inwardly. Root principles are not conveniences but necessities.

Faith is first a conviction and then an effort. Trees without deep roots have been seen sprouting and bearing leaves, but they have soon withered. Virtues without principle, the result of training or environment, or even imitation, may in their bearings, upon mankind prove beneficial. The man may act or give to satisfy another, or to obtain applause, or from some other selfish motives; but the virtues of the truly religious spring from a deep invisible principle that is rooted in and gathers its strength from God. And one of the results of absorbing abundantly God's blessings is that it develops righteous principles and convictions in the soul, bringing the invisible in us into living and growing contact with the invisible Eternal. II. THAT SPIRITUAL STRENGTH IS OURS IN PROPORTION TO THE GROWTH OF OUR INTERNAL PRINCIPLES. We may have a laudable ambition to be strong, vigorous Christians, having resisting power to fight manfully and successfully all alluring temptations, persisting power to pursue with firm step our godly course, maintaining a large measure of devoutness whatever may be the hindrances and difficulties in our way, and possessing conquering power whereby we may overcome self as well as Satan. Then our desires and anxieties and ambitions must move towards God, to settle themselves in Him, and derive their strength from Him, and become "strong in the strength which God supplies through His eternal Son." III. A STRENGTH THAT SHALL BE SEEN IN UNWAVERING STEADFASTNESS. Storms sweep over the Lebanon forests in mad fury, but they only help to consolidate the roots of the cedar, and help them to strike themselves deeper among the rocks, to have a still firmer hold, and then to stand in stately grandeur. The powers of our soul are capable of expansion, and don't try and tie them down to any circumscribed rule of your own, and sinfully stunt their growth! Give them scope, being careful that they ever move in the direction of God and eternal realities. Why the wavering and vacillating on the part of so many? Why the painful unrest so generally apparent? The answer is not far to find. The roots are not deep. Conviction is at a discount, and principle is not the sacred and important concern that it rightly should be in the estimate of large numbers of professing Christians. How different they who are rooted and grounded in God, with convictions firm, and principles a guiding rule! Compromise and expediency find no countenance with them. Such men were Moses, Job, Daniel, and others in Old Testament times, and Peter, Paul, John, and others in apostolic times, and the martyrs and others in later years. (*E. Aubrey.*) *Spiritual restoration*.—I THIS EXPRESSION IMPLIES A SAD AND PAINFUL TRUTH. A truth, alas! only too evidently confirmed by our own experiences, namely, that there lies in us a possibility to err from the ways of God. Among the many causes that contribute to this is—1. Too large a measure of self-confidence. There is a confidence that is legitimate and necessary, the confidence that has God for its foundation. But if in exalting self our trust rests upon our own powers, and we reason confidently from an exaggerated conception of the ability of those powers, then do we sin both against God and ourselves. Self-confidence is false confidence, and like all things false, it must wither and decay. The chequered career of Israel as a nation is a striking object-lesson that illustrates this truth. Its several declensions are preceded by unmistakable evidences of a growing self-confidence, that leads to ignoring God, and eventually makes them the captive slaves of their victorious enemies. And history in its recital of the careers of individuals bears testimony to the operation of the same law here. Self-confidence has proved the sure harbinger of declension. It was so with Peter. 2. Another cause of spiritual declension is the neglect of the means Divinely appointed to ensure our stability and progress. This naturally follows the other. An exalted self means a belittled God. Self-satisfaction means despised Divine provision. We cannot live and grow and prosper without God. And so are His appointed means. 3. Again, too close a tie to the world in its enervating influences conduces to declension. We cannot live in the miasma and fever swamps of sin without being spiritually affected for ill. Indications of such declension are also present in our own spirits. (1) There is a low tone to our spirituality. And matters are looked at not in the light of revelation under the illumination of God's Spirit, but with eyes dimmed and vision darkened by too close a contact with the world. (2) Relish for the spiritual is lost. (3) To which may be added as a further indication the harassing sense of unrest that pains us. II. VOICES A CONSOLATORY TRUTH. "They shall return." Recover the ground lost by their declension, on condition that in quiet, trustful receptiveness they dwell under God's shelter.

It is our comfort to know that God works our restoration. Have we asked, "What shall I do to win back the joys of former days"? We may have vowed and planned and promised and striven in our own strength away from God, but all in vain. How shall we compass again the experiences of a brighter day? Here is the answer, "They that abide under His shadow shall return." (*Ibid.*)

Soul revival:—The figure implies—I. THE POSSESSION OF A LIVING ENERGY. II. THE FIGURE AGAIN SUGGESTS THAT SOUL REVIVAL IS PROMOTED BY COMING UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF THE NECESSARY AND ADAPTED MEANS. The grain to germinate and grow and produce must be placed in congenial soil, be watered by the clouds of heaven, and warmed by the abounding rays of the sun. Israel's revival is ensured by being in God's presence, with His fertilising blessings resting upon them and His gracious favours awakening their sleeping powers. Prayer, the Word of God, and the influences of the Holy Spirit are a necessity. III. SOUL REVIVAL SHALL MEAN THE INCREASE AND MULTIPLICATION OF LIFE. "Revive as the corn." How? To grow? Yes, and to multiply. When God is ours, He multiplies life through us. We live to-day, when God is ours, to live to-morrow, not only in ourselves, but in others, and become immortal both in heaven and on earth. Immortality is inseparable from the life lived in God and nourished by Him. Its very nature, for it is Divine, ensures its perpetuation. The saints that have gone before never lived as they do to-day. They fill a larger circle, and sway a greater influence than when in the flesh. When filled with God we produce what becomes seed for greater harvests. What magnificent possibilities belong to us! (*Ibid.*)

And grow as the vine.—*Spiritual growth by dependence and pruning:*—I. IT IS GROWTH BY DEPENDENCE UPON SUPERIOR STRENGTH. While all the trees and plants of forest, field, and garden in many ways evince their dependence, in none, perhaps, except the ivy and its class, is it manifested more openly than in the vine. Growth by clinging to superior strength seems to be the primary lesson that it teaches. "The Lord was my stay," says David. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, . . . let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." It is no dishonour to our devout character, no disgrace to our virtues, no disparagement of our powers to acknowledge our utter dependence upon God, and to exhibit it. "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe." It was no empty platitude, or mere figure of speech, that exhortation of Barnabas's to the brethren in the Church at Antioch: "That with full purpose of heart they should cleave unto the Lord." Clinging to the Lord is not only weakness laying hold of strength, but life gathering force and finding support to expand and grow and be fruitful. This is not merely a wise policy, but an absolute necessity. II. GROWING IN AN ELEVATED SITUATION. We are told that "the elevation of the hills and tablelands of Judah is the true climate of the vine." This natural fact suggests a parallel in Christian history and experience. The souls that have dwelt in the heights of God, above the world in their desires, affections, and aims, standing on an elevated platform in the principles that they have ever acted upon, and the methods which they have adopted, have ever proved the most fruitful, and the product of their life most wholesome and rich. As the vine is indigenous to an elevated position, and grows best there, so our souls are indigenous to a higher mode of life than the worldly, and meant in that higher position to breathe a holier and purer atmosphere, and grow best in our native soil, which is God and the Divine.

III. THAT OUR SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS PROMOTED BY NECESSARY PURGING AND PRUNING. To grow is one thing; to grow pure, strong, healthy, and fruitful is another thing. And the latter is ensured by the wise arrangement that ordains a measure of trial and sorrow and suffering. To grow as the vine is to grow to the sharp, necessary touch of the pruning knife as it lops off the superfluous, and as it bleeds by skilful incisions to draw off the infected sap, which being allowed to remain would work destruction. Conscious as we are of the presence in our spirits of much that is injuriously superfluous, it is a loving hand that in affliction comes to purge, since it makes the zeal stronger and the soul holier. "It was good for me that I was afflicted," is a confession that has often been endorsed. Is it not a privilege to be helped to grow strong and healthy? Is it not a favour to be assisted to greater purity and more abundant fruitfulness? IV. IN WHICH FRUITFULNESS IS ITS PURPOSED END. The vine that grows to a purpose, being advantageously situated, carefully and skilfully tended and trimmed is the one that repays the attention bestowed upon it with rich clusters of luscious fruit. And it is this that explains the attention. "That ye may abound in every good

work" is the key that unlocks the mysteries of our life, and explains the trying dispensations through which the believing soul is made to pass. (*Ibid.*) **His branches shall spread.**—*Spiritual progress*.—First the growth of our inner virtues, then the growth of our outer graces. First deep-rooted convictions, pure desires, holy affections, honest motives; then manifest activities, wide sympathies, and powerful influences, the natural and irresistible outcome. I. **TO THE MANIFEST AND VISIBLE IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH.** Grace, which is the New Testament term for the Divine blessings, cannot be concealed. Besides, we cannot absorb more unless we produce with what we have. We must give God out in our life, if we would take in more of God into our spirit. God has not meant that we should be reservoirs to store, but channels to communicate. It is as false as it is selfish to suppose that, God being ours, He is ours to conserve for ourselves, as if the ideal of religion consisted in getting as much from Him for our own aggrandisement as we can contain. Then verily would our portion be small. Not how much of enjoyment can we derive in the sanctuary makes us religious, but how much of God can we exhibit in our homes and its duties, in the workshop, in the office, and in the street. Religion is not personal enjoyment so much as a relative blessing. The ideal is not our own enriching as being blessed in being means of enriching others. II. **A TRUTH NOT LESS APPLICABLE TO OUR INFLUENCE THAN TO OUR ACTS.** Society has mistakenly joined the epithet "influential" to mere worldly position and material wealth, and calls him the influential man who possesses these. But the standard is a low one, and neither true to history or experience. True influence, an influence that lives and elevates the race, is that which emanates from goodness and is joined to disinterested piety. Cæsar, Charlemagne, Napoleon, and others are but mere names in history as compared with the living influence of the disciples. Their branches spread and are spreading still. III. **THEN, AGAIN, PROGRESS IS CHARACTERISTIC OF OUR VISIBLE GRACES WHEN GOD IS OURS.** This sentence in its literal form presents to us a complex figure, seemingly contradictory—"His branches or sucking offshoots shall go on." And having God as ours even now progress is characteristic of our life as we go "from strength to strength," adding virtue to virtue. Our life's history is a "going on." From grace to grace; from effort to effort; from experience to experience; from achievement to achievement. The branches are going on. Desires are becoming more holy, devotion's fires burn brighter and stronger, zeal becomes increasingly fervent, and religion is more transparent. (*Ibid.*) **His beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell as Lebanon.**—*Like the olive and Lebanon*.—"His beauty shall be as the olive-tree," which though fruitful and excellent, yet hath no sweet smell; therefore it is added, "His smell shall be as Lebanon." The olive is a very fruitful tree, and the oil which comes and distils from it hath many excellent properties, agreeing to graces. It is a royal kind of liquor, that will be above the rest; so grace commands all other things, it gives a sanctified use of the creature, and subdues all corruption. And then it is unmixed, it will mingle with nothing: light and darkness will not mingle, no more will grace and corruption. And it is sweet, strengthening, and feeding the life. It is the excellence and glory of a Christian to be fruitful in his place and in his particular calling. Every one that is fruitful, God hath a special care of. A Christian by his fruitfulness doth delight others. Note the figure, "dwell under His shadow." What is the use of a shadow? It is for a retiring place to rest in. It is for defence against the extremity of heat. It is for delight, if the shades be good and wholesome. What solace and rest do men find under the shadow of the Church? There is rest and peace. God is about His Church as a wall to protect it. (*R. Sibbes, D.D.*) **Abiding beauty of the godly life**.—So the beauty of the pious life is by this figure set forth. I. As being **UNINTERMITTENT**. A striking contrast to the ever-changing and short-lived so-called beauty of the world. Dressed in the charm of novelty and breaking upon the world at certain seasons, the beauty of much that society boasts of, or even nature presents to our view, is thereby deemed especially attractive. But true spiritual beauty is an ever-present quality. Not the cold beauty of a statue or of a finely painted picture, the result of human skill and artistic manipulation, but the living production of a healthy, God-filled soul. The strength within counteracting the destroying forces without, and triumphing over them. The winter of life no less than summer witnesses its continuance. As sure as it is the result of the God-life in us, so sure will it abide and live uninterruptedly. The unbelieving observer will occasionally

complain that it is not sufficiently apparent, and some, because they cannot see it, deny its existence, forgetting that spiritual things are spiritually discerned. Besides, the pious man's surroundings occasionally prevent the world from seeing his real character. II. That it is beauty COMBINED WITH UTILITY. The olive-tree, while symbolical of beauty, stands none the less noted for its wealth, with its proverbial fatness, combining with its abiding vigour and beauty the virtue of being pre-eminently serviceable—its stock, branches, sap, leaves, and fruit being all of the highest value. And that is the truly beautiful which is pre-eminently useful. The beauty of an object to the pious mind is that it awakens gratifying spiritual sensations, and so far is subjective; and, moreover, is ever fresh with unfading glory, serves a useful purpose, harmonises with the grandeur of the Divine creation, and stands in due order and rightful proportion to the universe in its symmetry and forces. The spiritual theory, as one puts it, is that it is "the expression of the invisible and spiritual under sensible material forms," or, in theological phraseology, it is the inner life manifesting itself in holy fruitfulness and blessing, glorious with the attraction of felt benefits. Such is the really beautiful life—a life of positive activity and blessing. Speak we of spiritual beauty? We ever associate it with self-sacrificing labours. We view the representatives of the truly beautiful in the gallery of Scripture; and inquire wherein does their beauty lie? And we find it consists in the manifestation of this self-sacrificing spirit and effort. They found their beauty by distributing their powers and blessings, regardless of self. III. It is beauty of AN EVER-ENDURING CHARACTER. (*E. Aubrey.*) *Spiritual fragrance*.—I. SUCH FRAGRANCE IS THE PRODUCT OF INTERNAL GRACE AND DIVINE FAVOUR. Vain is the hope to be able to diffuse a sweetening and hallowing influence unless God is in us in His sweetening and sanctifying life. The botanist tells us that the perfume of flowers depends upon the volatilisation of an essential oil which they secrete in their most hidden recesses, whether a sweet oil diffusing rich fragrance or a nauseous oil that exhales itself in repulsive smell. Still the possession of this oil is one thing, its volatile character another. Turning from the figure to the lesson it embodies, it manifestly suggests two things: first, the necessity of possessing internal graces, being filled with the fulness of God, and then, that these graces should become external influences, as they dispose themselves in pleasing and effective forms. Such influences are the holy fragrance of the devout life, arresting attention, awakening inquiry, and inspiring fondness, being neither heard nor seen but powerfully felt. Appearance and sweetness do not always go together. To the eye the richly-hued dahlia is more fascinating than the spray of mignonette, which can scarcely lay claim to be regarded as a flower. But which is it that gives the greatest sense of sweetness? True spiritual influence is more a felt than a seen power. There are parallels in human life to the dahlia and the mignonette: the beauty that expends itself in colour—not to be despised—and that still greater beauty that touches us with pleasing and arresting force, though still unseen—the subtle, penetrating, and captivating influence whose presence is a felt reality. It is so in the life of many a humble, modest, retiring disciple of Jesus Christ's, who dread nothing more than conspicuous publicity, who would blush to find themselves famous, and yet whose presence gives a healthy, fragrant character to the workshop, warehouse, office, or in whatever circle they are found. Their life is a diffusion of Divine sweetness. To scatter a Divine aroma in the community, to diffuse a holy fragrance in our life, grace must be obtained from God, and our virtues must be of a diffusive nature. II. SPIRITUAL FRAGRANCE MEANS AGAIN THE HARMONIOUS BLENDING OF CHRISTIAN VIRTUES. As the fragrance of Lebanon was the blended odours diffused by the various fragrant plants that grew on that mountain range, so the spiritual fragrance of the Christian Church is the harmonious unity and co-operation of its members, and in the case of the individual believer it is the union of the several virtues that go to make up Christian character. There is a spiritual deformity that hinders the diffusion of spiritual influence, where only one grace, or set of graces, is cultivated to the neglect of all the rest, and symmetry is lost and beauty and sweetness consequently absent. Christian character, to prove an influence, must be symmetrical and complete. "Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge," &c. Men may admire boldness, revere meekness, take pleasurable notice of sturdy faith, applaud charity, speak of kindness, and trust honesty when beheld singly; but it is when they are joined together in one character that men are afraid of committing evil in its presence, and are inspired by it to holy effort. III. THE EMBLEM SUGGESTS

AGAIN UNCONFINED EXPANSION. Lebanon loads the passing breezes with a rich profusion of fragrance to be carried anywhere and everywhere—a fragrance that defies the artificial limitations of men's erecting. A high wall may shut in the colour, but the fragrance will overleap it and scatter itself in ever-widening directions. (*Ibid.*) *Lily, cedar, olive*:—Look at the picture of what the dew does, that we may claim the promise and drink in the blessing. I. THE DEW MAKES BLOOM. When God heals the backsliding of Israel, "he shall blossom as the lily." God comes as the dew to dower us with eternal bloom. His secret influences are meant to urge us to an open and increasing beauty. God promises in this figure, to give us, not merely the lily lines, but also the lily glow. He shall lead us not only to do the right, but to do it from a noble motive, and in a noble manner. He aims at colour as well as form. II. THE DEW MAKES ROOT. "Shall cast forth his roots as Lebanon." The famous ridge is known the world over for its groves of cedar, and the cedar-tree is remarkable for its deep, strong grip of the soil. It takes its name indeed from the way in which it "coils" its roots about the rocks. It is the very figure of immovability. Our faith roots itself in truths as sure as the changeless, tremulous rock. We lay hold of the eternal love, and we know that we must shake the universe and wreck all existence before we can move that. Therefore our hope rears itself ever nearer heaven, and fears not the blasts of temptation nor the tooth of time. III. THE DEW MAKES FRUIT. God promises the luxuriant growth of the olive. Here is the symbol of a life that is visible in open majesty and usefulness. It bears an ever fuller harvest of fruit. It shows a constant freshness. The spiritual olive-tree, weighted with its berries, is God's secret benediction to the soul given forth again as an open blessing to the world. IV. THE DEW MAKES SCENT. The lily, when it has much colour, has little fragrance. The cedar and the olive are sweet-smelling trees. Thus the three foregoing figures not only represent gracefulness, steadfastness, and usefulness, but also imply the virtue which is typified by scent. God would have His Church fling far beyond its borders a pleasant savour. As we send our own special sweetness into the air we make a fragrance which woos the world to think well of God's work. Popular opinion as to godliness is not formed from the aroma of one saintly life, but from the general experience of men in their dealings with saintly people. How necessary then that every plant of the Lord, however lowly, should be richly fragrant. The dew, which is God, nourishes the continual incense that ascends to God. Sweeter than our songs, truer than our prayers, our godly spirit is a delight to God, and a worship ever waited for. (*Anon.*) *Fragrant influence* (for children):—Lebanon is the name of two great ranges of mountains on the northern border of Palestine. Travellers who have visited the place tell us that when you enter the valley between these mountains there meets you at once "a perfect gust of fragrant odours." It comes from the flowers, from the aromatic shrubs, from the fig-trees, mulberry-trees, vines and cedars which abound in the valley. The perfume is delightful, and cannot easily be described. Hosea must have passed that way and caught some of the exquisite fragrance, else he could not have written about it so forcibly. But what can the prophet mean when he speaks of Israel—God's people, men, women, children—having a "smell as Lebanon"? Was the smell in their clothes, or in their bodies? No. Clothes may smell of grease, of smoke, of scent; and vulgar persons are sometimes vain enough to make themselves known in a company by means of their favourite perfume. He was a silly little boy who, after nurse had washed his face, removed his pinafore, put some sweet pomatum on his hair and a drop of scent on his handkerchief, came strutting into the drawing-room among his mother's guests, and, looking all around, proudly said, "Now, if anybody smells a smell, that's me." We shall do well to shun that kind of folly and vanity. If good people have a "smell as Lebanon," it is not in their clothes, or in their bodies, but in their character—their influence is what the prophet refers to as fragrance. Influence is not an easy word to define, yet we all know what it is. Influence is like the scent of shrubs and flowers; you cannot see it, touch it, hear it, but it never fails to make its presence known. The fragrance of a plant is part of itself—that part which it gives forth in minute particles, in atoms so small the eye cannot see them, yet they float in the air, and reach the organs of smell. And influence is something going forth from us in little, almost imperceptible ways; in looks, tones, gestures, tempers, actions. It is the outcome of our inner self. It may be good or bad, sweet or foul, wholesome or noxious; and like

the magnet, it has power to draw or repel. Every one of us has influence. No hair is so small that it is without a shadow. No violet is so hidden that it yields no scent. No child is too young, too lowly, to sweeten daily life in home and school. If boys and girls live for Jesus, in the sunshine of His love, and under the dew of His Spirit, theirs will be a fragrant life. They will bring joy into the family, love into the playground, good temper into every quarrel, happiness and gladness into many hearts. The missionary who settles among strange people in a foreign land may not be able, at first, to speak their language, or say a word to change their bad habits. Yet there is something he can do. He may live a life of kindness, goodness, compassion, truthfulness, purity; and, so living, the influence of his character will be sure to impress the heathen favourably, and do them good. Of King Jesus it is said, "All Thy garments smell of myrrh." Keep company with Jesus, and He will give you of His sweetness, wherewith to influence others. The Chinese have a wood which, however deeply buried underground, fills the air with fragrance; and in the higher peak of Teneriffe, far above the clouds, in a dry, burning waste, grows a plant which in summer emits a delicious odour far and wide. Let me so live, that, whether my lot be in the vale or on the hill-top, others may find some good and gracious influence proceeding from me, like that in Israel of which the prophet testified, "His smell as Lebanon." (A. A. Ramsey.) *God does everything beautifully*:—Everything that God does is beautifully done. His stars are jewels set in velvet; His flowers are sapphires set in emerald. Everything of His creation, in shape and colour, as it lies bathed in the sunlight, has upon it the touch of the beautiful. And this teaches us to do beautifully everything that we do. Especially in our conduct towards each other ought there to gleam the beauty of star and breathe the fragrance of flower. *The uses of the olive*:—Anybody that has ever seen a grove of olives knows that their beauty is not such as strikes the eye. If it were not for the blue sky overhead, that rays down glorifying light, they would not be much to look at or talk about. The tree has a gnarled, grotesque trunk, which divides into insignificant branches, bearing leaves mean in shape, harsh in texture, with a silvery under side. It gives but a quivering shade and has no massiveness nor sympathy. Ay! but there are olives on the branches. And so the beauty of the humble tree is in what it grows for man's good. The olive is crushed into oil, and the oil is used for smoothing and suppling joints and flesh, for nourishing and sustaining the body as food, for illuminating darkness as oil in the lamp. And these three things are the three things for which we Christian people have received all our dow, and all our beauty, and all our strength—that we may give other people light, that we may be the means of conveying to other people nourishment, that we may move gently in the world as lubricating, sweetening, soothing influences. The question, after all, is, Does anybody gather fruit of us, and would anybody call us "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified"? (A. MacLaren, D.D.) **They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn.**—*The blessings of the Church of Christ to others*:—1. Who are those that are under his shadow, and what is their return? What is the shadow? Is it Christ, or is it the visible Church? A shadow is literally the representation which any solid body, interposing between the sun, or light, and another body makes of itself. Christ, and God in Him, are the shadow and protection of the Church. But the Church of God seems to be the shadow meant in the text, to which those who dwell under the shade of the same return. 2. Their revival on their having returned, and being under his shadow. This is described as the growth of corn. Corn, in this metaphor, includes wheat, barley, oats, rye, &c. 3. Set forth the growth of these converts, thus returned to the Church, who, being received into it, and protected by it, and being hereby under the shadow of the same, "are revived as the corn, and grow as the vine." 4. The spiritual fragrantcy of those who thus return to the Lord. "The scent, or memorial (see margin), shall be as the wine of Lebanon." Thus we have the Church of Christ in the open, visible state in which she will shine forth in all her gifts and graces. (Samuel Eyles Pierce.)

Ver. 8. Ephraim shall say, what have I to do any more with idols.—*Joined to idols*:—Compare this account of Ephraim with that given in chap. iv. 17. How is this surprising change to be accounted for? I. A SINNER IN HIS NATURAL STATE IS JOINED TO IDOLS. Herein consisteth the essence of man's apostasy.

Something that is not God is the supreme object of his love, and possesseth that place in his heart which is due only to the living and true God. This world, the things of the world, its riches and pleasures and honours, are the great rivals of God which, ever since the fatal apostasy, have usurped the throne of the human heart. This present world, in one shape or other, is loved and served in preference to God by every man, without exception, who hath no other principle of life than what he derived from the first Adam. II. TO SEPARATE A SINNER FROM HIS IDOLS MUST BE THE PECULIAR WORK OF GOD HIMSELF. The natural man may change the object of his devotion; but he will only turn from one idol to another. He stops short of God. All the objects of his pursuit belong to the present state of things. The conversion of a sinner is in Scripture represented as the effect of omnipotent creating power. It is called "a new creation," a being "born again," "a resurrection," a "passing from death to life." The apostate creature is really dead, in the truest and most important sense of the word. III. HOW DOES GOD ACCOMPLISH THIS WORK? By the discovery and application of His pardoning mercy and sanctifying grace. Fear is the immediate consequence of guilt, which soon degenerates into hatred, or that enmity against God which is the distinguishing characteristic of the carnal mind. The report of God's pardoning mercy presents him in a light so suited to the necessities of the apostate creature that, in proportion as it is believed, the sinner is encouraged to look to Him with hope. Then how powerful must the actual experience of such pardoning mercy be. IV. THESE WORDS OF EPHRAIM WILL BE ADOPTED BY ALL UPON WHOM GOD HATH BEEN PLEASED TO CONFER HIS PARDONING MERCY. By this means alone can the sinner be separated from idols. Learn—1. How to account for that idolatry which is so prevalent in the world. 2. That nothing can avail for the cure of this idolatry which doth not relieve from the guilt of sin and vanquish the tormenting fear of wrath, by representing God in a light wherein we can behold Him with pleasure. 3. The importance and use of faith in Christ. (*R. Walker.*) *Some of our idols:*—When the Holy Spirit comes into any heart He drives out the buyers and sellers. If you have received the Spirit you will be crying now in your heart: Lord, take these things hence; what have I to do any more with idols? Some of the idols to be cast away are—1. Self-righteousness. The largest idol of the human heart—the idol which man loves most and God hates most. 2. Darling sins. Every man has his darling sins. Dash down family idols, and secret idols of your own heart. 3. Unlawful attachments. There is not a more fruitful source of sin and misery than this. 4. Ministers. It is right to love them, but beware of making idols of them. 5. Earthly pleasures. This is a smiling, dazzling idol. Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. Sometimes it is a gross idol. 6. Money. You must not love money. You must be more open-hearted, more open-handed. 7. Fear of man. Grim idol! Many souls has he devoured. His eyes are full of hatred to Christ's disciples. This keeps some of you from secret prayer, from worshipping God in your family, from going to lay your case before ministers, from openly confessing Christ. (*R. M. M'Cheyne.*) *Turnings in life:*—This is a touching delineation of true repentance, not the less applicable to us in our turning to God because it describes the repentance of a nation, not of an individual, or because it was written thousands of years ago. Israel and Judah were at this time in a miserable condition. The form under which the prophet presents the lesson he would teach his people is very curious. He was directed to take a wife; she was faithless to him, and fell lower and lower in infidelity and infamy. In his own distracted home-life the prophet is taught to see a parable of the state of his country. The words of the text are spoken partly by returning and repentant Israel, and partly by God. Ephraim exclaims, "What have I to do any more with idols?" The response of God is, "I have heard him, and observed him." 1. The recoil and disgust of Ephraim when he remembers his past idolatries. Idolatry in the Bible is always associated with moral debasement. It is not necessary that the idol should be an image of wood or stone. It may be money, position, a splendid establishment, or æsthetic feeling; it may be senseless parsimony, or drink, or licentiousness. And sooner or later there comes a sense of debasement, a wonder that we could have brought ourselves so low. If we have ever known true repentance, we must have known also that feeling which is of its very essence,—"What have I to do any more with idols?" To hate our idol, even though we confess its power over our souls, is at least an advance, the beginning of spiritual life. But by one manly effort to say,—“What have I to do any more with

idols?" and to lay our heart's allegiance and love and reverence before Him who deserves it and asks it, this is repentance or change of mind, this is to pass from death unto life. 2. But that is a tremendous revolution. Such a resolve demands the very highest form of moral courage. The spell of our false gods does not withdraw itself all at once. But God is not unaware of the struggle in which you are engaged. And to returning Ephraim His loving response is, "I have heard him and observed him." Our warfare is so feeble because we do not believe that God is witnessing and approving and aiding us. It is well to hear Ephraim recognising his own weakness in the words, "I am like a green fir-tree." "I do not think I am a giant of the forest; I know I am but a slight and delicate sapling." Then comes the response of God, deepening Ephraim's humility and trust, "From Me is thy fruit found." The great spiritual need of our souls is to trust God more perfectly, to lay the full weight of our spiritual being on His promises and His character; not to trust Him a little, and ourselves much, but to say out of the fulness of our hearts, "All my fresh springs are in Thee." Such trust means strength, not weakness. It is manly; it is truthful; it is self-respecting. (*J. A. Jacob, M.A.*)

True penitents:—I. THE LANGUAGE AND CHARACTER OF TRUE PENITENTS. Godly sorrow for sin is always found when sin is perceived in its pollution and native deformity. The language, "What have I to do any more with idols?" is the language of confession: a sincere acknowledgment of sin committed against God. Unless the sinner confess his sins unto God he cannot entertain the least degree of hope that they will be forgiven. But this sorrow is not that godly sorrow which issues in repentance unto salvation, unless it has respect to Him who was made a sin-offering for us. Godly sorrow is the gift of God. It is the effect of His Spirit brooding on the heart, softening and melting it. A constituent part of true repentance is faith in the Saviour of sinners. It implies also a steadfast determination to break away from idols, to cast them off. The idols of the heart are to be treated as heathen should treat their idols of wood and stone. But this costs us supreme difficulty. II. GOD'S DISPOSITION TOWARDS SUCH AS CALL UPON HIM IN PENITENTIAL PRAYER. 1. His attentive observation. The words of this passage depict the notice which God takes of those who have any spark of generous indignation against themselves. The ears of the Almighty are open to the very first words which betoken humiliation and penitence. 2. His favourable mind towards them. He regards them with a placable mind, as well as a favourable eye. If there is any one truth to which we should cling with the greatest tenacity it is surely this, the favourable disposition of God towards returning penitents. 3. He is a shadow of protection for those who repair to Him in penitence and faith. "I am a green fir-tree." He will shield and defend them from the fiery darts of Satan, from their own clamorous lusts, and from the depraved examples of the world. III. FRUIT PROCEEDING FROM THE RELATION INTO WHICH THE TRULY PENITENT ARE BROUGHT WITH GOD. 1. What is to be deemed "fruit." The worth of a tree consists in its bringing forth the fruit which is proper to its nature. The fruit differs according to the kind of the tree. God's people are called "trees of righteousness." They bring forth the fruits of the Spirit. 2. This fruit is produced by the grace of God working in those who are in union with Christ. 3. This fruit is found in all who are truly turned to God, truly converted to God. Faith is lifeless and dead if it produce no fruit. There must be life and reality in our religion if we would glorify our Father who is in heaven. (*H. J. Hastings, M.A.*)

Ephraim forsaking idols:—Here are two voices—first, the penitent voice of the returning wanderer, then the welcoming answer of the Father. Here is a wonderful expression of the perfect simplicity of a true return to God. "What have I to do any more with idols?" That is all! No paroxysms of grief, no agonies of repentance, no prescription of so much sorrow, so much grief, for so much sin; no long, tedious process, but, like the finger put upon the key here, the sound yonder. Look at the answer, the echo of this confession which comes from heaven: it is the welcoming voice of the Father, "I hear him, and observe him." Note how instantaneously that Divine ear, strong enough to hear the grass grow, fine enough to hear the first faint shootings of the new life in a man's heart, catches the sound that is inaudible to all besides, and as soon as the word comes from the pale penitent lip of Ephraim the answer comes from God. Observation is here used in a good sense: watching as a nurse watches a feeble child. Then comes a singular metaphor. "I am like a green cyprus-tree." The cyprus is an evergreen. So God means, I am unchanged amidst the changing seasons,

unaffected by all the change. To the prophet this tree, with its wealth of continual shadow, was an emblem of an unchanging blessing and protection. There is another possible association in these words—fanciful but beautiful—for which I am indebted to an old Jewish rabbi and commentator. He says a cypress-tree bends down, and anybody that has seen one knows that its shelves of leafage do droop and come down near to the ground; that a man may lift up his hand and grasp the branches. There is an old legend that the boughs of the tree of life used to droop of themselves to the level of Adam's hand when he was pure and good. And when he had sinned and fallen they lifted themselves above his reach. This metaphor, then, may hint the condescension of the great loving Father, who stoops down from heaven in order that He may bring Himself within our reach. If you take these three points, unchangeableness, protection, condescension, you exhaust the force of this lovely emblem. And so it all comes to this: the humblest voice of conscious unworthiness and lowly resolve to forsake evil, though it be whispered only in the very depths of the heart, finds its way into the ears of the merciful Father, and brings down the immediate answer, the benediction of His shadowing love and perpetual presence, and the fulness of fruit, which He alone can bestow. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Portraiture of a Christian.—The text exhibits the temper of all converted people towards God. Converted men forsake their idols. The Christian knows that everything becomes an idol to a man which occupies more of his thoughts, his time, his care, his desires, and his pursuit than God and His glory. In setting before you the temper and characteristics of a child of God, our attention must be directed before all things to its principles, which is that of universal conformity to the image of Jesus Christ. If it be said that the character of our blessed Lord is too grand and too holy for our imitation, the excuse may be met by saying, that imitation does not mean perfection. It is by the perpetual earnest study of the character of Christ that we are first of all brought to love, and afterwards impelled to imitation. The more we study Christ, the more we must love Him; and the more we love Him, the more we shall assuredly copy His features. The Christian's temper of heart and mind is, of course, displayed in the two great duties of life—1. That which concerns his Maker. 2. That which concerns his neighbour. With the former of these only we are now engaged. In casting away the idols of his heart and life, the Christian^{like} Ephraim, serves, loves, and acknowledges no other but God. The first thing in the character of the child of God is holy fear. The next is obedience. How many idols are overthrown by obedience! Then comes gratitude, which makes a man seek all occasions of showing love and honour to his benefactor. Then trust. This is ever a peculiar mark of the Christian's temper towards God. This trust keeps the Christian watching, striving, praying, and expecting. Then comes supreme desire for the glory of God, which overthrows the great idol of selfishness. This temper is very necessary to prevent many deceptions of the heart. It is of all things most difficult to keep the motives pure; and without pure motives how barren and contemptible is our abstinence from evil and our practice of good. Purity is the temper of right motives. Purity of heart is the most eminent and distinguished temper in the circuit of the Christian graces. This temper brings with it the love of God. Love is the spring that moves all the wheels. It is that delight in God which makes us choose Him above all things. There is one more characteristic of the child of God—a constant endeavour to draw nigh to Him. For this cause the Christian loves and values the ordinances of religion. He prizes them as gracious means whereby he is brought into that nearer fellowship with God after which he is aspiring. Humility forms the crowning feature in the Christian's temper towards God. It is the seeing our own proper position before God. (*W. Harrison, M.A.*)

Ephraim renouncing his idols.—The necessity and power of Divine influence to regenerate the heart is a truth in which all Christians will agree who make the Word of God their sole guide. This doctrine receives confirmation from the history of Ephraim. Two things. Ephraim's abandonment of idols; and God's reception of him. I. THE RENUNCIATION. Here is—1. The language of confession. The strong aversion he expresses is a virtual admission of his precious attachment. The state of Ephraim in his degeneracy is a correct picture of the entire family of man in their irreligious condition. 2. The language of detestation. The predominating sin of Israel was the worship of idols. With us the sin which has been most prevalent lies the heaviest on the conscience, and becomes the object of the most unqualified indignation. 3. Ephraim resolved on the abandon-

ment of his idols. There is a noble promptitude in this pious determination.

II. THE RECEPTION. 1. The Divine attention. "I have heard him." 2. The Divine observation. "I have observed him." 3. The Divine protection. "I am like a green fir-tree," which affords grateful shade and security to the traveller. It conveys the ideas of repose, refreshment, safety. 4. Fruitfulness is provided for. This extends the previous image. Reference probably is to the fruit which the penitent bears after conversion to God. This subject is a check to despondency. No true penitent has cause for despair. (*Anon.*) *Idols abandoned*.—1. What men pursue, before conversion, are idols, i.e. things which give trouble. 2. When the grace of the Gospel is received into the heart it divorces the sinner from his sins. 3. The language of a penitent renouncing his sins is most pleasing to God. 4. Converts shall find that happiness in Christ which idols offered, but gave not. 5. Whatever good we do and enjoy is in and from Jesus Christ. 6. True wisdom is to know and understand God's Word, in its threatenings and in its promises. (*H. Foster.*) *Giving up idols*.—Ephraim does not give up his idols without a reason. He says, I have tried you, and you are vain; I have leaned upon you, and you are broken staves; I have consulted you, and you had no answer; I have looked to you, but you never turned a kind eye upon me. The great apostle says, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols"; the old Scotch version says, "Wee bairns, keep yourselves frae dolls"; the meaning is the same. I like the quaintness of the Scotch version. There is a caressing tenderness in that gruff old tone; listen to it; it is the kind of tone that grows upon the heart. At first it is very singular, and not wholly desirable, but there is in it a latent music; if you say the words over and over again you will come to like them. The time is on the surface; open it, and you find eternity. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *True repentance*.—I. THE EVIDENCE OF A TRUE REPENTANCE. Entire renunciation of idolatry. The repentant sinner is led to confess the folly and sin of his empty pursuits (Rom. vi. 21). Sinful pleasures (1 Cor. vi. 9-11). False confidences: e.g., self-righteousness. Unconditional mercy, &c. And to determine to renounce them. This gracious melting of heart is the Lord's doing. Jesus is exalted to give repentance (Acts v. 31). It is produced here as the blessed fruit of sanctified afflictions. *Illus.*—Manasseh. Prodigal. II. THE NOTICE WHICH GOD TAKES OF A REPENTANT SINNER. "He listens to his moanings" (Job xxxiii. 27). He watches for his return. His eye is upon the repentant sinner when least he thinks so. He observes him. III. THE GRACIOUS ENCOURAGEMENT WHICH GOD GIVES TO HIM. 1. A promise of security. Shadow from the heat. Shelter from the storm. 2. An assurance of supply. Fruits of comfort derived from God. Fruits of grace produced by God's help. (*John D. Lowe, M.A.*) *The pious determination of the true penitent*.—Whatever we set our affections upon, in preference to God, is an idol; and grace will teach us to renounce it. Every man in an impenitent state seeks his happiness in some forbidden and sinful enjoyment. He is therefore an idolater. We have here—I. A CONFESSION OF GUILT. "Any more" implies that in the past he had been concerned with idols. II. A DETERMINATION TO RENOUNCE SINS. Implied in the language taken form as an interrogation. III. THE DETERMINATION IS A HUMBLE ONE, FORMED IN RELIANCE ON GOD'S HEAVENLY GRACE. Reasons for renunciation of sin are—1. Penitent sees something of the real nature and evil of it. 2. Penitent has had experience of the vanity and unprofitableness of all sinful pleasures and pursuits. 3. Penitent has already experienced some, and expects more of, solid and permanent happiness. 4. A principle of love and gratitude to God in the penitent's heart cannot but operate to make him abhor and renounce all iniquity. 5. Every true penitent has the strongest reason to express and maintain the most determined disavowal of all iniquity, in consequence of having surrendered himself to God, and in solemn covenant devoted himself to His service. And this is true religion. This is genuine repentance. All that comes short of this is but vanity and deception. (*S. Knight, M.A.*) *Ephraim and his idols*.—The statement here is, that Ephraim shall and will go on in abominating idols, be constant in his former resolution. Under the term "idols" gather—I. False doctrine, which is the foundation of idolatry. 2. Idols themselves. 3. Idolatry, which they tend to. 4. Idolaters. Idolatry frameth base conceits of God. Consider the opposition between any representation of God, and God. Because God is a jealous God, He will not give His glory to another. Unconverted persons are prone to idolatry; to set up their own wits and wills, instead of God's. Some commit this great sin of idolatry by trusting to the outward performances and

tasks of religion. Consider God's hatred unto all sorts of idolaters; for He accounts such to hate Him, and so accordingly punishes them. (*R. Sibbes, D.D.*) *God corroborates Ephraim's promise.*—There are two causes of repentance, one is fear, the other is love. That repentance which owes its existence to fear is to be repented of, but that which originates in love tends to the soul's salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Repentance which owes its existence to love is distinguished by the infallible effects of a new heart and a right spirit. Penitents, from the effects of redeeming love, endeavour to keep God's commandments. The truly penitent is never left to the treachery of self-dependence. . . . The text is a ratification or corroboration of the terms of the covenant which Israel promises to fulfil. Unless the Almighty confirms our promises and resolves our own determination would be of no avail. We learn the confidence of the truly penitent in God's mercy. The truly penitent ascribes all to the great First Cause. And the truly penitent loses no time to make a firm stand against his former sins. The words also express that the penitent does not cavil or reason as to the effect his conversion might have upon his worldly prospects. Genuine repentance affords comfort in every condition of life. (*Moses Margoliouth, B.A.*)

Ver. 9. Who is wise, and he shall understand these things?—Who is wise?—There must be prudence and wisdom before we can understand Divine truths; there must be an illumination within. A man may know whether he be prudent and wise by his relishing of Divine truths, for otherwise he is not wise and prudent in these things which are the main. The prophet now comes to shew and defend the equity of God's ways, how crooked soever they seem to flesh and blood. By "ways" he understandeth the whole law and Gospel, the whole Word of God; which he calleth right, not only because they are righteous in themselves, but because they reform whatsoever is amiss in us, and rectify us; and work whatsoever is needful for our good and salvation. God's ways are those wherein He walks to us: the ways that He prescribes us to walk in; and our ways as they are conformable to His. "The ways of the Lord are right"; as they agree to that which is right or straight; and right likewise, because they lead directly to a right end. Observe that man is not a prescriber of his own way, and that no creature's will is a rule. The Word of the Lord is every way perfect, and brings us to perfection. The best way to come to a good and right end is to take God's ways. Shew the divers effects these right ways of God have in two sorts of people, the godly and the wicked. 1. The just shall walk in them. They are just who give to every one their due, and give God His due. They are such as have respect unto all God's commandments. They do things to a good end, even the glory of God and the good of man. They desire to grow in grace and they love the brethren. In the worst times, God will have always a people that shall justify wisdom. Men must have spiritual life, and be just, before they can walk. For our encouragement to walk in God's ways, know that they are the most safe ways of all; they are the most pleasant, and they are the cleanest and holiest. "The transgressors shall fall therein." The same word which is a word of life and salvation to the godly is an occasion of sin and perdition unto the wicked. (*R. Sibbes.*) *Who are the truly wise and prudent?*—I. THE CHARACTER OF THE PERSONS WHO WOULD GIVE HEED TO THE WORDS OF THIS PROPHECY, AND TO THESE DOCTRINES. 1. What does the Spirit mean by "wise"? Wisdom is described in the Book of Proverbs. In it wisdom calls, reproves, and has a spirit to pour out, actions and attributes which belong only to the very and eternal God. In it wisdom is said to be the source of royal and judicial authority. It is described as eternal. It is said to have a temple and sacrifices. It promises to do that which the Almighty alone can do. It threatens to execute judgment upon those who refuse to accept the proffered mercy. Then who else can wisdom be but the Lord of Hosts? "Wise" must mean those who make the knowledge of God their chief study and pursuit. They are wise whose heart, mind, and soul are pervaded by wisdom. 2. What does the Spirit mean by "prudent"? The original means, "an understanding one," or "a sound reasoner." So the real meaning of the expression differs considerably from the apparent one. The Spirit means an individual who, by diligent searching and study of God's dispensations and providential visitations, arrives at accurate conclusions with reference to the Almighty's promises and threats; to the consequences of obedience and disobedience; to the effects of impenitence and repentance. A prudent man, in Scripture, but

especially in this place, means a knowing individual in the deep mysteries of God's holy Word. II. THE NATURE OF THE DOCTRINES TAUGHT. "The ways of the Lord are right." This is an expression for true religion which binds and knits man to God. True religion is irresistible. What can be more "reasonable" than that He who made all things for Himself should demand us to Himself? The ways of the Lord "are right," with regard to their conformity to the holy nature and will of God, with regard to the peace which they confer.

III. THE DOUBLE USE MADE OF THE WAYS OF THE LORD BY DIFFERENT PARTIES. "The just shall walk in them: the transgressors shall fall therein." We never make the Word of the Lord our rule of life whereby to walk, until we are made righteous; until the sun of righteousness hath shone in our hearts, and illumined our souls. But how fearful is the doom of those who have despised the wisdom and prudence which the prophet recommended for their knowledge and understanding. The same Being who helps forward the just on their way, and removes every impediment from their path, becomes the insurmountable obstruction in the way of transgressors. Many are the things in the Word of God at which corrupt hearts are apt to stumble. The profoundness and incomprehensibility of some of its mysterious doctrines, instead of humbling the finite mind and bringing it into subjection to the infinite, puffs up with pride and arrogance the depraved and scanty reason, and makes it exalt itself against Him who is exalted above all. The sanctity and strictness of God's ways make many an unholy temper and disposition revolt against making those ways their choice. (*Moses Margoliouth, B.A.*) *The right ways of the Lord*:—Here the prophet makes an application of his subject. I. THE IMPORT OF THIS QUESTION OR APPEAL. 1. Vain men would fain be wise. The question implies that the number of the wise and intelligent on these subjects was but small. And those who did not understand such things as the prophet had delivered did not deserve the name of wise and intelligent, however they might assume it to themselves.

I. THE IMPORTANT DECLARATION. "The ways of the Lord are right." Need not prove this. It is a first principle in religion. It is now before us as matter of reflection. III. THE DIFFERENT VIEWS OF THE WAYS OF GOD WHICH ARE ENTERTAINED, AND THE DIFFERENT EFFECTS PRODUCED THEREBY. The righteous, being taught of God, have a proper and spiritual discernment of things. Transgressors, blinded by the god of the world, discern no spiritual objects in their proper colours. (*S. Knight, M.A.*) *God's ways made known unto the wise*:—The truth is, that men live the chief part of their lives without any knowledge of their own separation from the Lord; they do not understand that sin separates the sinner from his Maker. I. WHO ARE THE WISE? 1. They are willing hearers of God's truth. Like Cornelius of old. 2. Humble receivers of truth. Like the jailer at Philippi. 3. They are careful thinkers. Like Mary, who pondered things in her heart. No others but these can really be spoken of as wise.

II. GOD'S RIGHT WAYS. He has a right to demand obedience on our part to whatever He may please to lay down. If we walk in His ways we shall have grace to support us, and supply our various wants, we shall have guidance in the hour of difficulty, we shall have our hearts prepared for the enjoyment of those pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore. He will give us strength for the day, and grace unto the end. The ways of the just shall be increasingly clear. "The wicked shall fall therein." The ways are the same, but men receive them and walk in them differently. That which is really good for those who are anxious to serve God, we are told here, is turned into evil in the case of the wicked. (*H. Montagu Villiers, M.A.*) *Walking or falling in God's ways*:—In the worst times God will have always a people that shall justify wisdom. Some are foolish; not caring for the ways of God, cavilling at them. But the "just shall walk in them," that is, they take a contrary course to the world that slights wisdom. In ill times, let us labour to justify truth, both the truth of things to be believed and all just religious courses. 1. Men must have spiritual life, and be just, before they can walk. Walking is an action of life; there must be life before there can be walking. Unless there is first spiritual life in the inward man there will not be a harmony and correspondence betwixt a man and his ways. 2. Because a just man is also a prudent and wise man, he walks in God's ways. Spiritual wisdom and prudence lead to walking in obedience. What things doth this walking in the ways of God imply? 1. Perspicuity. Those who walk in the ways of God discern those ways to be God's ways, and discern them aright. 2. Resolution to go on in those

ways till he come to the end, though there be never so much opposition. How shall we know whether we go on in this way or not? 1. When earthly profits and pleasures seem little, and heaven and heavenly things seem near. 2. It implies a uniform course of life. 3. He who would walk in God's ways must be resolute against all opposition whatsoever. The use of this teaching may be—1. Reprehension unto those who can talk, but not walk; that have tongues, but not feet. 2. It is for instruction, to stir us up to walk in God's ways. 3. It is for consolation. If this be our walk, then God will walk with us, and the angels of God shall have charge of us, to keep us in all our ways. (*R. Sibbes, D.D.*)

The cause and cure of social evils :—It cannot be said that our position as a nation is like that of Israel in those days when she was tottering to her fall. But the same, or very similar, evils to those which proved the ruin of Israel exist among us to a deplorable degree. Those who are familiar with the prophecy will know what I mean when I say that evil is with us at the moth stage, not yet at the lion stage (see chap. v.). The moth stage is when evil keeps eating like a canker into the vitals of a people, but where there is nothing, or very little, to attract attention; no noise, nothing to alarm. But let the moth stage go on, let corruption increase among the people, and presently the roar of a lion will be heard; there will be tumult and commotion, there will be the outbreak of open rebellion against the powers that be, in heaven and on earth too. Hosea has it for his great object throughout to show the cause and the cure of all these evils. The cause is unfaithfulness to God, and the cure is returning to Him with the whole heart. There is never more vigour in Hosea's tone than when, reminding of the sin of Jehovah, he says, "Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off!" Has modern society no calf? Does it not make a god of gold? Is not that "covetousness which is idolatry" a national vice? Israel had a calf at Dan as well as at Bethel. This may be taken to represent the idol of natural law. People trust in the laws of evolution, working through the struggle for existence to the survival of the fittest. The great effort of these people is to bring man and all that concerns him under the stern operation of that law. What shall we do? A question much more easily asked than answered. There are many reforms, and these by far the most needful and far-reaching in their result, which can only be accomplished by the diffusion of a spirit of love; and this is only possible by a general return of the people to the Lord their God. The humanitarian spirit which is shown by not a few of those who make no profession of faith in God is much to be commended; but it never can by its inherent force make way in society. To flow as a fertilising stream through the waste places of society, it must take its rise in the high mountains of Divine faith and hope and love. The nether springs of human generosity must be fed by the upper springs of Divine grace. (*J. Monro Gibson, D.D.*)

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BY

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ways till he come to the end, though there be never so much opposition. How shall we know whether we go on in this way or not? 1. When earthly profits and pleasures seem little, and heaven and heavenly things seem near. 2. It implies a uniform course of life. 3. He who would walk in God's ways must be resolute against all opposition whatsoever. The use of this teaching may be—1. Reprehension unto those who can talk, but not walk; that have tongues, but not feet. 2. It is for instruction, to stir us up to walk in God's ways. 3. It is for consolation. If this be our walk, then God will walk with us, and the angels of God shall have charge of us, to keep us in all our ways. (*R. Sibbes, D.D.*)

The cause and cure of social evils :—It cannot be said that our position as a nation is like that of Israel in those days when she was tottering to her fall. But the same, or very similar, evils to those which proved the ruin of Israel exist among us to a deplorable degree. Those who are familiar with the prophecy will know what I mean when I say that evil is with us at the moth stage, not yet at the lion stage (see chap. v.). The moth stage is when evil keeps eating like a canker into the vitals of a people, but where there is nothing, or very little, to attract attention; no noise, nothing to alarm. But let the moth stage go on, let corruption increase among the people, and presently the roar of a lion will be heard; there will be tumult and commotion, there will be the outbreak of open rebellion against the powers that be, in heaven and on earth too. Hosea has it for his great object throughout to show the cause and the cure of all these evils. The cause is unfaithfulness to God, and the cure is returning to Him with the whole heart. There is never more vigour in Hosea's tone than when, reminding of the sin of Jehovah, he says, "Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off!" Has modern society no calf? Does it not make a god of gold? Is not that "covetousness which is idolatry" a national vice? Israel had a calf at Dan as well as at Bethel. This may be taken to represent the idol of natural law. People trust in the laws of evolution, working through the struggle for existence to the survival of the fittest. The great effort of these people is to bring man and all that concerns him under the stern operation of that law. What shall we do? A question much more easily asked than answered. There are many reforms, and these by far the most needful and far-reaching in their result, which can only be accomplished by the diffusion of a spirit of love; and this is only possible by a general return of the people to the Lord their God. The humanitarian spirit which is shown by not a few of those who make no profession of faith in God is much to be commended; but it never can by its inherent force make way in society. To flow as a fertilising stream through the waste places of society, it must take its rise in the high mountains of Divine faith and hope and love. The nether springs of human generosity must be fed by the upper springs of Divine grace. (*J. Monro Gibson, D.D.*)

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