

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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JOEL.

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INTRODUCTION TO JOEL.

I. IN WHAT PERIOD SHOULD JOEL'S ACTIVITY BE PLACED?—Before we can get a true idea of any man who played an important part on the stage of the world in past days, it is essential that we should know something of his environment—what the character of his age was, who his contemporaries were. This knowledge is of peculiar value in connection with the prophets; for, more than anything else, they were God's messengers and missionaries to those among whom they lived and moved and had their being. They preached first to the generation and the epoch in which their lot was cast. No doubt their words had other applications, because God's truth, like God from whom it comes, may fulfil itself in many ways. But we shall hold a very unnatural and a very inadequate theory of prophecy if we think of it as dealing solely, or even principally, with the future. It is the philosophy of history, unveiling its meaning and pointing its lessons. If the prophet had had to do only or mainly with the distant future, it would have mattered little to us in what particular age he chanced to live. Because he was linked very truly and vitally to his own days and his own people, it is most needful that we should try to understand his surroundings. What, then, did Joel preach and labour? We cannot say that there is anything like unanimity in the reply to the question. That he belonged to the kingdom of Judah and dwelt in Jerusalem itself—these facts are admitted by all, and are indeed rendered indisputable by the prophet's frequent references to Zion, to the house of Jehovah, to the porch and the altar, the priests and the ministers, the meat-offering and the drink-offering. His date, however, is not so easily determined as his home. Opinions have varied from the middle of the tenth century before Christ down to the late days of the Maccabees. But, after all, it is pretty certain that Joel is among the very oldest of the prophets. Amos, himself one of the first in that goodly fellowship, knew his writings and loved them, and regarded their author as a teacher, at whose feet he was willing to sit and listen. The herdsman of Tekoa, to whose soul the breath of the Spirit came impelling him to speak, opened his prophecy with the awful declaration with which Joel had closed his—"The Lord shall roar out of Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem." Isaiah, too, though he was so great and original, was not ashamed to glean from the son of Pethuel some of those spirit-stirring thoughts which he uttered in the ears of his people.¹ Evidently Joel was more ancient than these two. Something may be learned, too, from the silences of his prophecy as well as from its positive declarations; for there are significant omissions in his writings. He does not so much as allude to Assyria, the terrible power, whose armies, having menaced Israel often, at last carried its tribes into captivity, and whose might and cruelty and doom are frequent themes with the prophets. No doubt there are interpreters who find Assyria and its people everywhere latent under Joel's glowing

¹ Note, for example, the similarity between the thought and language of Isaiah xiii. and those of Joel.

language ; but they are the exponents, as we shall see, of a theory which is not the wisest or the best. Nor has our prophet anything to say even of Syria, a nearer neighbour of Israel and Judah, with whom they were often at war. We may conclude that its people did not harass his during the time when he fulfilled his mission, else he would surely have had some message from God regarding them. And so the invasion under Hazael, when, because King Joash had forgotten the lessons which he had learned from the godly priest Jchoiada, and had acted foolishly, and unlike a king of Jehovah's holy nation, "the host of Syria came up against him to Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people, and sent all the spoil of them unto the king of Damascus,"—this invasion, so glorious for Syria but so ignominious for Judah, could hardly have fallen within the years when Joel lived and preached. But it took place about the middle of the ninth century before Christ ; and we are constrained therefore to fix his age before that time. Yet not very long before ; for he could exult in the brilliant victory which, in the opening years of this century, Jehoshaphat had gained over the forces that combined themselves against him and against his God ; and could speak of it as the picture in miniature of a still nobler triumph which the Lord would win in the latter days. "I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will contend with them there for My people and for My heritage Israel." Such considerations help us to a decision—to this decision, that Joel prophesied nearly nine hundred years before the advent of Christ, perhaps in the days when Joash was still a child, and when the kingdom of which he was the nominal sovereign was managed by others in his stead. For the preacher's counsel is not addressed to any king, but to the old men, and to the inhabitants of the land, and above all to the priests, who were the real rulers during the regency ; and why should he have so much to say to these classes, if not because they were more prominent in his time than the monarch himself ? The reign of Joash commenced about 877 B.C., when he was but seven years of age ; and in the years just succeeding his accession we may imagine Joel coming forth in the presence of the people to utter the prophecies of which we have some fragments in the book which bears his name. One other proof, confirmatory of this date, may be added. Names, we know, were significant among the Hebrews. Jewish fathers and mothers were very careful what they called their children. And Joel means "Jehovah is God." But that had been the cry of the Israelites on Mount Carmel, on the memorable day when Elijah triumphed over the prophets of Baal, and slew them with his own hand until Kishon ran red with their blood. "Jehovah, He is the God," they exclaimed, "Jehovah, He is the God." Now, the birth of Joel, if he belonged to the period to which I have assigned him, would fall just about the time when on Carmel Elijah waxed valiant in fight, and turned to fight the armies of the aliens. Joining this link of evidence to all the rest, have we not a chain comparatively strong ?

II. IS JOEL'S PROPHECY LITERAL OR FIGURATIVE ?—Does he deal with the present and the actual, or rather with events which were still in the future, and which he depicts only in the language of metaphor and imagery ? Each belief has found its advocates. To all outward seeming he speaks of a solemn visitation of God's providence, which lay heavily on the land of Judah in his own time. Swarm after swarm of locusts had spread over the country, and had permitted no green thing to escape them. Matters were sad enough, indeed, before they showed themselves. Long-continued drought had robbed the fields of their wonted fertility. The vine was dried up, and the fig-tree languished ; the pomegranate and the palm and the apple were withered ; the herds of cattle were perplexed because they had no pasture ; all joy was gone from the sons of men. But when the locusts appeared the crowning desolation came. How graphically and vividly Joel describes these locusts ! Joel, we shall acknowledge, had manifestly an intimate acquaintance with the natural history of the locust. Then, too, in what splendid colours he paints the invasion of the insect-host ! He speaks of the shadow which their number throw over the land—a shadow resembling that of the dim, grey twilight of "the morning spread upon the mountains." He tells how they advance ; "like horsemen do they come" ; "like the noise of chariots they leap upon the tops of the hills" ; "like the noise of a flame of fire that devourereth the stubble" ; "as a strong people set in battle array." They are well disciplined, for Joel can confirm from his own observation the scientific

truth which Rabbi Agur imparted to his disciples, Ithiel and Ucal—the truth that, though the locusts have no king, yet they go forth by ordered bands. “They march every one on his ways,” he assures us; “they do not break their ranks, neither does one thrust another.” Before their onset the people are powerless. “They run to and fro in the streets”; “they mount the wall”; “they climb up upon the houses”; “they go in at the windows like a thief.” How, indeed, can they be defeated and put to shame? For this is the army of Jehovah; and they are strong—they cannot but be strong, whether they be angels or men or locusts of the field—who execute His word. And so, by heaping terror upon terror, Joel leads his hearers on to the goal towards which he has been aiming. He calls on them to repent of their sin. He bids them, in the Lord’s name, rend their hearts and not their garments. At this stage, with this call to repentance, the first part of his prophecy ends. We may imagine a pause, of longer or shorter duration, during which Joel sees his commands complied with. Priest and people humble themselves, and seek the pardon of the God whom they have offended. It is not in vain that they do so. When these poor men cry, the Lord hears and saves them out of all their troubles. This joyful fact Joel commemorates when he opens his lips again, and his strain passes from the minor to the major key. Translate the futures of the 18th verse of the second chapter, where the happier section of the prophecy begins, by imperfects, as there can be little doubt they should be translated; and you will know how true was the repentance of Judah—how seasonable was God’s succour—how thoroughly the winter passed from the prophet’s soul, and lo, the time of the singing of birds was come. And then the horizon of the prophet widens. He thinks of better blessings still which God has for His sons and daughters. He predicts the shame of those ancient foes of Israel’s youth—the only foes of Jehovah’s people with whom Joel was acquainted—Egypt, and Edom, and Philistia, and Phœnicia, and the merchants of the north who sold Hebrew children as slaves to the Greeks of Asia Minor, giving a boy for an harlot and a girl for wine. He prophesies the near approach of a day of the Lord, full of darkness like the pillar of cloud for all His enemies, of light and peace like the pillar of fire for all His friends. When he ceases to speak, this is the vision which he leaves with us—on the one side, nothing; and on the other, Judah and Jerusalem. God’s foes have become non-existent; only His people survive. “Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom a desolate wilderness; but Judah shall dwell for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation.” With this note of stern triumph, of lofty intolerance, Joel draws to a close the second and brighter part of his prophecy. Such in substance is the book. Is it not strange that some interpreters should have refused to adopt what seems its plain and evident sense? The drought was not a literal drought, they say; the locusts were not the insects of the natural world which have carried ruin and destitution many a time to Eastern lands. One critic thinks that Joel intended the work of the locusts to represent “the gnawing care of prosperity and the unsatisfied desire left by a life of luxury.” And others are sure that the prophet’s words dealt with the future and not with the present, and that it was the scourge of the Assyrians of which he chiefly thought. It is true that Assyria did not vex Judah until the time of Hezekiah, many years after Joel’s day; but to the seer’s mind, gifted with the vision and the faculty Divine, are not all things, even things distant and remote, laid naked and bare? It is difficult to conceive any reason for this figurative interpretation. Surely, in God’s hand, the locusts, which destroyed the pastures and trees, and brought want and woe and grim death to many homes, were a scourge sufficiently terrible to justify the raising up of a prophet who should expound the lessons of the awful visitation. They were as worthy instruments for the execution of the Lord’s punishments upon a guilty people as the Chaldeans could be; and if Joel had them for his text his theme was sad and weighty enough. To unfold the meaning of God’s providence—to show that the world of nature, with its “tooth and claw,” its earthquakes and storms and fearful diseases, its tribes of creatures which can work the most mournful ruin, is under His government and control,—is not that as lofty and responsible a mission as any prophet could desire? Indeed, the allegorical view is the outcome of that very insufficient conception of prophecy which considers it to consist almost exclusively of prediction. Perhaps, in the case of Joel, there has been this further thought in some minds, that, being one of the firstborn among the prophets, he was bound to deal with those themes which were principally to occupy the attention of his successors. He must sketch

in outline the picture which they would fill in detail. But I prefer to believe that, as the needs of men demanded, God sent out to them His servants, each at his own hour of the day and with his own allotted task to do—this servant among the rest, who had a very real and actual difficulty to grapple with, and who was sufficiently honoured in being chosen to encounter and overcome it. "Every man shall bear his own burden" is a rule which holds good in prophecy as well as in daily life. But the book itself is the best refutation of the figurative theory. It is a marvel that any could read its graphic sentences without feeling that the whole soul of the author was concerned about a present trouble—the trouble which he describes so powerfully. And it takes half of the grandeur and sublimity out of these chapters to make them deal with Assyrians. "They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war; they shall run to and fro in the city; they shall climb up upon the houses,"—understand these sentences of soldiers, and they are commonplace prose; understand them of locusts, and they are throbbing, beautiful, impressive poetry. They rob Joel of his genius who abandon the literal interpretation of his prophecy.

III. For, turning now to THE CHARACTERISTICS OF HIS STYLE, I think we must be struck most of all by the poetic cast of his thought and expression. There is no probability that this book contains all his prophetic utterances. In every likelihood it is but a sample of the words he was wont to speak to the people; but if the rest resembled these, how much we could wish that we had heard them all! If Joel wrestled with a literal trouble, he did not deal with it in a matter-of-fact way. His sentences, we might well affirm, sound in our ears "like sweet bells at the evening-time most musically rung"; only, the music is for the most part pathetic or terrible rather than joyous, and the bells, while they never lose their harmony, ring out now a plaintive and again a loud and spirit-stirring peal. If you wish an example of this sorrowful music—this mournful and yet most attractive melody—read the exquisite metaphors of the opening chapter. Joel has three different troubles to describe, each deeper and bitterer than the other; but he does not depict them like a pre-Raphaelite in their unlovely reality; he throws a halo of imagination round them. First, he wishes to tell his audience how the locusts had taken away the luxuries which men enjoyed before, and he paints the picture of a drunkard whose wine has been cut off, and who weeps that he is denied his old delight. And then, advancing in his account of the griefs of the land, he narrates how God's worship could not be fittingly observed, for the meat-offering and the drink-offering were nowhere to be found; and he paints another picture, very tenderly and feelingly, of a young wife bereaved and mourning and girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth. And yet further and deeper he goes in the sad history. The very necessities of life, the things which men required for ordinary sustenance, could not now be procured. There was no family but felt the pinch of poverty; no home but learned from experience how gaunt and fierce the wolf is that comes to the door in time of famine. And, that he may portray this lowest extremity, Joel paints a third picture, the companion of the others—the picture of some disappointed husbandmen and vine-dressers, who go out to their fields and vineyards at the season when the fruits of the earth should be gathered in, and discover only waste and barrenness. In this book you may find two characteristics of true poetry—a great sympathy with nature, and a great sympathy with man, in his varied life, his hopes and fears and joys and griefs.

IV. WHAT IS JOEL'S PLACE IN HISTORY AND REVELATION?—He was the successor of Elijah and Elisha. When he opened his mouth to speak what God had put into his heart, the great warfare between Jehovah and Baal was accomplished. There was no need to insist now on the truth that the Lord alone was God. His unity and His sovereignty and His spirituality had already been placed beyond all dispute; and to Joel was entrusted the mission of unveiling and enforcing other lessons about God—lessons which followed naturally on those taught by his predecessors. That God works in the world, and that men are connected with Him, and that there is a Divine event towards which things are tending—these were the doctrines which this prophet was bidden proclaim. He made clear to his people the meaning of two words which are very familiar to us—the words "providence" and "judgment." He showed them that God does not sleep, and does not only start at times into spasmodic activity—that He

is a constant power moving among His creatures; that with Him men have in a most real and solemn way to do. And whilst Joel was charged to deliver this message, he was honoured in being permitted to hint at other truths, to which his successors often returned. What are some of these truths which appear in his book in embryo and germ? To him there was revealed, first among the prophets, the great thought of "a day of the Lord"—*dies irae dies illa*—when the current of history should stand still, and this present age of the world should come to an end. This prophet, too, lays stress on the idea of an effectual Divine call, which comes to men, and which, when it comes in its majesty and grace, they cannot resist. "In Mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call." Of course, Joel did not attach to the idea the full doctrinal significance which the apostle Paul, for example, was wont to do. God's revelation of this truth, as of all truth, was gradual. A remnant, he said, called of God, would escape the desolating ruin wrought by the locusts. These illustrations of the legacy of truth which this prophet bequeathed to his successors might be multiplied; but I choose only one other. He was the first to speak of the outpouring of the Spirit, which should be characteristic of the new dispensation. They were his sayings which Peter quoted on the day of Pentecost. And his surely was a great honour, as well as a great personal happiness, who, before any other, was permitted to behold this glory of the Gospel day. And can we not fancy now, in some measure, what manner of man he was? He was very humble; for, though so high a mission was intrusted to him, he did not exalt himself. It was sufficient to him that he should publish the "word of the Lord that came to him"; that he should be a voice crying on God's behalf, not in the desert, indeed, but in the populous city; that he should finish the work given him to do, and then go quietly back to the darkness and the silence out of which for a moment he had been raised. He was very stern, too, towards all sin; and when he spoke of God's displeasure against transgression, men trembled as they listened, and went straightway and did those things which he commanded. And yet he had in him a tender and loving heart, and perhaps there were tears in his eyes when he told out his story of the wrath of the Lord. For he was much affected by the miseries of the creatures, and of the men and women and little children who were in sorrow around him. (*A. Smellie, M.A.*) *The prophet Joel*:—Of Joel we know absolutely nothing but what may be gathered from his prophecy, and that tells us neither when nor where he flourished, save by hints and implications which are still variously read. That he lived in Judah, probably in Jerusalem, we may infer from the fact that he never mentions the northern kingdom of Israel, and that he shows himself familiar with the temple, the priests, the ordinances of worship; he moves through the sacred city and the temple of the Lord as one that is at home in them, as one who is native, and to the manner born. On this point the commentators are pretty well agreed; but no sooner do we ask, "When did Joel live and prophecy?" than we receive the most diverse and contradictory replies. He has been moved along the chronological line of at least two centuries, and fixed, now here, now there, at almost every point. He was probably the earliest of the prophets whose writings have come down to us. There are hints in his poem or prophecy which indicate that it must have been written in the ninth century before Christ (*cir.* 870—860), more than a hundred years before Isaiah "saw the Lord sitting on His throne, high and lifted up," and some fifty years after Elijah was carried "by a whirlwind into heaven." Joel's style is that of the earlier age. So marked, indeed, is the "antique vigour and imperativeness of his language" that surely on this ground Ewald, whose fine, critical instinct deserves a respect which his dogmatism often averts, places him, without a doubt, first in the rank of the earlier prophets, and makes him the contemporary of Joash. All we can say is that, in all probability, the son of Pethuel lived in Jerusalem during the reign of Joash; that he aided Jehoiada, the high priest, in urging the citizens to repair the temple, and to recur to the service of Jehovah; and that his prophecy is the oldest in our hands, and was written in that comparatively calm and pure interval in which Jerusalem was free from the bloody rites and licentious orgies of the Baalim worship. That the prophet was an accomplished and gifted man is proved by his work. The style is pure, severe, animated, finished, and full of happy rhythms and easy, graceful turns. "He has no abrupt transitions, is everywhere connected, and finishes whatever he takes up. In description he is graphic and perspicuous, in arrangement lucid;

in imagery original, copious, and varied." Even in this early poem we find some instances of the tender refrains and recurring "burdens" which characterise much of the later Hebrew poetry. In short, there are marks both of the scholar and of the artist in his style, which distinguish him very clearly from Amos the shepherd, and Haggai the exile. It is almost beyond a doubt that he was a practised author, of whose many poems and discourses only one has come down to us. (*Samuel Cox, D.D.*)

ARGUMENTS FOR THE LATER DATE OF JOEL.—The probable date of the book of Joel is a matter of much dispute. Some Biblical critics place it as early as 837, others as late as 440 B.C. This is unfortunate, as the estimate of the value of the prophecy is directly affected by the position adopted. Joel is either at the head of the aristocracy of this famous line of prophets, or one of the less gifted who bring up the rear. He is either indebted for ideas and phrases to twelve other Old Testament writers, or they are indebted to him. When the smallness of the book is taken into consideration it seems much more likely that he borrowed from twelve than that twelve borrowed from him. Other reasons support the conclusion that the book is of late date. There is no mention of the crass tendency to idolatry, against which the early prophets declaimed. On the contrary, the people appear docile and devout. The northern tribes of Israel form no part of the body politic; direct reference is made to the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem and to the dispersed; the exile is apparently a thing of the past. Assyria as a world-power is not even darkly hinted at. There is no mention of a king. These facts favour a late date under the Persian era. Moreover, almost exceptional importance is attached to the temple ritual. That was an outstanding characteristic of the time succeeding the great reform of Ezra and Nehemiah (440 B.C.). The bitter hatred of the heathen shown in the idea of their utter annihilation (iii. 13), and the narrow, national exclusiveness revealed in the fond conception of Jerusalem as a sacred city undefiled by the foot of the foreigner (iii. 17), afford convincing evidence that the book belongs to the later days of Judaism. Further, the "Day of the Lord," which in the time of Amos was popularly regarded as the dawn of blessing rather than of judgment, appears in the writings of Joel in the sharpest contrast of light and shade that the idea had yet attained in the successive stages of its development. Such stumbling-blocks as the references to Egypt and Edom (iii. 19) may be accounted for on the lines of Ezekiel's visions (Ezek. xxix. 9, xxxii. 15). On the other hand, Greece appears on the horizon in a clear light (Joel iii. 6). These and other arguments set forth by various writers afford weighty evidence, which the tone and character of the book seem altogether to confirm. (*Thomas M'William, M.A.*)

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JOEL

CHAPTER I

VERS. 1-4. The word of the Lord that came to Joel the son of Pethuel.—*Joel* :—Great as is the variety in the works of nature, it is no less so in the treasury of God's Word. Tho "prophets" are quite unlike the rest of the books; and between the prophets themselves there is a marked distinction of character. This is seen in the case of the four great prophets, it is even yet more striking in the twelve lesser, or minor, prophets. Notice particularly the three, Joel, Micah, and Habakkuk. Strongly defined are the individual characters of each as different members of the same body, while all alike are animated by one life and spirit; or as varied instruments of music made use of by one and the same poet or musician, and chosen as best suited for his purpose, according to the character of his message or the mind he would convey. The prophet Habakkuk is remarkable for very striking figurative expressions, which have become familiar in the mouths of all. Micah is the one of all the prophets chosen to foretell the place of our Lord's birth—Bethlehem Ephrata. Micah associates the mercies of the Incarnate Son of God with pastoral scenes, well meet for the herald of Bethlehem. Different to this is the prophet Joel. One object fills his mind from first to last, one subject in which he is altogether wrapt. There are no little sentences of wisdom like Habakkuk, who might be called the prophet of faith; no rural images like Micah, who might be termed the prophet of mercy; but one absorbing spirit throughout; and the question is not about expressions, but about the meaning and intent of them. He is beyond all others, and it might be said, solely and entirely the prophet of judgment. He is full of the trumpet; it is in all he says. What are we to consider the exact subject of this prophet? It is, but more especially at the beginning, the description of a plague of locusts. The description is most exact and striking in all its parts. It is figurative and allegorical of an armed host. In detailing one it foretells the other. This introducing into the same description many judgments is usual in the Bible; more than one thing is contained in the same prophecy;—one near and soon to happen, the other more distant; one of things temporal, the other of things eternal. One great lesson God would impress upon us by His prophet Joel, of constantly hearing the trumpet call, and realising the Great Day. Another remarkable point in Joel is, the voice of joy and exultation that is combined throughout with the terrible theme, and pervades each subject of his prophecy. The more we are impressed with a serious expectation of the Great Day, the more shall we be able to look forward to it with joy and comfort. (*Isaac Williams, B.D.*) *Joel* :—He is the prophet of the great repentance, of the Pentecostal gift, and of the final conflict of great principles. Of the man himself and his age we know practically nothing. The man is little more than a name to us. 1. He was a successful prophet. He accomplished a remarkable moral revolution. He bowed the hearts of his contemporaries as the heart of one man; he drew them to the altar of God, and united them in a great national fast and supplication. The prophet is raised up to do his work. He is to live, to speak, to die if necessary; to rouse the conscience, and, as far as he can, to persuade the world of the truth of his message. He is to do his errand,—he is not to be talked of. And what

are we compared with the work which we have to do? The joy of the true prophet is like that of the Baptist. He (the Lord and Master) must increase. What matter if I decrease, or be forgotten? Where the spirit of self-suppression is, there is power. No dim or uncertain thought mars the concentration of purpose. Feebler or more selfish natures dread to lose self. The date in which Joel lived is not necessary to be known in order to understand the direction and drift of his ministry. The spiritual value of many things is independent of chronology. 2. What was his message? He teaches spiritual principles, not for an age but for all time. (1) He is a prophet of rebuke and repentance. He so influences the people that they gather to a great day of humiliation. A grievous calamity spoke with the prophet's words. The calamity was awful, and unparalleled in its severity. It was the utter desolation of the land by locusts. Joy ceases among the people as they gaze at their desolated land, and contemplate the famine that must follow. The prophet gave guidance to people's thoughts and pointed the significance of the calamity. Mere trouble does not melt the heart or subdue the will, but startling troubles which come to disturb the monotony of indolently expected prosperity are nevertheless messengers of the Lord. The day of calamity, rightly understood, is a day of the Lord. This calamity breaks up two of the accustomed orders of life. The gifts of nature's order—the harvest of corn and wine—are snatched away. The usages of religious order are suspended. There being no gifts, the daily sacrifice ceases. To the people no two things could be more dread-inspiring. The two-fold bond which bound the people to their God, and God to the people, seemed to them to be broken. The order of nature and the order of worship were both upset. All order is witness of another order, the order of righteousness. If there be a bond between the Lord and the people, that bond must be of the highest and most enduring order. It must be a bond in the order of the moral life. The suspension of the accustomed order of things may be the witness to the existence of the highest order—the righteous order in which the righteous God rules. So this calamity is indeed the day of the Lord. It calls man to repair the bond which is more precious than the bond of benefits or material gifts and sacrifices. It bids the people to look at the broken links of that golden chain which is righteousness, purity, faith. The prophet exercises his function of rebuke. And this power it is hard for ministers to retain. Rebuke of men's sins so easily enlists the assistance of our personal feelings. When once this unholy alliance is permitted we assail men rather than men's vices. Will the prophet give us hints as to the principles which would enable us to maintain this power in purity and efficiency, and enable us to discharge this duty with impartial fairness? Notice the large sympathy of the prophet. He has the completest power of identifying himself with the sorrows and troubles of the land and people. He is one with them; their sorrow is his sorrow. Here is one condition of the capacity of rebuke. It has often been said that we can only help men by putting ourselves in their place. Want of tenderness almost certainly involves want of tact; and want of tact renders us ineffective in reproof and in persuasion. Along with sympathy there must be a spirit which is profoundly convinced of the reality of the Divine rule. No man is or can be a prophet to whom the kingdom of God is not the most real thing in the universe. Repentance must be deep and natural. It must be the hatred of the moral evil that hinders them. It must be the awakening of the spirit to the gulf which small and unobserved sins may make between them and God. The vainglorious spirit which so often follows in the wake of earnest and victory-seeking desires, robs away the protections which humility affords. What is needed is repentance for the whole spiritual tone—repentance which implies a recognition of the claim of God upon our whole spirit; repentance for the deviations from true and inward righteousness—repentance for the dulness and downwardness of our spirits. Joel does not mention specific sins. What then do we all need? We need the strong and vivid conviction of the reality of the kingdom of righteousness to make true our efforts for good. We need spirits which are united in sympathy with the Spirit of Him who sent us, for are we not fellow-workers with Him? Quick in tenderness, firm in righteousness, and with spirits possessed of the consciousness of God, we may attempt our work. (*Bishop Boyd-Carpenter.*) *The individuality of men's messages*:—Not the word that came to Hosea or to Amos, but the word that came to Joel,—intimating that there is a word that comes to every man. Each man has his own view of God, his own kingdom of heaven,

his own way of telling what God has done for him. And the mischief is that we expect every man to speak in the same tone, to deliver the same words, and to subject himself to the same literary yoke or spiritual discipline. The Bible sets itself against all this monotony. Every man must speak the word that God has given to him through the instrumentality of his own characteristics. A man cannot say what word has to come to him. A man cannot be both the message carrier and the message originator. We are errand-runners; we have to receive our message and to repeat it; we have not first to create it, then to modify it, then to deliver it. The prophets assumed the position of being instruments, mediums for communications which the Lord wished to make with His children near and far, and with the world at large, and through all time. A man cannot say he will sing his Gospel; the Lord has only sent a certain number of singers, and we cannot increase the multitude. No man can say, I will go forth, and thunder the Word of the Lord in the ear of the age; the Lord hath not given His thunder to that tongue; it was meant to speak peacefully, soothingly, kindly, and when it tries to thunder creation would smile at the feebleness of the effort, and the palpableness of the irony. So we have in the Bible all kinds of ministry. There are thunders and judgments in the Book, and there are voices like lutes; there are whispers which you can only hear when you incline your ear with all the intensity of attention. There are words that roll down the mountains like splintered rocks, granites that have been ripped in two by the lightning; and there are words that fall from another mountain as flowers, beatitudes, tender speeches. The Lord hath need of all kinds of men; He wants the fire and the whirlwind and the tempest, and the dew, and the still small voice—all are God's ministry, God's husbandry. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*)

The Word of the Lord to a sinful nation:—The prophet here informs us that the Word of the Lord came to him, and that it had reference to the most alarming calamities which could possibly happen to a nation. The messages of God sometimes come in a loud voice, and have in them more of judgment than of mercy. **I. THAT THE WORD OF GOD TO A SINFUL NATION IS COMMUNICATED THROUGH THE INSTRUMENTALITY OF ONE MAN.** "The Word of the Lord that came to Joel." Here we learn that it is the ordinary way of God to communicate with the race through human instrumentality. The Divine Being did not present Himself to the wicked people of Judah and threaten woe; they could not have endured the brightness of His presence; they would have fled from before the majesty of His voice. He did not send an angel to convey His message; an angel would not have gained the confidence required. And so it is the way of God to speak by man to men, that He may dim His infinite glory by wrapping it in human vesture, and thus adapt it to human vision; but the word thus spoken is none the less Divine, and none the less worthy of regard. Christ was incarnate that He might utter the unfathomable Word of God, and that Word is still prolonged by human lips. **1. This one man was Divinely selected.** The prophet Joel was selected by God to convey the message of woe and the need of repentance to the people of Judah. But who was Joel? Was he a man of social reputation, of advanced scholarship, of eminent talent? We know not. Nothing of his history is written; simply the name of his father is given. He was anxious to be known only as the servant of God. And we find that God often chooses modest agencies, unknown to fame, to speak His Word to mankind; He uses the foolish things of the world to confound the mighty. Thus the word uttered derives emphasis from the absence of human greatness in the speaker. Fame is not a condition of ministerial success. A man must be chosen by God before he has any right to preach the Word to the nations. **2. This one man was greatly honoured.** The Word of the Lord which came to Joel imparted to him the highest dignity. It honoured him by coming to his soul, even as the presence of a king confers renown upon those who are favoured therewith. He was the chosen of God out of a vast nation, and was entrusted with prophetic communications. New abilities were awakened within him, and his life, which had hitherto been solitary and of little influence, was to become the centre of a nation's life. Manhood can have no greater honour conferred upon it than to be sent with the Word of God to men. **3. This one man was supremely trusted.** Joel was entrusted with a great position. He was selected as one man out of a vast people to receive and make known the Word of the Lord. This might have led him to assume false claims and empty titles; he might have been tempted to use the moral authority thus given to him for secular ends. A

minister holds his unique position in society as a sacred trust, and betrays it if he uses it for any other purpose than the moral welfare of those around him. Joel was also entrusted with a valuable deposit, even with the Word of the Lord. This he was not to conceal, but to declare. This he was not to adulterate, but to defend. This he was bravely to announce to a sinful people, unawed by numbers or results. 4. This one man was arduously worked. To Joel was committed the task of effecting a moral reformation in the national life of Judah. He stood almost alone with a great work to accomplish. He had to proclaim great calamities to which few would listen. And the true minister has arduous work before him; he has oft, single-handed, to contend with a degenerate crowd; he has to preach great doctrines rejected and despised; he cannot guarantee success. II. THAT THE DIVINE WORD TO A SINFUL NATION REQUIRES THE EARNEST ATTENTION OF ALL CLASSES OF INDIVIDUALS (vers. 2, 3). 1. It should awaken the attention of the aged. The old men in the land of Judah were to listen to the prediction of Joel, and say whether anything so calamitous had ever occurred before. They could remember the past, and hence were competent to speak concerning it. Attention to the truth is the first condition of a renewed and sober life; even old men, who ought to be wiser, are sometimes heedless concerning it, and need to be reminded of its importance. 2. It should awaken the attention of the general multitude. All the inhabitants of the land of Judah were called upon to hear the message of Joel. It not only concerned the wise, but also the ignorant; not only the rulers, but those under them. It would not be the fault of the prophet if any did not feel the importance of his communication. The common multitude are not generally observant of the judgments of God occurring around them, they need some one to unveil their inner and solemn meaning. 3. It should awaken the attention of remote posterity. The calamity predicted by Joel was to be handed down to a remote posterity. Not only are the memories of Divine mercy to be preserved, but also of Divine judgment, that they may in future deter from evil. Children must be instructed in the historical revelation which God has made concerning Himself, that they may see the wisdom of piety demonstrated in the facts of life. We should ever remember that the ages are mysteriously linked together, and that we are transmitting moral influences and instruction which the future must inherit. Let us heed the teaching of the past. III. THAT THE DIVINE WORD TO A SINFUL NATION SOMETIMES HAS REFERENCE TO THE MOST AWFUL CALAMITIES (ver. 4). 1. It was a calamity occasioned by a wondrous increase of useful creatures. God can turn the existing arrangements of the universe into an army of eternal justice. He has no need to create new agencies to rebuke sin; there are myriads awaiting His command. Locusts will execute His judgments. The Divine resource of retribution is beyond human imagination. 2. It was a calamity which employed the weakest agencies to execute its purpose. God's weak things are strong enough to work mischief to the wicked. Man is soon smitten down by little creatures. 3. It was a calamity which for continuous destruction was unequalled in the national history. One agency of ruin was succeeded by another, until the effect of the whole was utter desolation of resource and joy. Lessons—1. That men must give themselves to the work which God appoints them. 2. That men should heed the Word of the Lord before the hour of retribution comes. 3. That sin is sure to be followed by the most awful calamities. (*J. S. Exell, M.A.*) *National calamity* :—We learn from this passage—I. THAT THIS CALAMITY WAS DIVINELY REVEALED AT FIRST TO THE MIND OF ONE MAN. "The Word of the Lord that came to Joel the son of Pethuel." No one knew at first what a sad calamity was coming on the country but Jehovah Himself. No sage, seer, or priest knew anything of it. Such a fact as this suggests—1. The distinguishing faculty of man. Of all the creatures on earth, man alone can receive communications from heaven. We know not how the Word came unto him. The great Father of Spirits has many ways of striking His thoughts into the souls of His children. Souls are ever accessible to Him. 2. The manifest sovereignty of God. Why did He select Joel more than any other man? II. That this calamity was UNPRECEDENTED IN HISTORY. "Hear ye this, ye old men," &c. Observe—1. That no Divine judgments have been so great as to preclude the possibility of greater. The penal resources of the righteous Judge are unbounded. Great as your afflictions have been, they can be greater. 2. That the greater the sins of a people, the greater the judgments to be expected. It is probable that Judah's sins were greater at this time than they

had ever been before, and that, consequently, severer penalties were to come. Take care, sinner, in every sin you commit you are treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. III. That this calamity was so TREMENDOUS AS TO COMMAND THE ATTENTION OF ALL GENERATIONS. "Tell ye your children," &c.

1. Because it shows that God rules the world. It is not controlled by chance or necessity. 2. Because it shows that God takes cognisance of the world's sin, and abhors it. IV. THIS CALAMITY WAS INFLICTED BY THE MOST INSIGNIFICANT OF GOD'S CREATURES. There is no authority for the opinion that the creatures here mentioned were symbols of hostile armies. Locusts are mentioned in their different stages and species. So to punish sinners God needs no thunderbolts. He can kill a man with a moth. (*Homilist.*)

Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land.—*Terrible Divine judgments*:—1. When men become incorrigible, and sin ripens to a height, then the Lord will reprove and plead against it by judgments, and not by His Word only; for whereas the method of other prophets is, first, to reprove sin, then to threaten for it, and then to subjoin exhortations to repentance with encouragements and promises; this prophet doth at first point out their sin and guilt, as to be read in visible judgments. 2. Famine is one of the rods whereby the Lord pleads against the Church for her sin, and strips her of abused mercies, and of temptations to wantonness and rebellion. 3. God can, when He pleaseth, arm very mean and contemptible creatures to execute His judgments, and particularly, to deprive men of the fruits of the ground; for here He sends out "the palmer-worm, the locust, the canker-worm, and the caterpillar," and they eat up all. 4. As God hath still one scourge after another with which to plague a sinful and incorrigible people, who will not repent, but think to escape with the plagues that have come on them. So it speaks sad things when one calamity stints not the controversy, but He pursueth still one judgment after another, and with breach upon breach, for so it is here, what one left another did eat up. 5. Albeit the Lord in every age be testifying His displeasure against sin, yet at some times, and when sin is come to a great height, He may make one age a remarkable spectacle of justice, and bring judgments on them, the like of which have not been seen in many generations; for such was His dealing with this generation, their fathers, past memory of man, had not seen the like, nor should the like be seen for many generations to come. (*George Hutcheson.*)

That which the palmer-worm hath left hath the locust eaten.—*Palmer-worm, &c.*:—The Hebrew words are the gâzâm, the arbeh, the yeleg, the châsil, and they seem to mean, in accordance with their etymology, the gnawer, the swarmer, the licker, and the consumer. But are they four different kinds of locusts? As there are eighty known species of this "*gryllus migratorius*," the supposition would be possible. But all known ravages of locusts are caused by successive flights of the same insect, not by different varieties. Are they then, as Credner argues, successive *stages* in the growth of the same insect, meaning the unwinged, the partially winged, the full-winged locust, and that changing in colour? Such is the view of Ewald, and he says that these four stages are well marked. There are insuperable difficulties in this theory. For if four successive stages had been intended in chap. i. 4, why is the order confused and altered in chap. ii. 25, where the arbeh is put first, and the gâzâm last? This is inexplicable if, as Credner thought, the gâzâm in chap. i. 4 meant the mother-swarm, and the arbeh, yeleg, and châsil, its three metamorphoses. In point of fact, there are only two broadly marked changes in the development of the locust—from larva to pupa—and from pupa to the full-grown insect. In hot climates the creature can use its wings in about three weeks. It seems certain that the prophet is in no sense writing as a natural historian. The use of the four terms is only due to poetry and rhetoric, just as the Psalmist, in *Psa. lxxviii. 46, cv. 34*, freely employs the words châsil and yeleg as interchangeable with the word arbeh, which is used in the Pentateuch to describe the Egyptian plague. (*Dean Farrar, D.D.*)

God's locusts:—What is to be told? God hath many locusts. Only four of them are named here, but they are the greatest devourers that ever fell upon a landscape. They came but an hour ago; they are multitudinous beyond the power of arithmetic to enumerate, and in a few hours not one green thing will be left upon the land. Nay, their jaws are like stones, they will seize the bark upon the trees and tear it off, and none can hear the crunching of that gluttony; and to-morrow what will the fair landscape be like? It will be like a country smitten by sudden winter; the trees that yesterday were green

and fair and lovely will be naked, and their whiteness shall resemble the whiteness of snow. All the fourfold locust tribe belong to the Lord. The great providence of God is responsible for its own acts. Man needs to be severely humbled; it does not always suffice simply to bend him a little; sometimes he must be doubled and thrown down as out of a scornful hand—not that he may be destroyed, but that he may be brought to himself. Soldiers with their sabres and bayonets cannot turn back the beetle. The Lord hath made some things so small that no bayonet can strike them; yet how they bite, how they devour, how they consume, how they plague the air, how they kill kings, and make nations weak, and turn armies white with panic. Joel knew what he was talking about, and could point to the landscape. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *Successive foes of spiritual life*.—The text speaks of the ravages of the locust in the different stages. If to the Jew the locust was a vivid type of the repeated wastings of his nation by the Assyrian, Persian, Macedonian, and Roman invasions, it may be to us a no less vivid picture of sin's successive swarm and scourge of our own spiritual heritage. Three thoughts respecting spiritual life. I. ITS FOES. Nature reveals life in its myriad lower forms begirt by foes. In our own physical life, the foreign fact becomes a near experience. Intellectual life has its foes. That spiritual life should have its foes is therefore no anomaly. II. THEIR SUCCESSION. In a garden, you save the plants from their first enemies only to find that later foes attack them. There are successive foes for every stage of the spiritual life. III. THEIR CONNECTION. The foes of the text were of one kind. They were several species of locusts, or several forms of the same species. So sin in one form is often followed by its fellows or its progeny, each working a wider ruin. We see pleasure-seeking followed by a breed of worthless traits; speculation followed by falsehood and dishonour; worldly yielding followed by neglect in prayer; compromise followed by complacency; doubt followed by intellectual pride; ignorance followed by fanaticism; covetousness by pharisaism; selfish success by indolence. What is the lesson? Beware of the coming into the field of your spiritual life of any sin. It will draw others after it. It will itself be metamorphosed into something worse. (*C. H. Morgan, Ph.D.*)

Vers. 5-9. Awake, ye drunkards, and weep.—*The insensibility and misery of the drunkard*.—The prophet now endeavours to awaken certain characters in the nation to an earnest sense of the woe that has overtaken them, and to deep repentance, that it may be averted. His first warning cry is to the drunkard. The evils of intoxication are often intimately connected with national plagues, and require that earnest ministries should be directed against them. I. THAT THE DRUNKARD IS INSENSIBLE TO THE MOST IMPORTANT CONCERNS OF LIFE. "Awake." The prophet knew that it was the tendency of intoxicating drink to cast men into an unholy slumber, and to render them dangerously insensible to the most important things around them. 1. Intoxicating drink has a tendency to darken the intelligence of man. 2. Intoxicating drink has a tendency to deaden the moral susceptibilities of man. These drunkards of Judah were not merely mentally blind to the calamities which had come upon their country, but were morally incapable of estimating their due social effect. 3. Intoxicating drink has a tendency to destroy the conscience of man. These drunkards of Judah probably did not consider that they were working their own moral degradation, and that they were inviting the retribution of heaven. They imagined that they were enjoying the plenty they possessed, and that they were the happiest of men. The prosperity of fools shall slay them. II. THAT THE DRUNKARD IS EXPOSED TO THE MOST ABJECT MISERY. "And howl, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the new wine; for it is cut off from your mouth." 1. He is liable to the misery of self-loathing. We can readily imagine that these drunkards of Judah would now and then awake from their sottish slumber, and that in the moment of bodily pain they would be seized with sad thoughts of their own degradation. 2. He is liable to the misery of social contempt. Drunkards are the object of social scorn, they are incapable of industrious work, they are injurious to the common good. They prostitute great abilities. They misuse golden opportunities. They place manhood on a level with the brute. 3. They are liable to the misery of unsatisfied appetite. The drunkards of Judah would howl because the new wine was cut off from their mouth. They had abused the gifts of providence, and now they are no longer allowed to enjoy them. Sin brings the wealthiest of sinners to want. Plenty at one time is no guarantee against penury at another. In the next life the appetite which sin

has created will be for ever unsatisfied; then the wine will indeed be cut off from the mouth. III. THAT THE DRUNKARD IS IN IMMEDIATE NEED OF THE MOST EARNEST MINISTRY WHICH CAN BE ADDRESSED TO HIM. We cannot but see in this verse that the prophet addressed the drunkards of Judah in earnest and faithful speech. He called them by their right name. He urged them to thoughtfulness and repentance. There is need that the pulpit of our age should take up his cry. Lessons—1. That the drunkard is incapable of the qualities necessary for true citizenship. 2. That many national calamities are occasioned by the drunkard. 3. That the most effective ministries of the Church should be directed against this terrible evil. (*J. S. Ezell, M.A.*) *Judgments adapted to sins*.—Prevailing sins are often visited with corresponding judgments. The Lord in His righteous dealings withholds those gifts of His providence which have been abused. He takes from an ungodly people the means of gratifying their lusts, and leads them to repentance by afflictions which are not capriciously ordered, but with exactest wisdom suited to their character. Thus, to check a thoughtless indifference to religion, He sends forth pestilences which strike down thousands and spread universal dismay. To restrain from habits of self-indulgence and extravagance, He causes a blight to fall upon the earth, bringing on scarceness and want. To put a rein upon the unsatiated pursuit of wealth, He allows a panic on the Stock Exchange. So here the prophet denounces no other woe against the drunkards than the deprivation of the wine they had abused. It is not unlikely that this part of the prophecy has a literal as well as symbolical aspect, that it inveighs against intemperance as well as idolatry. It was sensuality that first led the Israelites into idolatry. Persistence in indulgences so debilitated their minds and blinded their understandings as to cause them to apostatise from Jehovah, and fall down before images of wood and stone. On no class of persons do God's judgments fall more heavily than on those who embrace their souls with the intoxicating delights of idolatrous worship. (*C. Robinson, LL.D.*) *Woe to drunkards*.—Satan has three or four grades down which he takes men to destruction. One man he takes up, and through one spree pitches him into eternal darkness. That is a rare case. Very seldom, indeed, can you find a man who will be such a fool as that. Satan will take another man to a grade, to a descent at an angle about like that of the Pennsylvania coal-shute or the Mount Washington rail-track, and shove him off. But that is very rare. When a man goes down to destruction Satan brings him to a plane. It is almost a level. The depression is so slight that you can hardly see it. The man does not actually know that he is on the down grade and it tips only a little towards darkness—just a little. And the first mile it is claret, and the second mile it is sherry, and the third mile it is punch, and the fourth mile it is ale, and the fifth mile it is porter, and the sixth mile it is brandy, and then it gets steeper and steeper and steeper and the man gets frightened and says, "Oh, let me get off!" "No," says the conductor, "this is an express train, and it does not stop until it gets to the Grand Central Depot at Smashupton." (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) **For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number.**—*The agencies of Divine retribution*.—It is generally the way of God to meet sin by appropriate retribution; hence He destroys the vines of the drunkard. Some men are only reached through the lowest propensities of their nature, and are only conscious of penalty when their carnal wants are unsupplied. I. THAT THE AGENCIES OF DIVINE RETRIBUTION ARE GREAT IN THEIR NUMBER. "For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number." 1. These agencies are numerous. The locusts did not come in a single flight, but in incredible and successive swarms. Heaven has an infinite resource of retributive messengers waiting its behest. It can soon darken our lives by a throng of hostile energies. 2. These agencies are strong. True, those locusts were in themselves weak and diminutive creatures. They were not like the proud monarch of the forest, and had not the majestic appearance or strength of the lion or the bear. They were insects. And so the most trivial agencies of the universe, when sent by God to punish sin, become mighty and resistless. Then the superior intelligence of man will avail nothing against them. Then the pride of the mighty will be brought to the dust. 3. These agencies are united. The locusts came upon the land of Judah as though they were animated by one national policy. The ants and conies are designated a people (Prov. xxx. 25, 26), indicative of the wisdom by which they are Divinely taught to act. Hence the term nation gives no favour to the view that the locusts are symbolical of a foreign invasion. And so the retributive agencies of heaven

often come upon the wicked in terrible combination. The agencies of Eternal Justice are unconsciously in sympathy with each other, and advance in one vast army to execute the penalty of sin. II. THAT THE AGENCIES OF DIVINE RETRIBUTION ARE WELL EQUIPPED FOR THEIR WORK. "Whose teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the cheek-teeth of a great lion." 1. Their equipment is appropriate. The teeth of the locust are said to be "harder than stone." They appear to be created for a scourge; since to strength incredible for so small a creature, they add saw-like teeth admirably calculated to eat up all the herbs in the land. The providence of God in executing the penalty of sin generally employs those agencies whose natural constitution the best fit them for the end contemplated. Heaven knows the most appropriate instrumentalities by which to punish the sinner. 2. Their equipment is fierce. These locusts were armed as with the cheek-teeth of a great lion. Thus they would be able to bite off the top, branches, and boughs of trees. And truly there are times when the judgments of heaven come fiercely upon the wicked, and destroy all that is precious to them. III. THAT THE AGENCIES OF DIVINE RETRIBUTION ARE DESOLATING IN THEIR EFFECT. "He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig-tree: he hath made it clean bare, and cast it away; the branches thereof are made white." 1. They desolate things of the greatest value. These locusts laid waste the noblest and most valuable fruit-trees of the land, which the Lord had given to His people for their inheritance. The messengers of Eternal Justice will not spare the vines and fig-trees of a sinful life. They strike at the root of all secular prosperity. 2. They desolate things to the utmost extent. These locusts attacked the herbage, fruit, leaves of trees, the young shoots, and their bark. Everything in the country was devoured and made clean bare. And so the agencies of Divine retribution sometimes spread their desolation over a vast area, over the entire history of a nation, throughout the entire circumstances of a family, or of an individual. They leave no token of former splendour. 3. They desolate things to the remotest period. The agencies of Divine retribution often achieve a destruction which is felt to the end of life. IV. THAT THE AGENCIES OF DIVINE RETRIBUTION ARE PRODUCTIVE OF SAD CONTEMPLATION IN THE MIND OF THE TRULY PATRIOTIC. "For a nation is come up upon my land." The prophet here speaks in his character of representative of the people of God, and sees in the desolation of his country an occasion for sorrow. Hence the prophet, regarding the land as a Christian patriot, was pained by its desolation, and sought to remove the cause of the Divine anger. Piety makes men truly patriotic. Lessons—1. That the retributive agencies of heaven are countless in number. 2. That the retributive agencies of heaven are effective in equipment. 3. That the retributive agencies of heaven spare not the most sacred possessions. (*J. S. Exell, M.A.*) **And barked my fig-tree.**—*The fig-tree barked:*—We all have our fig-trees, and very early we become proprietors. Do these fig-trees continue to live and to thrive? Experience and observation furnish a prompt and sufficient reply. To bark a tree is to destroy it. To bark our fig-tree is to remove that in which we have found chief pleasure and advantage. I. WHEN MAY GOD BE SAID TO BARK OUR FIG-TREE? 1. When God renders that which has been useful to us useless, and that which has been pleasant, obnoxious; and that which has been helpful, injurious. 2. When God removes something from us which He has given to us, and which we have taken to our hearts as all-important, and as supremely precious. 3. By breaking up some work of ours in which we have found much pleasure; or by rooting up something which we have planted, it may be with tears, it may be with joy. II. BY WHAT MEANS DOES GOD BARK OUR FIG-TREES? God uses various means. He may permit some devil, commission some angel, allow or employ a fellow-man to bark our tree. He may use some inanimate and unconscious agent. Or He may effect the destructive work by some influence upon our minds and hearts. III. WITH WHAT INTENT IS THIS DONE? What is the end of the Lord? Does He do this wantonly, cruelly, ignorantly, or unwisely? Nay, His object is either correction or prevention. IV. HOW SHOULD A MAN OF GOD DEMEAN HIMSELF WHEN GOD BARKS HIS FIG-TREE? Submit quietly. Reverently ask, Why has God done this? Learn to use all temporal things without abusing them. (*Samuel Martin.*) **Barked fig-trees:**—I. LOOK AT SOME OF THESE BARKED FIG-TREES. High hopes are often changed into cruel disappointments. Bright prospects of coming happiness are turned, like fairy gold, into withered leaves. A young man's fig-tree is a healthy body and high spirits, and that tree is barked when affliction seizes him, and bodily weakness and mental depression make him as pale and helpless as a downright

old man. A workman's fig-tree is regular work and a living wage; that tree is barked when work is scarce and wages low. The tradesman's fig-tree is a prosperous business; providence smiles upon him, friends multiply, and everything promises a golden harvest, when suddenly he meets with disappointment, his schemes are thwarted, the bank fails, and he is doomed to spend a helpless and penniless old age. A family's fig-tree is the father and husband; and it is barked when he is smitten down by death. The old man's fig-tree is a gladsome old age, which he hopes to spend with his wife and children "about him"; and that tree is barked when he suddenly dies before he has realised a thousandth part of his anticipated enjoyment. The invalid's fig-tree is some glimmering hope of returning health; and it is barked when the doctor tells him that his disease is incurable, and that he must die. II. WHO BARKS OUR FIG-TREES? The prophet, looking up to God, said, "Thou hast barked my fig-tree." The affairs of men, and especially of good men, are under God's wise, omniscient, benevolent, and almighty control. Were there no particular, there could be no general providence, for it seems quite impossible to take care of the whole if the separate and dependent parts be neglected. He holds the helm of the universe, and He will bring us into the desired haven. III. WHY DOES GOD BARK OUR FIG-TREES? 1. Does He do it unkindly? No! He is too good to be unkind. 2. Does He do it unwisely? No! He is too wise to err. 3. God barks our fig-trees in mercy, and not in wrath. We are prone to think too much of those trees; to bestow too much thought and affection upon them, and to expect too much happiness from them. 4. Barked fig-trees destroy worldliness. Thomas Erskine used to say: "Education would cease if we and our circumstances fitted each other." If our position in this world were always one of unmixed comfort, I'm afraid we should never stretch our desires for a better. It is often said that the world satisfies no one; but, as a matter of fact, most men are so satisfied with it that they feel no concern for a better country, that is, a heavenly. Now, what is God to do with such people if their souls are not to be lost, but saved? They must be rendered dissatisfied with their earthly condition, and be made to welcome the hope of a happier state beyond the grave. And what is so likely to do this as some dispensation which snatches from them the objects of their inordinate affection? 5. Barked fig-trees help to mature Christian character. In the midst of our heaviest trials and deepest woes we can sing of mercy as well as of judgment. (1) Job's fig-tree was barked (James v. 11). (2) Jacob's fig-tree was barked. The loss of Joseph was regarded by his family as a great domestic calamity. (3) Paul's fig-tree was barked. He suffered imprisonment at Rome; some false brethren created division and strife in the Church. (4) Barked fig-trees help to develop latent qualities. It was when Paul Gerhardt was banished from his church and manse, for preaching unpalatable truth, that he wrote that inspiring hymn, "Give to the winds thy fears," &c. IV. WHAT ARE THE LESSONS THAT THIS SUBJECT SUGGESTS? 1. Recognise the providence of God in all the events of life. 2. Moral goodness is the aim of all God's dispensations. 3. Trust God's providence. (H. Woodcock.)

Vers. 8-10. Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth. The meat-offering and the drink-offering is cut off from the house of the Lord.—*The worship of God sadly neglected through the failure of temporal resource*.—I. THAT A NEGLECTED WORSHIP IS OFTEN CONSEQUENT UPON THE FAILURE OF THE TEMPORAL RESOURCE OF A PEOPLE. To the Jews the suspension of the daily sacrifice was the suspension of the appointed sign indicating that they were in covenant with God, and therefore the last of evils. And so there is ever an intimate connection between temporal resource and the worship of God; a desolated commerce will probably involve a neglected temple. When the harvests fail the offerings of the soul are not brought into the sanctuary. 1. That anything which tends to increase the temporal resource of a people gives them an increased power of temple-worship. It is the duty of man to give himself to industry and profitable labour that he may win the means which shall enable him to come into the sanctuary with the offering of the Lord. 2. That our temporal resources are not to be devoted merely to the secular needs of a people but also to the worship of God. The people of Judah were required not merely to supply their own need with the fruit of the vine and of the field, they were required out of it to support the service of the temple and the worship of God. The fine flour and oil they gave to the priest they first received from God, and hence it was right that they should recognise the Divine beneficence. How many rich men amongst us would see the

daily offering of the temple languish before they would aid it even by a small gift! Wealth can be consecrated to no higher service than that of the temple.

II. THAT A SUSPENDED WORSHIP CANNOT BUT BE REGARDED AS AN INDICATION OF THE DIVINE DISPLEASURE. Surely the announcement of the prophet, that the temple offerings were suspended, would run throughout the land of Judah, and would lead many souls to ask the reason why. Hence we gather—1. That the agencies of Divine retribution are likely to prevent a sinful people from the enjoyment of secular prosperity. It is not improbable that the vines and fields of a wicked people will be destroyed by the retributive hand of God. Secular prosperity is more dependent upon moral character than many are inclined to admit. Sin blights many harvests. 2. That a well-maintained temple-worship is an evidence of the Divine favour. A well-supported temple-worship is an index of sanctified wealth and of the Divine approval. III. THAT A NEGLECTED WORSHIP CALLS FOR THE DEEP GRIEF OF ALL REFLECTIVE MINDS. The land of Judah was to lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth, who had been snatched from her when she was betrothed to him, but had not yet been taken to his house. The time of betrothal varied from a few days in the Patriarchal age (Gen. xxiv. 55) to a full year in later times. Hence the people of Judah were not to regard the judgments which had come upon them with indifference, with a mere conventional grief, but with an anguish akin to that experienced by a youthful wife bereaved of her husband. We see—

1. That a neglected worship should awaken deep grief of soul. Lamentation in the hour of bereavement is commended by men, but in the cause of God is regarded as a sign of mental weakness. Ought this to be so? 2. That a neglected worship should lead to outward tokens of the grief of the soul. Judah was not merely to lament like a bereaved virgin, but was to be girded with sackcloth. IV. THAT A SUSPENDED WORSHIP WILL ESPECIALLY AWAKEN PAINFUL SOLICITUDE WITHIN THE HEART OF THE TRUE MINISTER. "The priests, the Lord's ministers, mourn." 1. That ministers of the truth are often the first to be affected by great calamities. The priests of Judah would pre-eminently feel the effect of the terrible devastation that had come upon the land; they would suffer through the neglected worship of the temple, as they would cease to fulfil their office, and would be deprived of their livelihood. He stands at the very heart of society, and the most deeply feels the woe inflicted by the retributive agencies of God. 2. That ministers of the truth ought to be the first to set an example of repentance in the hour of calamity. Lessons—1. That all temporal resource should be regarded as the gift of God. 2. That the withdrawal of temporal prosperity is calculated to affect the worship of God. 3. That the suspension of the worship of the sanctuary is a token of the Divine displeasure. (*J. S. Exell, M.A.*) **The land mourneth.**—*Nature's voice*:—The poets of all nations give nature a voice, and make her share man's feeling, as man shares her plenty or calamity. The Hebrew preacher shews the sanctity of life by mourning the dearth of Jehovah's altar. Instead of the abandoned licence which in Florence, London, &c., great calamities produce, or the bloody offerings which the Phœnicians and earliest Greeks practised, he calls for prayer and solemnity. In all ages, when human effort is at an end, an irrepressible instinct bids us cry to God. We may be tempted to doubt whether unblest seasons are the "days of the Lord" (ver. 14), or are shortcomings of nature, bound by wider necessity than the law of our convenience; and such doubts are not useless in bidding us exhaust the range of human effort, while the preacher joins the philosopher in bidding us not appease God with cruelty or wrong; yet the instinct remains unproved by anything we know of the Divine government; and our own prayers (ver. 18), justified by reason, seem joined by the instinctive cries (ver. 19) of brute creatures in distress. (*Rowland Williams, D.D.*)

Vers. 11, 12. **The harvest of the field is perished.**—*The destructive nature of sin*:—The prophet still lingers on the theme of his solemn and faithful discourses and urges all classes to attend to him that their sin and sorrow may be removed. He did not seek new or pleasing themes on which to address the nation. He was anxious to produce a deep and lasting conviction, and hence dwelt long on the subject which he felt to be of the greatest importance. I. IT IS DESTRUCTIVE OF HUMAN LABOUR. "Because the harvest of the field is perished." The tillers of Judah had taken a great deal of pains in cultivating their soil; they had ploughed and sowed it, and certainly expected as the result a rich and golden harvest.

Also the vine dressers had worked hard in the vineyards in watering and pruning the vines, and anticipated their reward. But the wheat and barley were destroyed before they were ripe; and the vines were withered. Thus we see how sin destroys the products of human labour and industry; how it utterly wastes those things which are designed by God to supply the wants of man, and to be remunerative of his energy. I. Sin is destructive by incapacitating man for industrious labour. There are many men so enfeebled by sin that they are really unable to go into the fields and attend to advancing harvests, they are unable to look after the growth of the vines and the pomegranate-tree. They are divested of their vital energy and of their muscular power by a continued habit of transgression against the laws of purity and temperance. 2. Sin is destructive by rendering men prodigal of the time which should be occupied by industrious labour. There are men who will only work three or four days in a week; the rest they spend in idleness. Thus fields are untilled, the vines are neglected, while indolent pleasures are pursued. 3. Sin is destructive by diminishing the ultimate utility of industrious labour. The fields and the vines may be productive of crops and fruits, but if man were a saint instead of a sinner he would enhance their value by putting them to the best and highest use. Sin makes the labour of men less useful than otherwise it would be. II. IT IS DESTRUCTIVE OF THE GOOD AND BEAUTIFUL THINGS OF THE MATERIAL UNIVERSE. 1. Sin destroys the beautiful things of the material universe. We can well imagine the desolated condition of the land of Judah robbed of all its harvests and fruits. The corn stricken. The vines withered. The trees peeled of their bark. Nature, divested of her beautiful vesture of green and gay life, a complete wreck. The difference between Eden and the world as we now see it is entirely occasioned by sin. How lovely would this universe appear were all sin removed from amidst its fields and vines! 2. Sin destroys the valuable things of the material universe. It destroys the things which are appointed to sustain the very life of man, and failing which the grave is immediately sure. It does not merely destroy the little superfluities of the universe, but its most essential and strongest things. III. IT IS DESTRUCTIVE OF THAT JOY WHICH IS THE DESTINED HERITAGE OF MAN. "Because joy is withered away from the sons of men." 1. It is certain that God designed that man should experience enjoyment in a wise use of the things around him. God does not wish man to be miserable in the universe which He has made for his welfare. But the use of His creatures must be wise. They must not be abused by excess or ingratitude, or they will be withdrawn, and the joy they should give will be turned into mourning. Let us not rest in the creature, but in the Creator, and seek all our joy in Him, then it shall never fail. 2. Sin is destructive of those things which should inspire joy in the soul of man. It destroys the harvests to which he had looked forward as the reward of earnest toil. It brings him into great need and destitution. It hushes the joy of a nation. Lessons—I. That sin is destructive of human toil. 2. That sin divests the world of its beauty. 3. That sin is incompatible with true joy. (*J. S. Ezell, M.A.*) *The advantages of a bad harvest.*—A harvest may be called bad as compared with expectation or as compared with crops of former years; or as compared with the harvests of other lands. Under God's benign providence a bad harvest is an instrument for good to men. Like all chastisement, it becomes a blessing to such as are "exercised thereby." I. IT RECALLS US TO A SENSE OF OUR DEPENDENCE UPON GOD. In these days law is everything. There is a tendency to exclude God from nature. What is law but His will? Adversity helps to cure this sore evil. Do what men will, they cannot make sure of results. There are causes beyond their ken. There are influences at work which they cannot control. II. IT AWAKENS US TO A DEEPER FEELING OF THE EVIL OF SIN. Calamity witnesses for God against sin. Things are out of course. Every pain, every sorrow, every disaster is a call to repentance. Calamity that affects a whole people is as the ringing of the great bell of providence, summoning a whole nation to repent. III. IT SERVES AS A TIME OF DISCIPLINE FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF CHARACTER AND THE PROMOTION OF THE GENERAL GOOD. Calamity is fitted to humble us. It teaches patience. It stimulates thrift and economy. It quickens the inventive faculties. It moves the heart to a truer sympathy with the struggling and the poor. It develops trade and commerce and civilisation. And commerce becomes a pioneer of the Gospel. IV. IT IMPRESSES THE SOUL WITH A SENSE OF ITS HIGHER NEEDS AND DUTIES. This great lesson is always needful, and never more than in this grossly material age. V. IT INVITES US TO DRAW NEARER TO GOD, AND

TO REGARD HIM AS THE ONLY TRUE AND SUPREME GOD. If we believe on Christ we should be brave and hopeful. Let the worst come to the worst, our highest interests are safe. In the most desperate straits we may rejoice in God. (*William Forsyth, M.A.*) *The shame of the husbandman*.—The husbandmen and vine-dressers should be ashamed, and disappointed of their expectations, through the barrenness of land and trees. 1. Albeit men are bound to labour for their daily bread, yet except God bless, their labour will be in vain, and their expectations by it end in sad disappointments. 2. Sin doth procure great desolation, and doth provoke God to destroy whatsoever is pleasant or profitable to the sinner, and leave him under confusion and sorrow. So much is imported in the first reason of their shame and howling. 3. Albeit men ordinarily count little of the mercy of their daily bread, and of the increase of their labours, yet the want of it would soon be felt as a sad stroke, and will overturn much of their joy and cheerfulness. 4. The matter of men's joy is God's gift, to give or take it away as He pleaseth; and whatever joy, warranted or unlawful, men have about anything beneath God, it is but uncertain and fading, and ought to be looked on as such; for here, when God pleaseth, He maketh joy to "wither away." (*George Hutcheson.*) **All the trees of the field are withered.**—*The voice in withered leaves*.—I. WE HAVE A REMINDER OF MAN'S MORTALITY. "We all do fade as a leaf." On festive occasions the ancients had a curious custom to remind them of their mortality. Just before the feast a skeleton was carried about in the presence of the assembled guests. The value of human life does not depend upon its length so much as upon its fullness. II. WE HAVE A REMINDER OF THE PERISHING NATURE OF ALL EARTHLY THINGS. The picture of withered nature in our text is of blight in summer—death just when life is most expected. It is used by Joel as an illustration of the material decay of Israel, living in sin, and exposed to the inroads of enemies without the favour and protection of God. Material blessings are provided for us by the Giver of all good, but we must remember that transitory and uncertain are the things that appear most stable. Men forget this, and reap bitter disappointments in life. III. WE HAVE A REMINDER OF THE RESURRECTION. The leaves are falling, but the trees are not dying. In the very decay of autumn we have the promise and hope of spring. And this is the hope of the Christian in view of decay and death. At every stage of life we suffer loss and decay, but every stage brings also fresh gain and new experience. And when we come to the last stage it will be so in richer measure. Our flesh shall rest in hope. (*James Menzies.*) **Because joy is withered away from the sons of men.**—*Sin destroys joy*.—A brittle thing is our earthly happiness—brittle as some thin vase of Venetian glass; and yet neither anxiety, nor sorrow, nor the dart of death, which is mightier than the oak-cleaving thunderbolt, can shatter a thing even so brittle as the earthly happiness of our poor little homes if we place that happiness under the care of God. But though neither anguish nor death can break it with all their violence, sin can break it at a touch; and selfishness can shatter it, just as there are acids which will shiver the Venetian glass. Sin and selfishness—God's balm does not heal in this world the ravages which they cause! (*Dean Farrar.*)

Vers. 13, 14. **Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests: howl, ye ministers of the altar.**—*Ministerial duty in the time of dire national calamity*.—The prophet now directs his message to the priests of Judah, and intimates that the calamity which had befallen their nation had a deep moral significance to which they should give earnest heed, and which should awaken them to immediate activity. I. THAT IN TIMES OF NATIONAL CALAMITY THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE BECOMES OF THE HIGHEST IMPORTANCE. It is evident that Joel regarded the office of the priest as of the highest importance in these times of dread calamity. He had called the drunkards from their slumber, but they could do nothing to avert the immediate danger. He had made known to the husbandmen the extent of their loss, but they could not render much aid in the terrible crisis; but now he turns to the priests, and urges upon them the duty of initiating and guiding the nation to a reformed life. He knew that they would be more likely than any other class of men to help him in this arduous work. And why? 1. Because the ministerial office wields a great social influence, and is therefore competent to initiate moral reformation. 2. Because the ministerial office is supposed to seek the general good of men, and will therefore be credited with lofty motive in seeking moral reformation. 3. Because the ministerial office touches the

springs of the inner life of a nation, and can therefore infuse healing remedy. II. THAT IN TIME OF NATIONAL CALAMITY THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE SHOULD BE REPENTANT IN ITS INMOST SOUL. "Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests: howl, ye ministers of the altar; come, lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God." 1. Then the ministerial office should be characterised by quick energy. The priests of Judah were to gird themselves. They were to hasten at once to the duty required by the circumstances of the nation and by the retribution of God. This was no time for indifference or sloth; their best energies were required. 2. Then the ministerial office should be characterised by deep sorrow. The priests of Judah were to lament and put on tokens of deep grief; they were to robe themselves in sackcloth. Their outward attire was to be indicative of their inward feeling of repentance before God. 3. Then the ministerial office should be characterised by untiring watchfulness. The priests of Judah were to lie all night in sackcloth and give themselves to prayer; their tears of repentance were not to be wiped away by the gentle hand of sleep. 4. Then the ministerial office should be characterised by true humility. We can readily imagine that the priests of Judah would experience a sense of humiliation as they gazed upon the neglected temple worship, and they would bow in abasement before the Lord of the temple. III. THAT IN TIMES OF NATIONAL CALAMITY THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE MUST ENDEAVOUR TO AWAKEN THE PEOPLE TO THE INITIAL ACTS OF REFORMATION. "Sanctify ye a fast," &c. 1. They proclaim a fast. The priests of Judah were to proclaim a fast, and they were also to sanctify it. A mere abstinence from food is of little service before God unless it be accompanied by those thoughts and devotions of the soul which alone can hallow it. 2. They call an assembly. The prophet commands that all the nation should be called and gathered into the temple, that public prayer might be added to private abstinence. It appears that fasting was always connected with a solemn convocation; the confession and humiliation of men must be unanimous and open. Humiliation for sin must not be confined to secrecy and solitude, but must be made in the great congregation, that the law which has been openly broken may be openly honoured, and that the ways of God may be justified before men. 3. They urge to supplication. The putting on of sackcloth by the priests, the abstaining from food by the people, the coming into the temple, would avail nothing unless it all were joined with earnest supplication; hence the assembled worshippers are urged to cry unto the Lord. Lessons:—1. That the ministerial office should exert its best energy to prevent moral apostasy in the nation. 2. That in times of such apostasy it must give an example of true repentance. 3. That in such times it should initiate the necessary worship in order to avert the Divine displeasure. (*J. S. Exell, M.A.*) Sanctify ye a fast. — *On fast day*:—Fasting has, in all ages and among all nations, been an exercise much in use in times of mourning and affliction. There is no example of fasting before the time of Moses. And he enjoins only one fast, on the solemn day of expiation. After the time of Moses examples of fasting were very common among the Jews. It does not appear from the practice of our Saviour and His disciples that He instituted any particular fast, or enjoined any to be kept out of pure devotion. Fasting has, in itself, this peculiar good, that it provokes attention, by interrupting ordinary habits; the flow of business and pleasure is on a sudden stopt; the world is thrown into gloom, and a certain solemnity of thought obtruded upon those whose outward senses must be influenced before their inward hearts can be moved. The object, then, of this day is to confess our sins, and to repent of them. The object of the ministers of the Gospel is, to state what those sins are, what are their consequences, and how they may be avoided. Sins may be considered under a twofold division. Those which individuals always commit, which are the consequence of our fallen state, and inseparable from our fallen nature. Those which are the result of any particular depravity, existing in a greater degree at this time than at any other, or in this country than among any other people. As to the first class of sins, it is right to remind mankind of those imperfections, inherent in their nature, lest they should relax from the exertions of which they are really capable. Coming to that part of our conduct which is variable, to that small and contracted sphere in which it is allotted to us to do better or to do worse, begin with the subject of religion. Here may be noticed that prodigious increase of sectaries, of all ranks and descriptions, which are daily springing up in this kingdom. These men seem to think that the spirit of religion

consists in a certain fervid irritability of mind. They are always straining at gnats, always suspecting happiness, degrading the majesty of the Gospel. The moment fanatical men hear anything plain and practical introduced into religion, then they say this is secular, this is worldly, this is moral, this is not of Christ. But the only way to know Christ is not to make our notions His notions, or to substitute any conjectures of our own as to what religion ought to be for an humble and faithful inquiry of what it is. There is a contrary excess in matters of religion not less fatal than fanaticism, and still more common. That languor and indifference upon serious subjects which characterises so great a part of mankind; not speculative disbelief, not profligate scoffing against religion, not incomppliance with the ceremonies it enjoins; but no penetration of Christianity into the real character, little influence of the Gospel upon the daily conduct; a cold, careless, unfruitful belief. Let it be our care to steer between these opposite extremes; to be serious without being enthusiastic; to be reasonable without being cold. Alike to curb the excesses of those who have zeal without discretion, and to stimulate the feelings of others who have conformity without zeal; remembering always that every thing intended to endure must be regulated by moderation, discretion, and knowledge. (*J. Smith, M.A.*)

An extraordinary fast.—It must have been in the kingdom of Judah what the drought of Ahab's reign had been in the kingdom of Israel. It was a day of Divine judgment, a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness. The harsh blast of the consecrated ram's horn called an assembly for an extraordinary fast. Not a soul was to be absent. All were there stretched in front of the altar. The altar itself presented the dreariest of all sights, a hearth without its sacred fire, a table spread without its sacred feast. The priestly caste, instead of gathering as usual upon its steps and platform, were driven, as it were, to the farther space; they turned their backs to the dead altar, and lay prostrate, gazing towards the Invisible Presence within the sanctuary. Instead of the hymns and music, which, since the time of David, had entered into their prayers, there was nothing heard but the passionate sobs, and the loud dissonant howls such as only an eastern hierarchy could utter. Instead of the mass of white mantles, which they usually presented, they were wrapped in black goat's hair sackcloth, twisted round them; not with the brilliant sashes of the priestly attire, but with a rough girdle of the same texture, which they never unbound night or day. What they wore of their common dress was rent asunder or cast off. With bare breasts they waved their black drapery towards the temple, and shrieked aloud, "Spare Thy people, O Lord!" (*Dean Stanley.*)

The duty, object, and method of keeping a public fast.—Unusual duties require unusual preparation. I. THE DUTY OF KEEPING A PUBLIC FAST. It is enjoined on due occasions by God Himself. In Joel's time what was the occasion? It was a famine. How strikingly it is described. The Word of God repeatedly declares that such a calamity is sent on nations as a punishment for national sins. When God sends a famine in punishment for our sins He Himself calls to humiliation and fasting. This duty has been recognised from time to time. As in the days of Joshua, the Judges, Samuel, Jehoshaphat, Ezra, &c. There is nothing in the New Testament to set the duty aside. We have no instance of a Christian nation fasting, but we have no instance of a nation having become Christian. II. THE OBJECT OF A FAST DAY. Not to provide opportunity for seeking our own pleasure. Not substituting food equally or more pleasant, even by way of change. Some call it fasting to deny themselves food in one form, to take it in another, with equal or greater zest. Fasting is not an end in itself, but a means conducive to an end. The object is, humiliation for sin in order to pardon and justification. Therefore ministers must aim to arouse the national conscience. There must be humiliation in order to reflection; the deepest contrition of heart for sin, in order to turning wholly to God, with faith in the revelation of Himself in the Gospel and in all His grace, mercy, long-suffering, loving-kindness, and readiness to forgive and save, through Jesus Christ. And we must determine on reformation. A fast is worthless without that desirable end. III. THE METHOD OF KEEPING A PUBLIC FAST. No formal rules can be laid down. The rights of conscience and private judgment must be respected. 1. Sanctify the day. Set it apart from all common uses. And seek grace to sanctify it aright. 2. Attend in a right spirit on public worship, joining in public humiliation and united confession. 3. There should be special and appropriate prayer, both at home, and at church. 4. Make special gifts

to the poor. 5. Specially honour Christ as Mediator. He can feel for the hungry, the famishing, the dying. He can pity poor perishing sinners. Let Him come between, and intercede with His own effectual intercession, and the famine shall cease. (*John Hambleton, M.A.*) *Public fasting*.—The priests are commanded to appoint a solemn and public fast, that so all ranks of persons, both rulers and people, being called to the Temple, may solemnly pour out their prayers before God. 1. Private mourning and humiliation is not enough under public calamities, but there ought also to be general humiliation, by the solemn convening of all ranks, to mourn in a public way. 2. Fasts and humiliations, especially such as are public, should not be rashly gone about, but with due preparation and upstirring for so solemn a service. 3. For the right discharge of such a duty it is requisite that men be sensible of their former abuse of mercies. 4. Exercises of humiliation will not be acceptable to God unless they be seasoned and managed with faith and affection to God. (*George Hutcheson.*) *The great fast*.—We have observed abundance of tears shed for the destruction of the fruits of the earth by the locusts, now here we have those tears turned into the right channel, that of repentance and humiliation before God. The judgment was very heavy, and here they are directed to own the hand of God in it, His mighty hand, and to humble themselves under it. I. A PROCLAMATION ISSUED OUT FOR A GENERAL FAST. The priests are ordered to appoint one; they must not only mourn themselves, but they must call upon others to mourn too. Under public judgments there ought to be public humiliations. With all the marks of sorrow and shame sin must be confessed and bewailed, the righteousness of God must be acknowledged and His favour implored. Observe what is to be done by a nation at such a time. 1. A day is to be appointed for this purpose, a day of restraint (*marg.*), a day in which people must be restrained from their other ordinary business, and from all bodily refreshments. 2. It must be a fast, a religious abstaining from meat and drink, further than is of absolute necessity. Hereby we own ourselves unworthy of our necessary food, and that we have forfeited it, and deserve to be wholly deprived of it; we punish ourselves and mortify the body, which has been the occasion of sin; we keep it in a frame fit to serve the soul in serving God, and, by the appetite's craving food, the desires of the soul towards that which is better than life, and all the supports of it, are excited. 3. There must be a solemn assembly. All had contributed to the national guilt, all shared in the national calamity, and therefore they must all join in the professions of repentance. 4. They must come together in the temple, because that was the house of prayer, and there they might hope to meet with God. 5. They must sanctify this fast, must observe it in a religious manner, with sincere devotion. 6. They must "cry unto the Lord." To Him they must make their complaint and offer up their supplication. II. SOME CONSIDERATIONS SUGGESTED TO INDUCE THEM TO PROCLAIM THIS FAST, AND TO OBSERVE IT STRICTLY. 1. God was beginning a controversy with them. It is time to "cry unto the Lord, for the day of the Lord is at hand." Either they mean the continuance and consequences of this present judgment which they now saw but breaking in upon them, or some greater judgments which this was but a preface to. Therefore "cry to God," for—(1) The day of His judgment is very near. (2) It will be very terrible. 2. They saw themselves already under the tokens of His displeasure. (1) Let them look into their own houses, and there was no plenty there, as there used to be. (2) Let them look into God's house, and see the effects of the judgment there. 3. The prophet returns to describe the grievousness of the calamity, in some particulars of it. (1) The caterpillars have devoured the corn. (2) The cattle, too, perish for want of grass. III. THE PROPHET STIRS THEM UP TO CRY TO GOD, WITH THE CONSIDERATION OF THE EXAMPLES GIVEN THEM FOR IT. 1. His own example. "O Lord! to Thee will I cry." 2. The example of the inferior creatures. When they groan by reason of their calamity, He is pleased to interpret it as if they cried to Him; much more will He put a favourable construction upon the groanings of His own children, though sometimes so feeble that they cannot be uttered. (*Matthew Henry.*)

Ver. 15. Alas for the day! for the day of the Lord is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come.—*The day of the Lord*.—The prophet intimates that the destruction caused by the flight of the locusts over the land of Judah was but the commencement of calamity, and that it was a type of judgments more awful in the future. And all the judgments which come upon men

in the present are indicative of the final judgment which is to come, and are warnings of that awful event, so that we may not be unprepared to meet it. I. THAT IT WILL BE DIVINELY DISTINGUISHED FROM ALL THE DAYS WHICH HAVE PRECEDED IT. "The day! for the day of the Lord." This time of judgment is called the day of the Lord. 1. Because on this day the Lord will give a splendid manifestation of Himself. 2. Because this day will be in sublime contrast, in relation to the unfolding of the Divine purposes, to all others that have preceded it. In the days of Christ's incarnation He was rejected and despised of men; men saw no beauty in Him that they should desire Him. In our own age there are multitudes who neglect and treat Him with contempt, while many who profess to serve Him are cold in their service. These are the days of men, in which they are free to pursue an evil method of life, and in which they are left to accomplish their work, waiting for the return of the Great Master; but these days are soon to give place to the Day of the Lord, in the which He will give to every man according to the quality of his work. Then the Lord will exert His sovereign power. II. THAT IT IS NEAR IN ITS APPROACH AND WILL COME SUDDENLY UPON MANKIND. "The day of the Lord is at hand." 1. This day is certain in its advent. There may be many who contemptuously ask, "Where is the promise of His coming?" (2 Pet. iii. 4.) 2. This day will be sudden in its advent. The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, and will cause a sudden fear to come upon many. 3. This day is near in its advent (2 Pet. iii. 8). III. THAT IT WILL BE ACCOMPANIED BY THE MOST AWFUL DESTRUCTION EVER WITNESSED BY MANKIND. "And as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come." Lessons.—1. This revelation concerning the day of the Lord should make us careful in the ordering of our individual life. 2. This revelation concerning the day of the Lord should lead us to put forth our best activities to save men from its impending doom. 3. In this revelation concerning the day of the Lord see the mercy of heaven in giving us full warning of the coming peril. (J. S. Ezell, M.A.)

Vers. 16, 18. Is not the meat cut off before our eyes.—*Sin a great deprivation*.—I. THAT SIN DEPRIVES MAN OF HIS CHERISHED HOPE. "Is not the meat cut off before our eyes?" 1. This deprivation was unexpected. The ripe crops were seen by the people of Judah, who were rejoicing in the prospect of a safe harvest, when to their astonishment all was destroyed. And sin deprives sinners of their expected pleasures just when they are within sure reach, and turns in an unexpected moment the fairest prospects into barren wastes. It is the way of God to disappoint the evil-doer of his cherished anticipations. 2. This deprivation was calamitous. The people of Judah were dependent upon the ripe crops for the supply of their temporal wants, and would not be able to provide anything as a substitute for them. And sin does not merely deprive man of those things which are for his luxury, but even those things which are essential to his bare comfort. 3. This deprivation was righteous. The people of Judah might imagine that it was very unjust thus to deprive them of the harvest for which they had laboured, and that too at the very moment they were expecting to gather it in for use. They would be unable to understand the equity and meaning of such a visitation. But it is a righteous thing that sin should be punished, and in the manner most likely to restrain it, and this is often done by the destruction of a cherished hope. II. THAT SIN DEPRIVES THE SANCTUARY OF ITS APPROPRIATE JOY. "Is not the meat cut off before our eyes, yea, joy and gladness from the house of our Lord?" 1. That joy should ever be associated with the service of the sanctuary. Joy and gladness always belonged to the ancient temple; thither the Jews went to give thanks, and to acknowledge themselves the blessed of the Lord. But now they could not rejoice in the presence of God, because of the calamities which were upon them. 2. That sin deprives the sanctuary of the joy which should ever be associated with it. The sins of the people of Judah rendered it impossible for them to participate in their usual harvest festivals, and divested the Divine presence of its accustomed joy. And sin will extinguish the bright lights of the sanctuary; it will hush its sweet music, and stay the spring of joy which God has destined should flow from the temple into human souls. III. THAT SIN DEPRIVES THE SEED OF ITS NECESSARY VITALITY. "The seed is rotten under the clods, the garners are laid desolate, the barns are broken down; for the corn is withered." Thus we see that sin perverts the natural order of God's universe, it renders the seed which is full of life destitute

of all vitality. The seed is precious; man's sin makes it useless. God can plague man's mercies in the germ or in the barn, it is impossible to escape His retribution.

IV. THAT SIN DEPRIVES THE BRUTE OF ITS REFRESHING PASTURE. "How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture, yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate." All the life and interests of the universe are one, and one part of it cannot suffer without involving the rest; hence the sin of man affects the whole. Lessons—1. That men who imagine that they gain anything by sin are deceived. 2. That sin divests the most sacred places of their destined gladness. 3. That sin brings famine where God intended there should be plenty. (*J. S. Exell, M.A.*) **The seed is rotten under their clods.**

—*National calamities* :—The Supreme Ruler of the world is righteous and beneficent. What, then, is the cause of national calamities? It is sin. I. SOME OF THE PREVAILING SINS WHICH HAVE BROUGHT US INTO OUR PRESENT SITUATION. The vices which, on account of their enormity and uncommon spread, may be considered as, in a certain degree, peculiar to the present age. 1. Ingratitude. No nation ever experienced more of the kindness of heaven. Our climate is desirable; our minerals are varied and abundant; our situation favours our independence; our form of government is just and efficient. Internal peace is a blessing we have long enjoyed. Has our gratitude increased in proportion as our blessings have been multiplied? Consider, too, our religious privileges. What returns have we made to God for these mercies? 2. Pride. This has been called the universal passion. It is by no means peculiar to our country and times. Yet it may be called one of the peculiar sins of our age. Would to God that pride were confined to the State! Alas! its ravages have extended to the Church. 3. Infidelity has of late been greatly increasing. There is public avowed scepticism, by which revelation in general is censured and rejected. 4. Luxury and licentiousness of manners prevail to a most alarming degree. Was there ever a period, not excepting the age of the second Charles, when profanity, intemperance, seduction, and other vices were so common? Lewdness and intemperance are not confined to the more wealthy. Our prosperity, it may be said, is the cause of all these disorders. But shall we dare to palliate our vices by that which aggravates them in an inconceivable degree? 5. The prevailing influence of a worldly spirit. 6. The spirit of irreligion. As seen in the practice of profane swearing, in the omission of family duties, and in the neglect of Divinely instituted ordinances. II. THE MEANS OF DELIVERANCE. Consider those important duties without which there is neither safety nor hope. 1. We must return to God in the exercise of faith. 2. The review of our sins ought to fill us with grief. 3. Our faith and contrition must be accompanied with a universal reformation of our hearts and conduct. Exercise faith in God. Present to Him the sacrifices of a broken spirit. Be concerned to mortify the whole body of sin. These are duties beyond the strength of fallen humanity. The Spirit alone can enable us to perform them. To unwearied diligence let us add fervent supplication to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He would have mercy upon us, and cause His Spirit to descend as a spirit of faith, of contrition, and of holiness. (*Alex. Black.*)

Potting seeds :—This is the first new stroke of pathos which the poet adds to his previous description; but mark how he multiplies stroke on stroke. As though it were not enough to lose all mirth in the passing day, the heart of the people is torn with apprehension for the future. The very grain in the earth has "rotted under the clods," so that there is no prospect of a crop in the coming year to compensate for the loss of this year's harvest. Smitten by the burning rays of the sun, denied the vivifying touch of dew or rain, the germ has withered in the seed. The husbandmen, hopeless of any reward for their toils, fold their hands in indolent despair; they suffer their garners to moulder away, their "barns" to fall. Why should they repair barn and storehouse when the "corn is withered," even the seed-corn? (*Samuel Cox, D.D.*) *God's voice in things terrible* :—How does God utter His voice? In things terrible by terror, so that the feeling He inspires finds utterance in voice of man. In nature, by objects which He creates. In history, by results which He brings about. In calls to repentance, by the concurrence of calamity with our sense of sin, whether an instinct trained or rather a sentiment inbreathed by Divine communion. When such sentiments run through a people, kindled by prophets or organised by priests, the national temples echo with them; public religion embodies them; signs of joy are suspended, and prayers go up to the unsearchable Dweller of eternity in words which are the

words of men, seeking to move the mind of God, yet breathing a life which God's breath implanted. (*Roland Williams, D.D.*)

Ver. 18. **How do the beasts groan! The herds of cattle are perplexed.**—*The cattle plague*:—We have been called to make this a time of solemn humiliation and prayer, in the presence of a grievous plague upon cattle. Let us seek that our prayers this day may be the prevailing prayers of faith. There is a rough way of regarding the afflictive dispensations of God's providence, which is founded on a principle more Jewish than Christian, and regards them as "judgments" in the vulgar sense. We may say, generally, that all suffering is the consequence of sin, but no man has any right to say that a particular judgment follows a particular national or individual sin. 1. We are asked to acknowledge that this grievous plague has been sent by God in His all-disposing and sovereign providence. And we are surely all agreed here. Providential is an adjective that admits of no comparison. Nothing that happens in this world is more or less appointed by God than all the rest. He ordains all events. Mercy and judgment are alike providential: we take them both from God. Mercy with thankful joy; judgment with thankful resignation. We are not driven from our simple faith in God by anything that can be said of second causes intervening between Him and us, or even of the intervention of human folly or crime. Man's mistakes and misdoings have doubtless contributed to the spread and fatality of the cattle plague. Want of observance of obvious natural laws: want of knowledge of such; want of simple precautions, &c. We are called to acknowledge God's hand in this sore calamity; to humble ourselves before Him under it, and to turn from our sins by a true repentance. There is a discipline of God's appointment always around us which ought to lead us to repentance. God's goodness should do that; it ought not to need a cattle plague. God's goodness would be quite enough if we took our discipline rightly. Alas! God's abounding goodness often is found to harden. And we know that seasons of great sorrow and bereavement are often times of spiritual awakening. As times of trouble have been times of individual repentance and amendment, so doubtless have they been of national. How shall we repent? We cannot just make up our mind to be sorry, any more than to be joyful. All feeling must be founded in fact. The only way to be sorry for our sins is to think of them, to set them before us, so shall we find good reason to be humble and penitent. To be truly penitent for anything you have thought or done, you must see it to be wrong yourself. Then let us "take with us words, and turn unto the Lord." (*A. K. H. Boyd, D.D.*)

Ver. 19. **O Lord, to Thee will I cry.**—*Adding prayers to complaints*:—Turn thy complaint into prayer, or else it is but a murmuring against God. It is by prayer we make our sorrowful hearts known to God. The reasons of this doctrine are—1. Because God forgetteth not the complaints of the poor; i.e. of those that pray unto Him. Otherwise He remembereth no more the poor man's envy than the rich man's quarrel. Therefore let this stir us up to make our complaint in prayer. 2. When men do only complain of this or that want without prayer they tempt God; therefore if we will obtain anything at the Lord's hand for our good, let us ask by prayer. 3. Let us learn to ask of God without murmuring or grudging at our own estate, or the Lord's hand; for the Lord will complain as fast on us as we complained to Him. 4. Another use is this,—that if complainers without praying be odious in the Lord's sight, although the cause be indifferent, then much more are those that never pray but for unlawful and filthy things, that they may bestow them on their lusts, as the apostle saith. (*Edw. Topsell.*) *Prayer to God against terrible judgments*:—The prophet now turns from the people of Judah, with whom he could prevail but little, and cries to God as he stands in the midst of the universal plague. It is often a relief for Christian workers to leave the society of hardened men for communion with Jehovah. Prayer is sometimes their only refuge and strength. I. THAT THIS PRAYER WAS WISELY DIRECTED TO THE ONLY GIVER OF THE TRUE REMEDY. "O Lord, to Thee will I cry." 1. It was wisely directed. He sought unto God in this time of peril. He did not pray unto any idols, but unto the true God, the Maker of the heaven and the earth. Jehovah had sent the calamity, and He only could remove it. Sorrow should send us to God. 2. It was earnestly presented. The prophet cried unto the Lord with all the energy of his being. His

was no languid petition. Sorrow should make men earnest in devotion. 3. It was widely representative. The prophet did not merely pray on his own behalf; he remembered the universal woe around him, and caught up the pain-cry of nature and of the brute, and expressed it in his own prayer. He prayed as the groaning herds could not. A good man is the priest of the universe, especially in the hour of calamity. II. THAT THIS PRAYER WAS PROMPTED BY A SAD APPREHENSION OF THE CALAMITY IT SOUGHT TO REMOVE. "For the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath burned all the trees of the field." The prophet recognised the severity of the calamity which had come upon the nation. And it is essential to prayer that we should have a clear apprehension of the sorrow to be relieved, of the sin to be removed, and of the want to be supplied; prayer should always include a good knowledge of the conditions and circumstances under which it is presented and which it hopes to ameliorate. III. THAT IN THIS PRAYER WAS UNITED THE INARTICULATE PLEADINGS OF SUFFERING BRUTES. "The beasts of the field cry also unto Thee: for the rivers of waters are dried up," &c. We are not to suppose that the cry of the brutes was one with the cry of the prophet; one was the outcome of pious intelligence, the other was the outcome of blind instinct (Psa. cxlvii. 9; Job xxx. 41). Lessons—1. That a sorrowful soul should pray to God for aid. 2. That the soul must feel its need before it can expect relief. 3. That man should consider the pain of the inferior creatures, and never render himself liable to their rebuke. (J. S. Exell, M.A.) *The influence of national calamities on the minds of the good*:—It is a question whether the fire and flame are to be taken literally as burning the grass, or whether they are used figuratively. Probably the reference is to the burning heat in drought which consumes the meadows, scorches the trees, and dries up the water-brooks. The effect of national calamity on Joel was to excite him to prayer, to compel him to lay the case before the Lord. Having called the attention of all classes of the community to the terrible judgments, he turns his soul in a devout supplication to Almighty God. I. THIS WAS RIGHT. Prayer is right. 1. God requires it. 2. Christ engaged in it. He is our example. II. THIS WAS WISE. Who else could remove the calamity and restore the ruin? None. When all earthly resources fail, where else can we go but to Him who originates all that is good, and controls all that is evil? True prayer is always wise, because—1. It seeks the highest good. 2. By the best means. III. THIS WAS NATURAL. "The beasts of the field also cry unto Thee." "What better," says an old author, "are they than beasts, who never cry to God but for corn and wine, and complain of nothing but the wants of sense?" Conclusion. It is well when our trials lead us in prayer to God. The greatest calamities are termed the greatest blessings when they act thus. Hail the tempests, if they drive our bark into the quiet haven of prayer! (Homilist.)

CHAPTER II.

VER. 1. **Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain.**—*A ministry morally awakening*.—In the first eleven verses of this chapter we have a continuation of the address of the prophet to the priests of Judah. It was the duty of the priests to blow the trumpet for the assembling of the congregation, for the removing of the camp, and when they went forth to war; here the trumpet is blown to announce danger, and the consequent need of attention to certain moral requirements. I. THAT THERE ARE TIMES WHEN THE CHURCH IS IN ESPECIAL NEED OF A MINISTRY MORALLY AWAKENING. "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain." Zion was the meeting-place of the people of God, and may be taken as a type of the Church of God; here the trumpet was used only for sounds of alarm and fear. There was need that those who dwelt in the holy mountain should be aroused to a sense of the impending danger; we should have thought that they would have been sensitive to the judgment of God without such an awakening cry. 1. The Church needs an awakening ministry when it is not solicitous for the moral rectitude of the nation in which it is placed. It would appear as if Zion were ignorant of, or as if it were indifferent to, the apostasy all around it. 2. The

Church needs an awakening ministry when it is not alive to the peril of souls it should endeavour to instruct. 3. The Church needs an awakening ministry when it reposes undue confidence in external organisations. II. THAT AT SUCH TIMES THE MINISTRY MORALLY AWAKENING MUST BE CHARGED WITH THE SOLEMN TRUTHS OF ADVANCING JUDGMENT. "For the day of the Lord cometh, and is nigh at hand." Thus the ministry of the trumpet announced a terrible day of approaching judgment. The congregations of the present day are averse to these trumpet ministries, they prefer more gentle strains of truth, and prefer to be lulled to slumber rather than to be awakened to stern activity. The Church has need of its sons of thunder as well as of its sons of consolation. It announced these judgments as (1) Certain, (2) Near, (3) Terrible. III. THAT THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF SUCH TRUTHS SHOULD HAVE A SOLEMN EFFECT UPON THOSE TO WHOM THEY ARE ADDRESSED. "Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble." 1. It should awaken solemn apprehension. The people would know that the sounding of the trumpet in Zion would foretoken evil to them, and would be deeply apprehensive of the nature and extent of the judgment to follow. 2. It should awaken deep repentance. The terrors of the Lord should persuade men to deep repentance, and should become a forcible argument for a renewed life. 3. It should awaken devout gratitude. While men mourn the advancing calamities they should indeed be devoutly grateful that their advent is so clearly made known, and that they do not come unexpected upon them. Lessons.—1. That the Church requires to be aroused to a sense of its duty. 2. That the pulpit must give utterance to solemn and awakening truths. 3. That an earnest Church may avert a national judgment. (*J. S. Exell, M.A.*) *Warning trumpets*.—The trumpet is lifted up this time in warning. Sometimes it is lifted up in festival. The trumpet will do one of two things, the performer must tell it what to do. So with every ministry, and every instrumentality of life and nature; it is the intelligent, responsive, directing man that must say what is to be done with the silver lute of spring, or the golden instrument of summer, or the cornucopia of autumn, or the great wind of winter that makes the earth cold and bleak. The trumpet will foretell a coming battle, or it will call to an infinite feast; the man behind it must use it according to the occasion. It is even so with the Bible. There is no trumpet like the Bible for warning, alarm, excitement, a great blare at midnight shaking the whole air with tones of alarm; nor is there any instrument like the Bible for sweetness, gentleness, tenderness, an instrument that talks music to the heart, and that assures human fear that the time of apprehension has passed away. Warning has always been given by the Almighty before His judgments have taken effect. Yet there has always been some measure of suddenness about Divine judgments. The reason is that we cannot sufficiently prepare for them. We may know they are coming, we may tell even to a day when the judgment thunder will lift up its voice; yet when it does sound its appeal it startles and shocks and paralyses the world. Yet, though the warning has always been given, it has always been despised. How few people heed the voice of warning! They call that voice sensational. Were the old preachers to return with their old hell they would have but scant welcome to-day. They were men of the iron mouth; they were no Chrysostoms, golden-throated and golden-lipped; they were men who, knowing the terrors of the law, withheld them not from the knowledge of the people, but thundered right mightily even beside the altar of the Cross. Now all this is in many instances ruled out as theologically behind the time, as from a literary point of view vulgar and odious, and as from a spiritual point of view detestable, and not likely to work in man mightily in the direction of persuasion. We become familiar with warning. No man really believes in the day of judgment. But the warnings given us by men are often partial, and are not unfrequently falsely directed. There is not a preacher in the world who could not make a great reputation by thundering against heterodoxy. The world loves such vacant thunder; the Church is willing to subscribe liberally to any man who will denounce the heterodoxy of other people. What we do want is, not to thunder warningly against mistaken speculation, but thunders sevenfold in loudness, to be delivered against the current iniquities of the day. Warning is needed, but let it be of the right kind; warning is a needful element in every ministry, but deliver it at the right door. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *The trumpet of Zion*.—I. WHAT IS MEANT BY BLOWING THE GOSPEL TRUMPET? Trumpets were and are used in martial music, and in festive song. Commissioned by the Lord, and in dependence on God the

Spirit, the ministers of Jesus Christ come forth before their people, to offer them, in God's name, and on His own terms, pardon and peace, life and salvation, through Christ; or, if they reject these, to denounce to them, in His name, the sentence of death and destruction. This is "blowing the trumpet." Not content with this, ministers solemnly warn the self-righteous and the unrighteous, the professor and the hypocrite, and those who are "at ease in Zion," of their approaching danger. This is "sounding an alarm." But what reception have you given to this Gospel? II. To WHOM, AND WHERE, IS THIS TRUMPET COMMANDED TO BE BLOWN, AND THIS ALARM TO BE SOUNDED? Had he been sent to Nineveh, or to the profane part of his own people, we should not feel surprised, but he was sent to the princes and nobles, priests and Levites, aged and honourable; even to his neighbours and personal friends. He was to show to "Jacob his transgressions, and to Israel his sins." What was the duty of Joel is the duty of every minister of the Gospel now; and the difficulties are very nearly the same. A minister must be faithful to his oath, his conscience, his people, and his God. One reason for blowing the trumpet needs consideration. It is this. "The day of the Lord cometh, it is nigh at hand." (*J. White Niblock, D.D.*) *Warning ministries* :—The two sentences mean the same thing. To blow the trumpet is to sound an alarm. And the scene is the mount of God's holiness—the holy mountain where this alarm is to be sounded. I. WHAT ARE THE ENEMIES AGAINST WHOM AN ALARM MUST BE SOUNDED? 1. Ignorance. 2. Superstition. 3. Self-righteousness. 4. Conformity to the world. 5. Hypocrisy. II. REASONS WHY THIS OPPORTUNITY IS TAKEN FOR SOUNDING AN ALARM. (The clergyman was pleading on behalf of Sunday and national schools.) The children of the poor need education. The children of this generation will be the fathers and mothers of the next. III. OFFER SOME ENCOURAGEMENT. If you are disposed to listen to the alarm sounded, and endeavour to mind your ways. The first encouraging sign will be that you will learn to know your own state. Second encouraging sign, that you confess your sins. The next sign, your fairly setting to work, from this very hour, to see what can possibly be done for the everlasting good of these children. A most pleasing sign would be this, a looking up to God to do that for these little ones, which you have it not in your power to do for them. (*T. Mortimer, B.D.*) *Alarm in God's house* :—I. A SACRED SCENE. The trumpet is to sound the alarm in Zion—in God's holy mountain—among His people who professed His name. He was to tell them of the awful judgments the Almighty would bring upon the land. II. OUR PLACES OF WORSHIP MAY BE DESIGNATED HOLY MOUNTAINS. 1. Because there a holy God is worshipped. We cannot feel too much veneration and respect for the house of God. The places where we draw near to God are sacred spots. Holiness becometh His house. 2. Because there holy gifts are imparted. We meet together to receive blessings from God. There He sits, waiting to bestow on us all needful grace, to dispense His favours and to display His power. Holiness is that which we require in order to our enjoyment of God. 3. Because there holy anticipations are realised. We leave for a time the world and its concerns, and endeavour to attend on God without distraction, and feel ourselves surrounded with the Deity. III. A SOLEMN CHARGE. Blowing of trumpets an ancient custom in Israel (Numb. x. 3–10). There was a peculiar way of blowing the trumpet when it sounded an alarm. Ministers are to sound the trumpet of invitation, and the trumpet of encouragement. But there are periods when we are to sound an alarm, and show God's threatened judgments. Concerning four things you need warning. 1. Formality in the exercises of religion. A dead and dull spirit has crept into our churches. 2. Conformity to the world. Here is our special danger in the present day. As Christians, we are delivered from this present evil world. Ought we then to love it, to imbibe its spirit, and follow its maxims? How difficult the line of demarcation between the Church and the world! 3. Deadness to the power of prayer. Prayer is necessary to our prosperity in the Divine life; the more we are in it the more we shall thrive. But is there not a deficiency in the manner and spirit of this exercise, both alone and in the social meeting? God has answered prayer in every age. 4. Inactivity in the cause of Christ. Prayer without exertion is presumption. There is a want of united effort. Union is strength, and there is more of this wanted. A united people is likely to be a prosperous, thriving people—a comfort to the minister, an honour to religion, and a blessing to the world. (*Ebenezer Temple.*)

Ver. 8. Neither shall one thrust another; they shall walk every one in his

path.—*Order is heaven's first law:*—Reference is to the orderly march of locusts. Note the order which reigns throughout the whole of God's world. After this fashion there should be order and arrangement in the Christian Church. Note the order of the movements of the heavenly bodies. The same law holds good with the whole animal creation. There is also order in the providence of God. All the events in our own little lives are marching straight on to a gracious consummation. We may rise higher; we may think of God Himself. We may say of all His attributes, "neither doth one thrust another, but each one walketh in his path." The same order is perceptible in the doctrines of the Word. Doctrines which look as if they contradicted each other, are nevertheless fully agreed. Apply the lesson to the Christian life. We should remember that our thoughts, graces, and actions, ought all to keep their proper position. We ought to endeavour, as God shall teach us by His Spirit, to keep our thoughts of God's Word in their due harmony. Doctrine is not all that is taught in the Word, there are duties and promises also. The same should hold good in the graces which we cultivate. The same proportions and balancings should be found in our Christian duties. God would have us attend to all duties. The difficulty is often felt as to how much is due to diligence in business, and how much to fervency in spirit. Each one must decide and draw the line for himself. There is a greater difficulty with regard to the arrangement of distinct duties, when they are likely to run counter to one another. What is true in the little commonwealth of the heart and home, ought also to be true of the Church at large. There are different orders of workers, and these must co-operate. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The army of the locusts:*—1. They are very bold and daring. Some of the ancients have observed that the head of a locust is very like in shape to the head of a horse. 2. Very loud and noisy. "Like the noise of chariots," of many chariots, when driven furiously over rough ground. Historians tell us that the noise made by swarms of locusts in those countries that are infested with them has sometimes been heard six miles off. The noise is compared to that of a roaring fire. 3. They are very regular, and keep ranks in their march. "They shall march every one on his ways," straight forward, as if they had been trained up by the discipline of war to keep their post and observe their right-hand man. Their number and swiftness shall breed no confusion. See how God can make creatures to act by rule that have no reason to act by, when He designs to serve His own purposes by them. And see how necessary it is that those who are employed in any service for God should observe order and keep rank, should diligently go on in their own work, and not stand in one another's way. (*Matthew Henry.*)

Ver. 11. The day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can abide it?—*The judgments which shall accompany the day of the Lord:*—I. JUDGMENTS PRODUCTIVE OF GREAT SORROW. "A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness." This imagery is probably taken from the flight of locusts. They come in clouds. They darken the sky when they fly. The judgment of the locusts was typical of the day of judgment. Light is always the emblem of joy. Darkness is the emblem of intense sorrow. The day of the Lord will be productive of great sorrow to the impenitent, as then all their plans will be at an end, their hopes will vanish, their ambitions will appear vain, and the great mystery of eternity before them for which they are unprepared will awaken the saddest reflections and anticipations within their souls. II. JUDGMENTS WIDELY SPREAD. "As the morning spread upon the mountains." Some have thought this to allude to the appearance which the inhabitants of Abyssinia too well knew, as preceding the coming of the locusts. A sombre yellow light is cast on the ground, from the reflection, it was thought, of their yellow wings. But that appearance itself seems to be peculiar to that country, or perhaps to certain flights of locusts. The image naturally describes the suddenness and universality of the darkness, when men looked for light. As the mountain-tops first catch the gladdening rays of the sun, ere yet it riseth on the plains, and the light spreads from height to height, until the whole earth is arrayed in light, so wide and universal shall the outspreading be, but it shall be of darkness, not of light; the light itself shall be turned into darkness (*Pusey*). Thus the ills of the day of the Lord will be rapid in their motion as the spread of the first light of the day, and will fall upon all the myriads of the impenitent who have lived since the commencement of time. III. JUDGMENTS GREATLY DESTRUCTIVE.

"A flame devoureth before them, and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness: yea, and nothing shall escape them." This is not to be understood of the heat of the sun, or of the great drought that went before and continued after the locusts, but of them themselves, which were like a consuming fire; wherever they came they devoured everything as fire does stubble. This is a picture of the judgments which will accompany the day of the Lord; they will consume as with a terrible flame all that a wicked life holds dear, and there shall be no escape from their terrible ravages. IV. JUDGMENTS EMINENTLY WARLIKE. "They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war; and they shall march every one on his ways, and they shall not break their ranks." And thus we have pictured the awful judgments of the day of the Lord,—they shall be swift as horsemen (ver. 4); they shall inspire terror (ver. 6); they shall overcome every obstruction to their effective operation (ver. 7); they shall be orderly and well disciplined (ver. 7); they shall be incapable of repulse (ver. 8); they shall stealthily achieve their ends (ver. 9); they shall derange the usual order of nature (ver. 10); they shall leave no doubt as to the fact that they are Divinely sent on their work of retribution. Well may the prophet ask, "Who shall be able to stand?" V. JUDGMENTS DIVINELY CONDUCTED. "And the Lord shall utter His voice before His army." And thus amidst the terrors of that awful day there will be heard the Divine voice, commanding the warlike energies which shall be so destructive, and that voice will strike despair into the wicked soul. Lessons—1. That the day of the Lord is advancing. 2. That it will come full of terror. 3. That it should lead to repentance. (*J. S. Exell, M.A.*)

Vers. 12-14. Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning.—*The characteristics and encouragements of true repentance*.—I. THAT TRUE REPENTANCE CONSISTS IN THE IMMEDIATE TURNING OF THE SOUL TO GOD, IN A MOOD OF DEEP SORROW FOR SIN. This turning to God must be—1. Immediate. The prophet tells the people of Judah that they must turn "also now" to the Lord. These little words are full of emphasis, and signify that even though the people had so long abused the Divine forbearance, and although the opportunity of mercy was passing away, yet if they would at once pay heed to the words of warning they should be saved. There was no time for delay. 2. Sincere. The prophet says to the people of Judah, turn unto the Lord "with all your heart." They were not to simulate a repentance they did not truly feel; it was not to be half-hearted. They were to turn to God in their thoughts, in their affections, in their wills, and in every faculty and capability of their souls. 3. Inward. The prophet says to the people of Judah, "Rend your heart, and not your garments." Sin is an inward thing, and so must be the repentance which puts it away. 4. Sorrowful. The people of Judah were to turn to the Lord "with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning." A true turning of the soul to God is always accompanied by intense sorrow because the law of God has been broken, because the soul has been injured by sin, because time has been lost in which good might have been done, because it has enfeebled the moral manhood, and because it has moved the anger of God. II. THAT TRUE REPENTANCE IS ENCOURAGED BY OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE DIVINE NATURE, AND BY A HOPE OF THE DIVINE BLESSING. "And turn unto the Lord your God: for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil. Who knoweth if He will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind Him?" Here we have the greatest encouragements to repentance—1. From our knowledge of the Divine character. The prophet here gives a very beautiful revelation of the nature and character of God to the inhabitants of Judah, which they would perhaps hardly regard as consistent with His previous threats of judgment. And we have throughout the Bible such a revelation of the Divine mercy as should be an encouragement to the penitent. It is natural for God to have mercy upon the repentant soul, even as it is natural for fire to burn. 2. From our hope of the Divine blessing. It seems as though the prophet wished to leave the Jews in some uncertainty as to whether God would "return, and repent, and leave a blessing behind Him," in order that he might not weaken any impression which his former denunciations had made. God often leaves behind Him a blessing in the repentant soul, even a joy unspeakable and full of glory. Lessons—1. That men should turn to God with full purpose of heart.

2. That they should do so while it is called to-day. 3. That they should thus seek His mercy and expect His blessing. (*J. S. Exell, M.A.*) *The first day of Lent*:—From very ancient times Ash Wednesday has been kept by Christians with great strictness. Our Church too marks this day as a specially solemn day, by providing a special service for it, namely, the “Commination, or denouncing of God’s anger and judgments against sinners”—a service well fitted to stir up our dull minds to the thought of our sins, and to rouse our slumbering consciences to the feeling of our guilt. Now the great use of special days like this is to fill our hearts and minds with some special thought or feeling, to fix it firmly in our memory, to press and stamp it in so deeply that it will not easily be rubbed out by the wear and tear of the world: and on Ash Wednesday the thought that should fill our mind is the thought of our sinfulness; the feeling that should be uppermost in our hearts is the feeling of our deep guilt in the sight of God. This thought and feeling should rise with us in the morning, should go forth with us to our daily toil or business, should be with us wherever we are, and go with us wherever we go, if we would spend this day as it is meant to be spent, as a day of deep and earnest penitence. The very reason why most people’s religion is so poor and weak is because their religious feelings are so shallow, their religious acts so hasty and formal. A day like this is meant to correct the fault. It is meant to deepen the feelings, to give occasion for a more real and searching penitence. It is meant to be a day of much strict self-examination, of much humble confession of sin, of much earnest prayer, of much godly sorrow, of much hearty resolve. To fast on this day, and deny ourselves outwardly, is a mere mockery and snare, tempting us to think well of ourselves, and to fancy we are doing great things, if we have not the inward spirit of fasting, which is the humbling of the soul in secret shame and sorrow before God. Let this be what we aim at, and then we shall be thankful for every aid, such as fasting is, to so good an end. Only we must remember the end is greater than the means. Let us not, then, despise a day and a service which may be so blest to us, and which have been so blest to thousands and thousands of Christian people. Nay, till we can say that our sense of sin cannot be made deeper, that our confessions cannot be more earnest, that our knowledge of self cannot be increased, that our repentance cannot be more sincere,—have we any right to despise these helps? (*W. Walsham How, D.D.*) *National and personal fasting*:—It is not always that the voice of the Church hits the mood of the world. Just now there is no thoughtful man, whatever his personal condition, whose spirit is altogether untouched by sadness. We are all breathing an atmosphere of uneasiness, humiliation, and perplexity; our hearts are heavy, and there is much to weigh them down. How can we use the resource which the text proclaims? It is by no lip-uttered penitence that we can so turn unto God. It is by no mere confession of faults which we think others have committed, and petitions that they may be repaired. We may individually feel a sense of impotence in the presence of movements and measures which we cannot control. But, remember, that the whole is made up of parts; several items construct the whole. Every one who honestly tries to see himself and his wishes in the light of the Lord of righteousness, aids in the solution of national and social problems, whatever they may be, whether they concern order, home distress, or troubles beyond the seas. The individual is the unit of humanity. A sense of general vexation must never blot out that of personal responsibility. As each sweeps before his own door, the street is clean. As each honestly turns to the Lord, the attitude of the whole is corrected. Our business is to see to the items of our own conduct, leaving the total to accumulate by inevitable law. How may we individually use the tide of national anxiety in obeying the summons of the Lenten season? We have a common fault, a hectoring tone towards supposed inferiors. If there is anything which should cultivate Christian society and Christian households, it is goodwill and kindness. Let not the summons of the text demand a mere epoch of religious procedure, when we kneel in the congregation or in the chamber. Let it touch our lives. A turning to the Lord is a turning from self, from its lower passions, aims, and habits. It comes out in audible, visible, material results. It is seen in many a thing; it is perceived in the tone of the voice, and in the look of the eye; it is seen in the fair conduct of commonplace business; it is seen in our correspondence; in the office and the shop; in the amenities of home, and in the rectitude of public life; in the details of our personal conversation, and in the nature of our familiar habits. Pause at one point—“with

fasting." This arrow hits a national and personal blot. Some people fast too much, through poverty. Some people eat too much, through self-indulgence. There are many who need to fast, who need to use such abstinence that the flesh may, as it should, obey the mind, obey the spirit, not on the lowest, but on the highest grounds, that they may be, physically and intellectually, in body and soul, such as God intends them to be. Treat the summons of the Lenten season as a wholesome, reasonable, godly, human call to consider our ways, as in the presence of the Lord in whom we live, and move, and have our being. (*Harry Jones.*) *Thoughts for Lent*:—Ash Wednesday is neither a saint's day, nor a festival. It is simply the first of the forty days of Lent. On this day we read the seven penitential Psalms, and the Communion Service, and thus the day assumes a severe penitential character of its own. The text reminds us that at this time we have an inward and an outward duty to fulfil. The inward duty is, the turning of the heart to God. The outward is, the mortification of our bodily appetites. 1. Fasting is a matter very little discoursed about, and very little practised. Fasting is not for the weak, the sickly, the very young, or the very poor. Fasting is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Fasting should be observed to God. Its essence is mortification,—not the mere act of abstaining from food. The fasting we should all aim at is rather the denying ourselves in respect of whatever we know to be a superfluity. A check imposed on the curiousest of appetite; a curb submitted to in respect of the quantity eaten—this is true fasting. 2. The inward conversion of the heart to God. This is the great duty of the Lenten season. To think over one's past life, and one's present state; to review one's sins, and to loathe and forsake them; to make reparation where it is possible, and to confess one's fault when one cannot repair it—this is the fast which the Lord approveth. (*J. Burgon, M.A.*) *The right use of calamities*:—Two exhortations, whereof the first is, that they should set about sincere repentance and humiliation, testified by holy private fasts and unfeigned sorrow, and so prove that they are really converted to God, and reconciled to Him through faith in the Mediator (ver. 12). And that they should study rather to be afflicted for sin, than by performance of external ceremonies to pretend to it only (ver. 13). Unto this exhortation two reasons are subjoined, the first whereof is taken from the properties of God, who is merciful and gracious; not easily provoked, rich in kindness, and who, upon sinners' repentance, is ready to recall His threatenings that they be not executed. Doctrine. 1. Were there never so many plagues on sinners, yet God is not bound to take notice of them so long as they repent not. Were there never so much terror and affliction of spirit upon men, under feared or felt judgments, yet all these serve to no purpose if they stir not up to repentance; and they must be mad who, being in such a condition, yet do not set about that duty. Therefore after all the representation of plagues, and of terror upon men, they are called to this as the only remedy and way to an issue, and as the duty which they cannot but mind who are seriously affected with such a condition. "Therefore, turn ye." 2. When God is threatening most sadly, and proceeding most severely, He would be still understood as inviting by these to repentance, and willing to accept of it. For the Lord who threatens, doth exhort, and He brings it in with a "therefore," or upon the back of the former discourse, to show that this is His scope in all of it. 3. Such as have been so long abusers of God's patience, as matters seem irremediable, and strokes are either imminent or incumbent, should not, for all that, look upon the exercise of repentance as too late and out of season, but ought to judge that it is good even then to set about it, and that it will do good, however matters go. Therefore, notwithstanding they were in this sad plight, yet the Lord exhorts them "even now also to turn." 4. Such as do mind repentance, especially when God declareth Himself angry, would not linger or delay to set about it. So much also may be imported in that "now also" they should "turn." 5. Whatever doubts such as are humbled by judgments may have, that their repentance will not be accepted; yet they are bound to answer all these from God's naked word who giveth the invitation to such. 6. Repentance for particular sins, under sad judgments, will neither be right nor acceptable so long as men do not mind conversion to God, and a change of their state by regeneration; that so, the tree being good, the fruits may be answerable. Therefore doth He begin with, "Turn ye unto Me," where the exhortation doth not import any power in man, but only points out his duty, and sheweth that exhortation is a mean which God blesseth to His elect, and not only deals thereby with them

as rational creatures, but therewith imparts strength that they may obey. 7. In turning unto God men would beware of being faint or feigned, but would study to be sincere and single, since they cannot attain to perfection, for this, in a Gospel sense, is "to turn even to Me with all your heart." 8. As men would begin at conversion to God, so they would therewith study to be deeply affected for sin and bygone evils, and under the judgments procured thereby; and would evidence their affliction of spirit by sorrow and humiliation suitable (in some measure) to their condition. Therefore is it added, as an evidence and companion of the former, "turn ye with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning"; or with such sorrow as is usual in mourning for the dead, and expressed not only by wailing, but by smiting on the breast, and the like gestures. It is a change to be suspected where men please themselves with their present good condition, and do lightly pass over their former miscarriages. And albeit signs and expressions of sorrow be not always at command when men are most afflicted, yet repentance for gross and long continuance in iniquity, and under extraordinary judgments, should not be passed over in an ordinary and common way. 9. God is not pleased, nor will a true penitent be pleased, with external performances and ceremonies, neglecting substance; for saith He, "Render your hearts and not your garments." 10. Whatever the Lord be, or will say or do, to the impenitent, yet there is nothing in Him to be terrible to a convert and a penitent. Without the sight of this, conviction and contrition would but end in despair. Therefore, notwithstanding all the former threatenings, this is subjoined to the exhortation, by way of reason and encouragement, "Turn ye, for He is gracious," &c. (*George Hutcheson.*) *The day of humiliation a national obligation:—* Joel, having forewarned the people of Judah of the impending calamities that threatened to overwhelm them, proceeds to point out the necessary instructions for them to follow in the prospect of such an awful national crisis. I. THE VARIOUS DUTIES SUITABLE TO A PERIOD OF NATIONAL CALAMITY. 1. The appointment of a day of national humiliation. Joel orders them to assemble the people together in the courts of the temple, where by external purifications and proper instructions they might be fitted for the profitable solemnisation of the same. Is there less obligation on Christian communities to set apart a day of humiliation under similar afflictive dispensations of providence? Properly observed, such seasons of public demonstration are undoubtedly acceptable to God. The assembling of ourselves together will sharpen the desire of the Christian for more devout secret communion with God in the closet of prayer. 2. The first duty is turning unto the Lord. The Israelites were to attend the temple not only in a suitable manner outwardly, but with a deep inward impression of God's judgments. Their affections were to be estranged from the concerns of this world, and set on the God whom they had offended. Such a solemn day calls for nothing less than the whole heart. Away with frivolity, trifling, indifference. It is a day that calls for the implicit surrender of the inner man. 3. The duty of fasting. The Christian may perform this act if his conscience suggest it as incumbent upon him. But he must remember the Redeemer's admonition in relation to it. There is a notion that fasting consists in abstinence from particular kinds of flesh. Such an idea is as truly absurd as it is derogatory to that part of the Christian community which entertains it. We must fast in the spirit. It is the motive alone can render fasting acceptable in the eyes of the Creator. 4. The duty of weeping and mourning. The Christian dispensation does not demand outward demonstrations of grief. External signs of grief and humiliation are but faint emblems of the shame experienced by the contrite soul. Our repentance must be accompanied with a change of heart and life; it must exercise a converting influence upon us within. The sorrow we feel must be manifested in reformation of life. II. THE ENCOURAGEMENT TO THIS PERFORMANCE. "For the Lord is gracious," &c. It is on account of His infinite mercies that we are not consumed. From a consideration of this kind we may draw much consolation. The Divine ear will be open to the prayers of all those who call upon Him in sincerity. Let the many mercies of God experienced during the past encourage us to put our trust in His mercy now in "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." Let us praise Him to-day for all that is past; let us depend upon Him for all that is to come. (*Richard Jones, B.A.*) *Fasting, and duties connected with it:—* Let me exhort you diligently to examine into the state of your souls at this particular season. A business man has his seasons for taking stock. And are our souls of less consequence than our bodies? It is impossible

to determine exactly what must be the outward ceremonies or signs attending our penitential sorrow, so various are the tempers and dispositions of men. Yet nature points at the rule to each individual, namely, his own feelings; since there can be no true compunction for sin, and consequently no repentance, without pain and grief felt on the part of the sinner. If sins arise from the over-indulgence of sensual appetites, abstinence and temperance always, and fasting on occasion, may be efficient aids in bringing such appetites into subjection. No man is so little a sinner as not to be capable of advancing his soul's health by a due and religious observance of appointed fasting days. The prophet says we are to turn to the Lord with weeping. Tears are generally esteemed the signs of grief, but there are tears of joy. They are rather to be esteemed the effects of a violent perturbation, either of body or mind, proceeding from various causes—from grief, joy, envy, anger, or the exertion of any strong passion. To judge of a man's repentance solely by the quantity of tears he sheds would be to judge very rashly of it. Tears not being altogether in our own power, can never be essential sign of repentance. A third circumstance mentioned by the prophet is "mourning." That expression of grief which breaks forth into lamentation and woe, and is accompanied with tearing open the garments to smite on the naked breast: an external appearance of great humility and repentance, but which receives its whole merit from the sincerity of the performer. Weeping, fasting, and mourning receive all their worth from the inward man; they are sanctified by the integrity and sincerity of the heart. The prophet further says, "Rend your heart, and not your garments." "Rend your hearts," herein lies the essence of true penitential sorrow; from hence will all the necessary acts of outward mortification and self-denial unavoidably ensue. Tear open, as it were, the inmost recesses of your heart, spare not till you have discovered every stain and blemish, wash it away with unremitted diligence, that so you may present it pure and spotless before the Lord. Examine the state of your souls fairly and honestly. (*C. Moore, M.A.*) *Exhortation to repentance*:—

I. A DUTY ENJOINED. Here is at once implied our alienation from God. To say we are turned from Him is to say that we are fallen, depraved, and sinful creatures. We are not to turn from one evil way to another, from one idol to another, from one religious profession to another, but unto God. We cannot turn of ourselves. We need to pray for God's special and enabling grace. The impossibility is not natural but moral, consequently our inability to turn ourselves to Him does not lessen our obligation to do so.

II. THE MANNER OF ITS PERFORMANCE. "With the heart." No mere change of opinion, or reformation of life, or outward profession of godliness will suffice. "With our whole heart." God will brook no rival. When the heart, with all its affections, motives, and desires, returns to its rightful owner, there is nothing which delights its owner more than to see it touched with tender contrite sorrow. "With fasting." We approve of using such abstinence as will tend, through grace, to bring the body into subjection to the Spirit. Self-denial is a primary requisite in the religion of Jesus Christ.

III. OUR ENCOURAGEMENT TO FULFIL IT. Gracious—merciful—slow to anger, and of great kindness, is the Lord our God. Therefore none need be discouraged. (*W. Mudge.*)

On national repentance:—**I. THE EXHORTATIONS TO THE PEOPLE TO RETURN UNTO THE LORD.** "Turn ye even unto Me." What is the nation to turn from? Its evil ways. When we speak of the nation we speak of the individuals that compose the nation. The exhortation implies that the people had turned from God. Notice some of men's evil ways.

1. Ungodliness. Not one half of our nation makes any profession of godliness. And of those who name "the name of Jesus," how few depart from iniquity!

2. Hear the blasphemy which pervades the land. God's solemn message to man is mocked, His Word denied, His sanctuaries too much neglected. From all these evil ways we are called to return unto the Lord.

II. THE DIRECTION FOR RETURNING TO THE LORD. "With all your heart." Here lies the main business—the heart. It must be solemnly and unreservedly dedicated to God. Without this internal movement, all outward show of obedience, or sorrow for sin, or repentance, or fasting, or prayer will avail nothing. This return of the heart is to be expressed by suitable outward signs. "With fasting." "With weeping and mourning."

III. THE ENCOURAGEMENT PRESENTED TO THE PEOPLE TO RETURN TO GOD. "He is merciful and gracious." Every moment of the world's prolonged existence is a demonstration of God's long suffering and patience—is a practical commentary on His own Word. (*E. Edwards.*)

Turning to the Lord :—I. REPENTANCE AS A TURNING. Repentance is sometimes represented as renewing from a decay. Refining from dross. Recovering from a malady. Cleansing from soil. Rising from fall. Here the figure is turning. To turn is properly applied to them that are out of their right way. Whether a way be good or no, we principally pronounce by the end. Our end, or sovereign good, we call happiness. As we cannot find that here, we are to seek it with God. From God we ought never to turn our steps. The way of sin, of seeking our own pleasure or profit, is the way of turning from God. We are to turn to God. Whither should we turn from sin but to God? Many simply turn from one sin to another. We are to turn with the heart. There is a turning of the brain only. An alteration is required not of the mind only, but of the will, a change too of the affections of the heart. Not of bodily relations only; heart and all must turn. It must be with the whole heart. Not dividing the heart from the body, and not dividing the heart in itself. II. THE MANNER OF IT. "With fasting." Not only by way of regimen to keep the body low, but as a chastisement for sin already past. To be abridged of that which otherwise we might freely use hath in it the nature of a punishment. How must we fast? Two kinds of fasting in Scripture. 1. David's. No meat at all. That is too hard. 2. Daniel's fast. He ate no "meats of delight." The Church mitigates all she may. Content to sustain nature, not to purvey the flesh, to satisfy the lusts thereof. "With weeping." Thinking of the sins of our past might well make us weep. If we cannot weep, mourn we can, and mourn we must. Mourning is the sorrow which reason itself can yield. We can wish; we can pray; we can complain and bemoan ourselves. "Rend your hearts." If it is not done with the heart, nothing is done. As in conversion, the purpose of amendment must proceed from the heart; so in our contrition, the sorrow, the anger, for our turning away must pierce to the heart. Rending doth not so properly pertain to the passion of sorrow as to the passion of anger. The apostle puts into his repentance indignation and revenge, as well as sorrow. To say the truth, they are to go together. If we be truly sorry for our sin, we shall be angry with ourselves the sinners. (*Bishop Andrewes.*) *Conversion unto God* :—Such was the call of God to Israel of old, when His sore judgments lay heavy upon them, and more were impending. "Turn unto the Lord your God." Let there be in each one of us an unfeigned repentance towards God. I. WHEN SHALL WE TURN UNTO HIM? Now. Lent is appointed to call us to special repentance, and humbling of ourselves before God. Of all deceits the most common and most dangerous is delay. We all look forward to some time when we intend to be religious. Of what importance, then, is that word "Now." II. HOW MUST WE TURN UNTO GOD? Outward indications of sorrow are mentioned in the text. They are helpful. But the Spirit of God warns us against resting in the outward show, in any mere signs of sorrow. We must rend our hearts on account of our sins. Repentance must begin in godly sorrow. Can we offer God less than a heart broken and contrite, a heart hating the sins which have dishonoured God, set at nought the Saviour, grieved His Spirit, and wounded our own souls? Will He accept less than all our heart? Let there be deep sincerity. Let there be steadfast resolution. III. MOTIVES FOR TURNING TO GOD. We may declare the "terrors of the Lord." The motives of the text are the graciousness and mercifulness of God. Judgment is His strange work, mercy is His delight. (*E. Blencowe, M.A.*) *Soul-reformation* :—Three things. I. ITS PROCESS. Turning to the Lord. The unregenerate man is an alien from God. Like the prodigal son, he has left his father's house, and gone into the far country of carnality and sin. Reform is turning and directing his steps back to God. Soul-reformation is not turning from one doctrine or church, or habit, to another, but turning to God, going back with all its deepest love to Him. But in turning there is deep moral contrition; "fasting," and "weeping," and "mourning," and "rending of the heart." Soul-reformation begins in genuine repentance for past sins. II. ITS URGENCY. Therefore also now, saith the Lord. There is nothing more urgent; everything must make way for this; until this is done, nothing is done properly. Now, because—1. The work is of the most paramount importance. 2. The time for accomplishing it is very short. Whatever other work you adjourn to a future time, for your soul's sake adjourn not this for a single hour. III. ITS ENCOURAGEMENT. "For He is gracious and merciful," . . . "repenteth Him of the evil." The word "deprecate" would be better than "repenteth." The inflicting of sufferings on His creatures is repugnant to His

nature. "He desireth not the death of the sinner." What an encouragement it is to the sinner to turn to the Lord, to be assured that he will be welcomed with all the love and tender sympathy of an affectionate Father. (*Homilist.*) *God's design in sending affliction* :—This exhortation is addressed to all who, like the Israelites in the time of Joel, are living in opposition to the authority of Jehovah. "God commandeth all men everywhere to repent," and He enforces His Divine command by the solemn threatenings which His law has denounced against sin. Some can only be reached by arousing apprehension and alarm. But even when we speak the threatenings of Divine law, it must always be in accents of tenderness and love, entreating men to be reconciled unto God. Repentance is a turning unto God. It is an exercise of free and deliberate choice. It is not a partial, but a total change of character. What are its external manifestations? Fasting was an ordinance in the Jewish economy designed as an expression of the feelings of sorrow, and as a means of exciting and confirming these feelings in the hearts of the worshippers. Frequently the sorrow of the world makes a man afflict himself in secret. The accumulation of terms, "with fasting and weeping and mourning," may be viewed as a Hebrew superlative designed to set forth the earnestness and intensity of the grief which fills the heart of the penitent. It is to obtain a season for solemn thought, that the Christian sets apart his times of fasting. "Rend your heart," &c. The rending of the garments is in Eastern countries a token of grief. In connection with religious worship, it might be dictated by a sense of humility before God. It was, however, by no means an infallible mark of genuine emotion. Dubious marks of penitence are not enough for those who would turn with acceptance to the Lord their God. A broken heart is the emblem of deep anguish. Those who will not yield to threats of judgment, the prophet endeavours to persuade by kindness and love. He tells of God that "He is merciful and gracious," &c. "Gracious," as bestowing His favours upon those who have no inherent claim upon His bounty. "Merciful," extending His kindness even to those who, by their sins, have merited His wrath. "Slow to anger," bearing from time to time with those who are living in rebellion against Him. "Of great kindness," not impoverished by the mercies bestowed on a few, ever enough, and more than enough, for the wants of all who humbly and believingly ask it. "Repenteth him of the evil." Not that He will positively alter His Divine purposes, but even when the cup of their iniquity is almost filled, if they turn to Him in sorrow and penitence, the threatened wrath will be averted. The believing view of God's mercy, and the apprehension of God's wrath, are both, in their own place, instrumental in leading men to repentance. Learn to make a right improvement of our afflictions. Whatever inquiries we may institute in regard to their secondary causes, let us not forget that their great first cause is God; that they are sent upon us for moral purposes; that they speak to us with the authority of heaven-appointed messengers, saying, in God's name, "Turn ye even unto Me." (*William Beckett.*) *Humiliation and confession* :—The pride of the human heart is sometimes fearful. The sinner will justify or excuse his course and carry a high look, till the Holy Spirit actually conquers His pride and overwhelms his soul with a sense of self-convicted guilt and ruin. I. HUMILIATION BEFORE GOD AND MAN IS BOTH PROPER AND REQUISITE. 1. Proper, that is, right, enjoined by the fitness of things. The impenitent sinner is openly arrayed against God; his attitude is one of radical, persistent hostility. 2. Requisite. God absolutely requires it, and will not treat with the sinner or pardon him till he penitently surrenders, submits to God's terms, and truly and openly exhibits his penitence. II. CONFESSION OF SIN FOLLOWS HUMILIATION, AND IS INTIMATELY ALLIED TO IT. Confession is the language of penitence. The burden of sin is very heavy. The man who is unwilling to confess freely—not only in his closet to God, but openly before men, his heart of enmity, his life of guilt, alienation, and disobedience—is a stranger to true penitence. See characteristics of true confession. 1. Sincere. It must come from the heart. 2. It must be radical. 3. It must relate chiefly to God. 4. It must cover up, keep back nothing. (*J. M. Sherwood, D.D.*) *Fasting* :—1. Fasting was a frequent service of old—a principle of Divine original and practical recognition. Instances in the Old Testament, in the New Testament; in the primitive Church, and in the reformed Church. 2. The proper method of fasting. No uniform system has ever obtained. They are regulated by the character of the cause that calls them forth: by the spiritual condition of the State; and by the idiosyncrasies of individuals. Do not presume

on the plenty of your spiritual health, nor make an excuse of the poverty of your bodily health. 3. Seasonable suggestions for a fast-day. On no account convert the fast into a festival. On the other hand, do not think, by a simple, stiff, or formal fast you will gain either heavenly rest for yourselves, or earthly relief for your suffering brethren; do not fancy that for an austere demeanour, and a rigid restraint of your appetites and affections, you will merit aught at the hands of God. Reflect on your individual and our national sins; confess and repent. (*William Fisher, B.A.*) **And rend your heart, and not your garments.**—*The rent heart better than the rent garment*:—"Rend your heart and not your garments." Above all, important that repentance should be *real*—the weeping the sign of inward sorrow; the fasting the result of lower desires kept in abeyance by higher. There was danger of a superficial, evanescent revival.

I. EXPLAIN THE ALLUSION TO THE RENDING OF THE GARMENT. Many signs and symbols among Jews by which they professed to express feeling, desire. (1) In prayer—kneeling, prostration, standing, lifting the hands, hiding the face, smiting upon the breast. (2) Rending garment. This expressed strongest, most intense emotion of sorrow, or terror, or horror. (Gen. xxxvii. 29, 34; 2 Sam. iii. 31; 1 Kings xxi. 27; Jer. xxxvi. 24; Matt. xxvi. 65; Acts xiv. 14.) The emotion professedly expressed in Judah at that time—the deepest sorrow for sin; the most earnest contrition and repentance. **II. REMEMBERING THE SIGN AND EMOTION SIGNIFIED, NOTICE DIFFERENT CLASSES OF MEN.** 1. Some neither rend their hearts nor their garments. No outward sign of sorrow, and no sorrow without sign. Describe what should lead all to sorrow for sin. The history of sin, its present existence in the world, in us. God's revelation of His hatred of sin. God's revelation of love to the sinner. The life of Christ—Gethsemane, Calvary. The voice of conscience; the pleadings of the Holy Ghost. Draw the contrast between what should be and what is. Indifference, coldness of multitudes. Mad delight of many in the world's great source of misery. 2. Some rend their garments, and not their hearts. The outward sign, but no inward reality. The untruthful, hypocritical. Notice the religion of formal custom. The services of the present day—devout attitudes in prayer—observance of fasts—celebration of feasts—revival services. The danger—the lack of inward reality. 3. Some rend their hearts and not their garments. The inward reality, and not the outward sign. Men of reserve, emotion kept concealed in the heart's shrine. They shrink from demonstration, from the show of religious feeling, and so apparently they are cold, but not really so. Picture the earnestness of private communion; sorrow's deep wound which only God can see; sorrow which words, looks, cannot express—too deep for human sympathy. 4. Some rend their hearts and their garments. The inward sorrow; the outward expression. Room in the world for demonstrative and undemonstrative. Notice the tendency of reserved to misjudge those not like them, and the injustice of calling religious excitement worthless. Illustrations: The publican's outward demonstration; the bitter weeping of Peter. Some must rend their garments when their hearts are rent. **III. LEARN THE REQUIREMENT OF GOD.** 1. That it is necessary for us to rend our hearts. Repentance for sin a necessity. This the fruit of the law; this the germ of the Gospel. The Baptist's cry; the Saviour's cry; the cry of the apostles—"Repent." 2. As to the rending of the garment. "Rend your hearts," &c. The text means, "not *only* your garments." Other similar expressions. (1) From the Bible. "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." The meaning, "mercy rather than sacrifice." (2) From ordinary conversation. "Give us deeds, not words." The meaning, that deeds are more important than words. Customary, demonstrative, peculiar experience of feeling was not forbidden. Reality as opposed to mere form insisted on. 3. God does require the pure and holy life. The rent heart the open heart. Christ enters, abides, makes pure. The pure heart expressed by the pure life. The heart made clean, the garment also is made white. This agreement must be. There cannot be the changed heart without the converted life. (*J. M. Blackie, LL.B.*) *Repentance*:—"This chapter is not so much a peremptory prediction, what God absolutely intends, as a communication only, what conditionally He threateneth. Man, in his anger, threatens when he means to strike; God threatens, that He might not strike, but that we might be forewarned and ward off His blow. The Gospel, that offers all mercy and love, strictly exacts and requires repentance. The text is a vehement exhortation to sorrow and repentance; and a direction how and in what manner we should repent. **I. THE PRECEPT OF REPENTANCE.** 1. An exhortation to con-

contrition. Observe the act expressed in the word "rend"; and the object, which is presented affirmatively. We must rend our heart. And negatively. We must not rend our garments. 2. An exhortation to conversion. "Return unto the Lord your God." Return implies a motion. (1) The kind of motion. A returning. (2) That whereunto we must return, "The Lord." (3) That habitudo and relation which guides and biasses us unto the term; in the words following, "Your God." This is twofold. There is an attraction in the term and place to which the motion tends. And that which carries and disposes the thing moved towards it. II. THE MOTIVE TO REPENTANCE. In these words, "For He is gracious," &c. 1. The kind and nature of the motive. God contents not Himself by putting us in mind of our duty. He uses no threatenings, intermingles no curses. He urges mercy and favour. Observe the degrees of the motive. They are all set and purposed to prevent and remove all the fears and discouragements that a timorous guilty conscience can forecast to itself. We are here called upon to present ourselves unto the Lord, to hope for and expect His love and favour. But we are not worthy of such favour. True, but He is a gracious God. We have to admit that our lives have been demeritorious, sinful, offensive. True, but He is merciful and compassionate. We daily provoke Him by our rebellions, grieving His Spirit, and increasing His wrath by our offences. True, but He is a patient God, and slow to anger. The cry of our sins has already ascended up to heaven. Yet He is easy to be entreated, and of great kindness. His wrath hath smoked out against us; His prophets have denounced His judgments. Yet there is hope of mercy, for He repenteth of the evil. Then do thy sins discourage thee? Let the offer and invitation of His mercy assure thee. Doth the number and variety of thy transgressions dishearten thee? Consider the multitude of His mercies. Doth the measure and heinousness of thy rebellions affright thee? Let the degrees and plenty of His compassions comfort thee. Consider the duty of contrition. The act and practice of repentance is no less than a rending. And that implies stiffness and obduration in the object to be wrought upon. Hardness and difficulty in the act to be exercised—repentance. And it requires all the strength and might of him that undertakes it. Consider the object upon which repentance must work and exercise itself. In the affirmative sense, your heart. If thy heart be not contrite and sorrowful, it is not true repentance. Except thy sorrow work upon the heart, there is no use or profit in thy repentance. Except thy heart be humble and cast down for sin, it is no pleasing or acceptable repentance. In the negative sense,—“Rend not your garments.” In this counsel the Lord checks and reproves our outward superstition. All outward ceremonious practice of piety, if divided and severed from inward devotion, is rejected of God. Ceremonies, if accompanied with the heart, are useful and acceptable; if divided from it, are sinful and abominable. But the words may be read, “your hearts rather than your garments,” by way of comparison. The contrition of the heart is more necessary and useful than any outward bodily affliction. (*Bishop Brownrigg.*) *Penitence and conversion*:—I. A REAL SORROW FOR SIN. 1. Heartfelt. Rend your heart, and not your garments. Rending stan is for the outward expression of sorrow or penitence. The prophet does not intend by the contrast “hearts” not “garments,” to condemn such outward signs, but to insist upon the inward rather than the outward. We are not to affect sorrow, to display penitence. Outward usages are valuable, not as satisfying conscience or pleasing God, but as helps to realise a right spirit. 2. Deliberate. To rend garments is a sudden impulse. To rend the heart is a far harder and slower matter. 3. Intense. Rend—implying a breaking of the heart,—breaking by the irresistible force of conviction. This implies a personal sense of sin, and a holy hatred of sin. III. A TRUE CONVERSION TO GOD: It is, “Turn unto the Lord.” A broken heart without this would be more despair. This implies—1. A change in will. “Turn.” 2. An acceptance of God’s call. “Turn unto the Lord.” 3. An act of faith in Him. “Your God.” An acknowledgment of God’s claim on us. How are we to turn? The prayer of the Lenten season suggests the answer, “Turn Thou us, O good Lord, and so shall we be turned.” (*John Ellerton, M.A.*) *Repentance, a rending of the heart*:—I. THE EXHORTATION OR ADVICE GIVEN. Rending the garments was a sign of great sorrow and amazement. This custom, when a sense of the evil of sin and true sorrow for it were wanting, degenerated into a hypocritical form. Therefore comes the command, “Rend your hearts.” From what must they be rent? From sin, especially your besetting sin. From earth and earthly things.

From all creatures. From yourselves. From hypocrisy and formality, pride and self-confidence, unbelief, improper diffidence and distrust. How must they be rent? By godly consideration and self-examination; by conviction and humiliation, by shame and sorrow, by confession and abhorrence. Rend your hearts. The conscience must be pierced, the will conquered, the spirit humbled, the affections moved, and the old, hard heart made soft. The broken heart is God's sacrifice. "And turn unto the Lord." Do this by contemplation and thought, desire and prayer, faith and confidence, expectation and delight, gratitude and love. Turning we cannot do of ourselves. For what are we to turn? For illumination. For pardon. For Divine favour, communion, and fellowship.

II. THE MOTIVES WHICH ENFORCE IT. Evil is gone forth to chastise or punish sin. God is good, not only to "repent of the evil," and do it not, but to do good. That He is "of great kindness" witness a dying Jesus, an entreating ministry, so many sweet promises and alluring mercies. Apply to the unconverted, backsliders, and the godly. (*J. Benson.*) **For He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger.**—*The perfection of the mercy of God.*—Nothing is more true of God than that He is the first and chiefest good; His prime perfection is goodness, and our truest notion of Him is, that He is almighty goodness.

I. BY WAY OF VINDICATION. And to give satisfaction to objections that arise against this great truth. Three objections. 1. Several instances of God's severity are found recorded in Scripture: e.g., the Deluge; Destruction of Canaanites, &c. To this answer—(1) When necessities for our good are afforded, and by any neglected, the blame lies upon them. (2) Sometimes the sins of nations and persons are come to their height, and God is forced to punish. (3) The judgments of God in this life are exemplary and disciplinary: and better a mischief should fall on particular persons, than that a general inconvenience should follow. (4) God sometimes lets us feel something of hell here, to prevent it hereafter. (5) There may be a particular account given of several scriptural cases: e.g., Nadab and Abihu, and Ananias and Sapphira. (6) Though we do not know what time or leisure God will allow to sinners to repent, yet we certainly know God will grant forgiveness to penitents. (7) There is no other way for God's forgiveness but the way of repentance. This is the tenor of the grace of God. (8) We cannot competently judge the proceedings of God to His creatures.

2. God is represented as severe, in giving men up to a reprobate sense, stupidity, and hardness of heart. Answer—(1) This case hath no promise. (2) It is not fit for the exercise of grace or mercy, for this case is not compassionate. If some think that God, by an irresistible power, might have prevented all sin and misery, it may be answered,—Is it reasonable that God, having made voluntary and intelligent agents, should force them? Then there could be no exercise of virtue, for all virtue is in choice; and no happiness, for we should be under constraint. Of what use, in that case, would our natural faculties be? This would no longer be a probationary state. God draws; He does not force moral beings.

3. The necessity of justice in the case of sin. This objection will be resolved by a true explication of justice. God's justice is the same with His integrity and uprightness. These consist with the reason of the thing, and the right of the case. It is not necessary that God should punish sin, but He may justly do it, for sin deserves punishment.

II. EXPLICATION OF THE PHRASES OF THE TEXT. Five several words. 1. Gracious. Which imports to do good freely, without constraint: to go good above the measure of right and just; to do good without antecedent desert, or after-recompense. 2. Merciful. So as to compassionate His creatures in misery, so as to help them in respect of their infirmities, so as to pardon their iniquities. 3. Slow to anger. So as not to take advantage of His creatures, so as to overlook provocation; and so as to allow space for repentance. 4. Of great kindness. What He doth, He doth in pure good will, and for our good; not in expectation of being benefited by us; not according to the proportion or disposition of the receiver. 5. Repenteth Him of the evil. So as either it comes not at all; or it proves not what we fear and imagine; or it stays but a while if it do come; or He turns it into good.

III. CONFIRMATION OF THE TRUTH OF THE PROPOSITION OF THE TEXT. Four names and titles given to God that make this out. 1. His creation in infinite goodness, wisdom, and power. The variety, order, and fitness of things to their ends, declare the wisdom of God. 2. Conservation, protection, and government, declare God to be good, and full of loving-kindness. 3. Restoration and recovery out of the state of sin and misery. 4. Future confirmation and settlement in glory and happiness.

IV. CAUTION IS PRESENTED IN THE TEXT. Seen

in two particulars. 1. Not to abuse this declaration of Divine goodness, either by holding the truth in unrighteousness, or turning the grace of God into wantonness. 2. Not to permit hasty or rash judgment. If anything seem harsh in the dispensation of providence, we may understand it in a little time; therefore he that believes should not make haste. V. APPLICATION. 1. Here is matter of information. We have a true judgment of God when we think of His greatness in connection with His goodness. 2. Here is matter of imitation. We may resemble God. 3. Here is matter of consolation. To all that are willing to do well, and would be good. (*B. Whichcote, D.D.*) *Repentance recommended*.—I. THE IMPORTANT DIRECTION GIVEN. The direction "Turn unto the Lord your God" presupposes—1. A state of heedless inattention. The position from which they were to turn was one in which the back was upon God. 2. A state of careless and criminal negligence. 3. A state of obstinate disobedience. "Render your heart." The action of rending garments indicates—1. Excessive grief. 2. Great loathing and abhorrence. 3. Deep humility and earnest deprecation. II. THE CHEERING ASSURANCE AFFORDED. "For He is gracious and merciful," &c. 1. This revelation warrants our approach. The words are expressive of the most melting compassion and tenderness. 2. This revelation requires your return to "the Lord," your Proprietor, to whom you owe your all, and to whom you must account for all. 3. This revelation encourages your address. Ask, and receive now the effects of His grace and mercy. Pardon, healing, adoption, grace. All the present privileges of children. And finally, all their eternal enjoyments. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *God's mercy*.—Like some black rock that heaves itself above the surface of a sunlit sea, and the wave runs dashing over it, and the spray as it falls down its sides is all rainbowed, and there comes down beauty into the grimness of the black thing; so a man's transgressions rear themselves up, and Christ's great love coming sweeping over them, makes out of the sin an occasion for the flashing more brightly of the beauty of His mercy, and turns the life of the pardoned soul into a life of beauty. (*Sunday Magazine.*)

Ver. 14. **Who knoweth but He will turn and repent, and leave a blessing behind Him.**—*Encouragements to hope*.—I. THE OBJECTS OF THE PROPHET'S HOPE. 1. That the Lord would return. This can only be in a way of manifestation; all idea of place or motion being utterly incompatible with a being who fills heaven and earth. God is said to depart when, being provoked by the sins of any people, He withdraws His wonted assistance; and to return when, His anger being appeased, He again shews Himself favourable. There is sometimes a sad parting between God and His people; not owing to any want of faithfulness in Him, but to those things in them which awaken His resentment, as pride, self-confidence, carnality, and worldly-mindedness. 2. That He would "repent." Not change His nature or purposes, only His conduct. Though God cannot repent as men do, yet He may act as men do when they repent: He may cease to do what He had begun; He may revoke His threatenings, and recall His judgments. 3. He would "leave a blessing behind." (1) God never comes to His people empty-handed. (2) What God gives we should at least in part return. II. THE NATURE OF THIS HOPE. It rises no higher than a peradventure, lest they should sink into despondency, or lest they should give way to presumption and carnal security. Their hope must be mixed with fear, and their joy with trembling. A possibility—and much more, a probability—of obtaining mercy at the hand of God is a sufficient encouragement to a poor perishing sinner to seek, to trust in, and wait for Him. III. THE CASES IN WHICH THIS HOPE, FOUNDED UPON A PROBABILITY OF ACCEPTANCE, MAY AFFORD ENCOURAGEMENT TO SOULS IN DISTRESS. 1. With respect to prayer. 2. With respect to repentance. 3. With respect to patient waiting upon God in seasons of trial. 4. With respect to our exertions for the good of others. Application. 1. Improve this consideration so as to restrain and keep under a peevish, fretful, and impatient spirit. 2. Learn that God's help is only to be expected in the use of appointed means. While we trust in the Lord, we must keep His way. 3. Let no one persist in an evil course, on the presumption that He may find mercy at last. (*B. Beddome, M.A.*) *Modest expectation*.—The manner of the expectation is very humble and modest:—"Who knows if He will?" Some think it is expressed thus doubtfully, to check the presumption and security of the people, and to quicken them to a holy carefulness and liveliness in their repentance. Or rather, it is expressed doubtfully, because it is the removal of a temporary

judgment that they here promised themselves, of which we cannot be so confident as we can that, in general, God is gracious and merciful. There is no question at all to be made, but that if we truly repent of our sins God will forgive us and be reconciled to us, but whether He will remove this or the other affliction which we are under may well be questioned, and yet the probability of it should encourage us to repent. Promises of temporal good things are often made with a peradventure. (*Matthew Henry.*) *The hope of repentance*.—The text is an encouragement to repentance, upon hope of mercy. I. THE MATTER OF THEIR HOPE. 1. The regaining of God's grace and favour towards them. 2. The recalling of His threatenings and judgments. 3. The renewing of His mercies to them. 4. The re-establishing of His holy worship among them. For the understanding the nature of this mercy, this return of God to us, will afford us these three considerations—1. It is our main happiness to enjoy God's presence, to have Him dwell amongst us. 2. It is the bitter fruit of sin, that it causeth God to withdraw His presence, and to turn away from us. 3. It is the blessed fruit of repentance, that it recovers God's presence, causeth God to return graciously to us. II. THE MEASURE OF THEIR HOPE. This is somewhat strange. 'Tis but a cold encouragement, one would think; puts all their hopes upon a peradventure. 'Tis but "Who knows? It may be so"; that's all the assurance. It is a strange speech, seemingly contrary and inconsistent with God's goodness. It is inconsistent with His present invitation of them to repentance. It is inconsistent with His present encouragement. It seems contrary to His absolute covenant and promise to pardon penitents. What shall we think of this kind of speech? Show how this inking and intimation of hope may be useful. (*Bishop Brownrigg.*) *Leaving blessings behind*.—In the Canton of Berne a mountain stream rushes in a torrent toward the valley, as if it would carry destruction to the villages below; but leaping from the sheer precipice of nearly nine hundred feet, it is caught in the clutch of the winds, and sifted down in fine, soft spray, whose benignant showering covers the fields with verdure. So sorrow comes, a dashing torrent, threatening to destroy us; but by the breath of God's Spirit it is changed as it falls, and pours its soft, gentle powers on our hearts, leaving rich blessings upon our whole life. (*J. R. Miller.*)

Vers. 15-17. *Sanctify a fast.*—*A penitential assembly*.—I. IT MUST BE AN ASSEMBLY WHICH SHALL BE SOLEMN IN THE SPIRIT IN WHICH IT MEETS. "Call a solemn assembly." In all probability these words refer to the legal purifications which were enjoined upon the people prior to their entering upon the worship of the temple. They are also indicative of the moral purity and earnestness which should especially characterise a penitential assembly. All who attended this meeting were to be washed from the defilement of their past sin, and were to come and bow before the Lord in a renewed condition of soul. This was not an assembly to inaugurate social reform, to advance scientific research, or to determine a political policy; but to manifest a deep sorrow for national apostasy, and to turn aside the peril which had been awakened thereby. This meeting was not to vaunt the prowess of the nation, but to confess sin before God; and surely only a solemn mood would avail at such a time. How beneficial would be the effect of such an assembly. II. IT MUST BE AN ASSEMBLY IN WHICH EVERY CONCEIVABLE AID TO REPENTANCE SHALL BE REGARDED. "Assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet." 1. There was the pathos of sorrowful old age. Here is old age in tears because of the sin of the nation, and because of the evil of which it is guilty before God. The elders were present. They have known the nation long. They are concerned for its welfare. They are deeply moved by the judgments with which it is visited. 2. There was the pathos of imperilled childhood. The children of the nation were present at this meeting; not even infants were exempt from attendance. And would not the thought of the danger to which these innocent babes were liable, and their piteous cries, lead their parents to humiliation before God? 3. There was the abandonment of domestic festivities. The bridegroom went forth from his chamber, and the bride out of her closet, in order that they might attend the meeting thus imperatively called. The newly-married were not to be exempt from this penitential assembly. The most innocent festivities of life were to yield their joy to the refreshing and saving tears of repentance. III. IT MUST BE AN ASSEMBLY IN WHICH THE MORAL LEADERS OF THE PEOPLE SHALL SUSTAIN THEIR APPROPRIATE

RELATION. "Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar." The priests are to utter in public before God the inward feeling of the nation. This was a Divine arrangement. It was conducive to order. It was promotive of repentance. And so in the penitential assembly the moral leaders of the people must intercede on their behalf before God. IV. IT MUST BE AN ASSEMBLY IN WHICH THE MERCY OF GOD SHALL BE EARNESTLY SUPPLICATED. "Spare Thy people, O Lord, and give not Thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?" The priests were not only to weep; they were also to pray. Tears without prayers are vain. 1. The prayer of the priest is for mercy. They ask God to spare their undeserving but repentant people. They make no excuse. 2. The prayer of the priest remembers the covenant of God with His people. They plead that God will save His people and His heritage. In our prayer of repentance we may plead the Divine Ownership of us and the Divine interest in us. Each soul is the heritage of God. 3. The prayer of the priests desires the glory of God. The Jews were the people of God. Thus the priests plead that national salvation may take away from their wicked enemies the opportunity of reproaching the Divine name. Lessons—1. That national assemblies should be frequently called to confess sin before God. 2. That they should combine all classes of individuals. 3. That they should be arranged by the ministers of the Gospel. 4. That they should prayerfully seek the glory of God. (*J. S. Exell, M.A.*) A fast:—When God visits mankind in judgment, there are three calamities which He sends upon them, the sword, the famine, and pestilence. How are we to "sanctify a fast," or make a holy thing of it, by a due and proper celebration? This is to be done—I. BY A CONFESSION OF SIN. When we confess, we should begin with confessing that sinfulness of our nature which is the root of all the sins of the world. We should proceed to confess the sins of our time, the first and greatest of which is the want of faith, or the neglect of Christianity. This want of faith is naturally followed by a neglect of Divine worship; for who will worship as a Christian, that does not believe as a Christian? When we are considering the sins of the age, it is hard to know where to begin, or where to end. II. A RESOLUTION OF AMENDMENT. Not by the devotion of a single day, but by a continued sense of the "terrors of the Lord" upon our lives and actions. While we have the light of the Gospel, let us value it, and walk by it. III. A DEPENDENCE UPON THE GOODNESS AND MERCY OF GOD. Penitents in the worst of times have everything to hope. What obligations then lie upon you at this moment, to be serious, to be sorrowful for past sin, devout and humble, constant in the worship of God, and sincerely devoted to His service for the time to come. (*W. Jones, M.A.*) An urgently demanded meeting:—Men are constantly assembling themselves together for one purpose or another,—political, commercial, scientific, entertaining. But of all the meetings none are so urgent as the one indicated in the text. I. IT IS A MEETING CALLED ON ACCOUNT OF COMMON SIN. All the people of Judah had sinned grievously, and they were now summoned together on that account. No subject is of such urgent importance as this. Sin, this was the root of all the miseries of their country. It behoved them to meet together in order to deliberate how best to tear up this upas-tree, how best to dry up this pestiferous fountain of all their calamities. II. IT IS A MEETING COMPOSED OF ALL CLASSES. The young and the old were there; the sad and the jubilant; even the bridal pair; the priests and the people. The subject concerned them all. All were vitally interested in it. Sin is no class subject. It concerns the man in imperial purple, as well as the man in pauper's rags. III. IT IS A MEETING FOR HUMILIATION AND PRAYER. It was not a meeting for debate or discussion, for mere social intercourse and entertainment, but for profound humiliation before God. Conclusion. No meeting is more urgently demanded to-day than such an one as this. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 18-20. Then will the Lord be jealous for His land, and pity His people.—The Divine attitude towards repentant souls:—I. TOWARD REPENTANT SOULS GOD IS STRICT IN THE MANIFESTATION OF A JEALOUS REGARD. "Then will the Lord be jealous for His land, and pity His people." Thus we see the change which repentance makes in the circumstances and conditions of men. And God is jealous of the welfare and honour of the truly penitent soul. He will save it wisely from former enemies who have endangered it, and He will shield it kindly from all reproach which may threaten. The soul is His. He has redeemed

it. He has given it the grace of repentance. He will be jealous for its good.

II. TOWARD REPENTANT SOULS GOD IS BENEFICENT IN THE RESTORATION OF WITHDRAWN MERCIES. "Yea, the Lord will answer," &c. And happily true it is that while sin despoils life of many of its richest mercies, repentance with kind hand gives them back again. There is a glorious tendency in repentance to ameliorate and remove the loss and woe wrought by moral evil. Repentance does not always heal the pain of sin. It does not erase sad memories. It does not always restore a wasted bodily constitution. It does not always bring back the substance wasted in the far country. But its tendency is to do this. The moral touches the material.

III. FROM THE REPENTANT SOUL GOD WILL TURN ASIDE THE PLAGUES WHICH HAVE PREVIOUSLY AFFLICTED IT. "But I will remove far off from you the northern army," &c. The repentant soul is beset by old enemies. They are in the hand of God. He can cover their plans with defeat. Lessons—1. That God will protect the interests of repentant souls. 2. Let us see in the glad effect of repentance in this life a prophecy of the joy of the sinless life. 3. That the enemies of repentant souls will be brought to shame. (*J. S. Exell, M.A.*) *Divine favour the best alliance*:—These words are a comfortable promise to Judah, upon a sincere humiliation and repentance, of the Divine kindness and favour; the earnest of all blessings, the fountain of all prosperity, success, and happiness that can attend a people, or they can reasonably wish or hope for.

I. IN HOW EXACT A POSTURE OUR AFFAIRS STAND WITH THOSE OF JUDAH. Joel is supposed to point to the troubles of the reign of good King Hezekiah. We (1701) shall find that the coast from which we are alarmed and threatened, and the enemy from whom we apprehend our danger, has all the characteristics and marks of those enemies of the Hebrews described here by the prophet. They were powerful, cruel, and numerous. Neither is a foreign power the only evil we have reason to be apprehensive of and to provide against. We are a divided and dissatisfied people, maligning our governors, and murmuring at providence.

II. THE NECESSITY FOR SEEKING A SUITABLE AND SEASONABLE REMEDY IN THESE TIMES OF DANGER. It is the safest course for nations, when they are apprehensive of danger, to implore the Divine aid and assistance to their consultations and enterprises; to deprecate God's wrath, and to engage His blessing. Self-preservation should engage us to cure a distemper in its beginnings and first approaches; lest, by indulging too long to it, it prove incurable and mortal. For when diseases are once deeply rooted, and become so mixed with the blood and humours as thoroughly to taint them, it costs the patient much more pain and time to bear the several courses and operations he is enjoined in order to a cure. To how near a crisis the malady of our sins has brought us; then how necessary it is to use the most effectual means for our recovery! There is great danger, if we dissolve our public peace, and do not timely cure our fatal divisions. It is not enough for us to think we have justice on our side, if we ourselves break God's most holy laws. When people abuse mercies, and receive the grace of God in vain, it is the highest aggravation of guilt, and most apt to incense the goodness of God, thus abused and slighted. Hence He has often raised up wicked men, and wicked nations, as instruments to punish others, who were less such, but transgressed God's laws against clearer light and plainer evidence. God, like a tender father, is jealous of, and resents deeply the transgressions of His children, whom gratitude and a stricter sense of duty ought to restrain and keep within due bounds.

III. UPON A DUE APPLICATION OF REPENTANCE WE SHALL BE SAFE. True repentance is a healing balm, like that of Gilead, that cures the wounds of our sins, and has a sovereign charm to render a nation invulnerable; having power enough to ward off the force of any stroke of Divine vengeance, though just ready to be given. Illustrate by pious Hezekiah and good Jehoshaphat. Repentance has such influence upon heaven as to relieve from ruin some of the vilest people and most wicked princes, as in the cases of Nineveh and Ahab. Upon these considerations what should hinder us from speedily closing with God in a duty upon which our safety and happiness so much depend; and which, if we perform seriously and in earnest, we shall not fail of His powerful protection and succour? Every individual person ought to begin at home. Let us therefore acknowledge before God with the deepest sense of humility and contrition how unworthy we have rendered ourselves of the least of His mercies. Let us turn from our evil ways, and walk in those of true virtue, religion, and holiness, that so we may engage Him "to be jealous for His land, and pity His people." (*John King, D.D.*) *The*

glorious issue of repentance :—The prophet was successful. The people gathered at a great and solemn national fast. Verse 18 reads in R.V., "Then was the Lord jealous for His land, and had pity on His people." Then the message of the prophet becomes one of joy and hope. The scarcity shall be replaced by abundance. God will give the pledge of His loving regard in the sweet rain upon the burnt up and thirsty soil. He gives this gift of rain at first, because an after-gift and a better one is to follow. Thus we reach the re-establishment of confidence and love. But we have reached a higher plane than merely the repose which comes because a terror has departed, and nature is resuming her normal regularity of beneficence. The true ground of the reposeful and confident spirit is this, that the people know the Lord is in their midst, and that He is their God and none else. Repentance if it is to do nothing else must convince men of that. It must establish the eternal fact of God's presence. It must lead us to feel that we are God's, and that we owe ourselves to Him. This confidence in the Lord their God alone is the first resting-place of our prophecy after the day of humiliation. But it is only a first resting-place. He who gave the former and the latter rain for the harvest gave them as gifts to be followed by others. A gift was coming which would lift the people into a much higher plane of thought, and into much more spiritual conceptions of life. It is the gift of the Spirit : it is the gift of new power upon repentant souls. The thought of the prophet carries with it a principle which to the men of his day must have been lofty, and perchance strange in its loftiness. This highest gift of God, like all gifts, is to make us great with that greatness which is service. Baptized with the Spirit, the apostles were baptized into the spirit of service. Here we see the higher region of the prophet's ambition. It is not the restoration of temporal blessings which exhausts his desires on their behalf. He desires for them a spirit of true insight into the meaning and significance of life. One method of raising and rousing others is by awaking aspirations, by painting the possibilities which may yet be achieved. It is the Divine method to inspire by placing high possibilities, yet higher ranges of life and duty before our eyes. No doubt there is always something above earth in all the higher gifts of the Spirit. The poetic gift is the power to see—not what is not—but what is. "Imagination is the power to see things as they are." The gift of the Spirit enables men to see the real significance of the facts of life—the true meaning of what men are, where they are, and why. This is exactly what the prophet has been leading us up to. The most real of all presences is the spiritual presence of Christ. The most real aspects of life for all men must be their spiritual aspects. The gift of the Spirit was to reveal the tremendous gulf which existed between life as men lived it and the life which God sought to see lived by men. Among the knights of Malta, the cross given and worn was the eight-pointed Maltese cross. The eight points signified the beatitudes. The cross was to be carried in the remembrance of the blessing which belonged to the poor in spirit, the sorrowful, the meek, the hungerers after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, the persecuted. The Cross of Christ was to be carried in the Spirit of Christ. It is thus that the victory of Christ in the world will be won. More than ever we need the simple, guileless, loving, pure spirit of Christ. (*Bishop Boyd Carpenter.*) *Interaction of the Divine and human* :—

I. That the MATERIAL CONDITION OF A PEOPLE DEPENDS UPON THE DIVINE OPERATIONS. 1. The withdrawal of calamities. "I will remove far off from you the northern army," &c. Men may and ought to employ means ; but futile for ever will be all human efforts without the co-operation of Almighty power. This fact should teach us ever to look to Him and Him only for deliverance from evil at all times, both material and moral. 2. The bestowment of blessings. "The Lord will answer and say unto His people, Behold, I will send you corn," &c. The productions of the earth are dependent every moment upon Almighty power.

II. That the Divine operations ARE INFLUENCED BY THE MORAL CONDITION OF THE PEOPLE. The priests and the ministers of the Lord wept between the altar, and said, "Spare Thy people, O Lord," &c. "The porch before the temple was a hundred and twenty cubits high, twenty broad from north to south, and ten from east to west. The altar was that of burnt-offering in the court of the priests. Here, with their backs toward the altar, on which they had nothing to offer, and their faces directed towards the residence of the Shekina, they were to weep and make supplication on behalf of the people." That the Divine conduct towards us depends upon our conduct towards heaven, is inexplicable to us although clearly taught in the Word of God. Indeed consciousness assures us that He is

to us what we are to Him. It is absurd to suppose that God will alter the laws of nature because of human prayers and human conduct, says the sceptic scientist. But what laws of nature are more manifest, more universal, settled, and unalterable than the tendency of human souls to personal and intercessory prayer? Every aspiration is a prayer. Scripture abounds with examples of God apparently altering His conduct on account of man's supplication. III. THAT THE RIGHT MORAL CONDUCT OF A PEOPLE WILL ENSURE THEM DIVINE BENEDICTION. In these verses there is a beautiful gradation. First the destroyed land is addressed; then the irrational animals; then the inhabitants. All are called to cast off their fears and rejoice in the happy change which God would effect. It is too clear for either argument or illustration, that if you change the moral character of any country from ignorance to intelligence, from indolence to industry, from intemperance to self-discipline, the whole material region in which you live may abound with plentifulness and beauty. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 21. Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the Lord will do great things. —*The influence of a repentant soul upon the universe at large.*—I. THERE IS A TENDENCY IN THE INFLUENCE OF A REPENTANT SOUL TO BRING BACK TO THE MATERIAL UNIVERSE THE FORFEITED JOY IT WAS DESTINED TO POSSESS. "Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the Lord will do great things." The land is here said to have been in the mood of fear. It had abundant cause for terror. It had been stricken by the retributive hand of God. All its produce had been destroyed. It was desolate. It was yet threatened with more awful agencies of destruction. Sin has made the material universe to tremble. The mood of man is reflected in the material things by which he is surrounded; they reflect the terror of sin and the joy of repentance. Let man obey God, and Eden is a garden of the Lord. Let him disobey God, and earth becomes the abode of Satan. Let man be redeemed, and the earth begins to smile. Let man be glorified, and there is no more curse. When the race is saved, "the Lord will do great things" in nature. He will entirely change her moods. When the new earth dawns, she will know no fear. II. THERE IS A TENDENCY IN THE INFLUENCE OF A REPENTANT SOUL TO RENDER MORE FRUITFUL THE BENEFICENT OPERATIONS OF NATURE. "Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig-tree and the vine do yield their strength. . . . And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil." 1. There is peace. Man has in his soul the key to the quietude of the universe; when his soul is at peace with God, then the entire world is at rest. 2. There is growth. When man is at peace with God, then the earth is most potent in the exercise of its vitalities. The fruits of the earth are not far removed from the fruits of the Spirit. 3. There is superabundance. When man turns to God, the earth in superabundant blessing turns to man. When repentant in soul our cup runneth over. Nature is rich in treasure to the pure in heart. Repentance is a good friend to commerce. III. THERE IS A TENDENCY IN THE INFLUENCE OF A REPENTANT SOUL TO CAUSE A SPIRIT OF HOLY SATISFACTION TO REST UPON THE WORLD. "And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and My people shall never be ashamed." 1. There is true enjoyment. Man shall eat in plenty. Nature shall not refuse to supply his want. 2. Here is real satisfaction. Not merely shall nature supply the need of man, but shall appropriately satisfy it. 3. Here is devout praise. The gifts of nature shall awaken men to holy thanksgiving. This is an ideal state of society. Thus will it be when all souls repose in the love of the eternal God. IV. THERE IS A TENDENCY IN THE INFLUENCE OF A REPENTANT SOUL TO AWAKEN MEN TO A MORE THOUGHTFUL RECOGNITION OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN THE MIDST OF LIFE. "And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God, and none else." When a nation is given over to a sinful method of life, it has no recognition of God in its midst. It forgets Him. But repentance opens the eye of the moral nature and renders it keen in vision, so that it sees God. To see God in the midst of life is the supreme joy of the pure soul, because all things around partake of the lustre of His presence. This gives a solemn view of life. Lessons—1. That the joy of the universe is conditioned by the moral sentiments of man. 2. That a pure soul is often the most enriched by nature. 3. That God is in the midst of a repentant humanity. (*J. S. Exell, M.A.*) *A year's ministry:*—A prophecy of national adversity, a call to

national repentance, and a promise of national blessing, are the three great topics of Joel's prophetic ministry. The last is represented by the text. The adversity, the repentance, and the blessing indicate a Divine order. If there is reason to fear that days "of darkness and gloominess" are settling down upon our own land, let not the Israel of God despair; the "people" and the "elders" shall assemble before God; lift up the voice of penitential confession, and cry in faith; the vows of a covenanted land shall be remembered and renewed, and the light of God's countenance shall scatter the darkness. "Fear not, O land . . . the Lord will do great things." The great things of the Lord's doing comprehend the mission of the Saviour in the fulness of the time; the subsequent mission of His Holy Spirit; the millennial glory; and the final triumph of truth and righteousness in the world. Looking far beyond the intervening clouds of calamity and penitential sorrow, we behold a glory; and by faith we can hear from the distant future, in the trumpet-tongued voice of some messenger of the Lord, that consoling prophecy of the world's last resting-time of love. "Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the Lord will do great things."

(T. Easton.) *Antidotes against the operation of desponding fear*.—Unto his beloved country Joel is not only the messenger of its misery, but the herald of its prosperity. I. THE PROMISE OF DOING GREAT THINGS AS AN ANTIDOTE TO FEAR. The fear implied is desponding and unreasonable fear. 1. The causes and occasions of such fear are,—the enterprises of the gates of hell, the tyranny of the man of sin, the wrath of the kings of the earth, the bulwarks of superstition, the efficacy of delusion, the battering-rams of infidelity, and the fierce contentions for dominion of empire with empire, and kingdom with kingdom. 2. Exemplify the strength and sufficiency of the antidote to this fear, in the promise of doing great things. Apply to the above several occasions and causes of the fear. 3. Enforce the caveat entered against this fear with the promise. In order that the strength and sufficiency of the antidote may be felt in experience, read the record of the great things which the Lord hath done: believe the promises of the great things which He will do; assure yourselves that before the Church be swallowed up by the world, the great things which He hath done shall be done over again; and observe that the caveat against desponding fear is entered, and its antidote prescribed and recommended, under the authority of the Lord who is both the doer and the promiser. II. THE PROMISE OF DOING GREAT THINGS, WHICH IS THE GROUND OF THE ADMONITION, IS AN EXCITATION TO EXPRESS THE JOY FOR WHICH THE ADMONITION IS GIVEN. Mention some great things which the Lord will do. Protect the reformed faith, furnish a ministry to preach it, raise out of every generation professors to hold it, reconcile the remnant of the seed of Abraham, gather in the fulness of the Gentiles, fill the earth with His glory, crush the insurrection of the last days, rend the heavens and come down, raise and judge the dead, dissolve the frame of the world, present the whole Church faultless in the presence of His glory, and reign over it for ever. Consider the nature of the joy for which the admonition is given, and unto which the promise of doing these great things is an excitement. The Father of glory is the fountain of it; the Saviour of the world is the medium of it; the Spirit of holiness is the author of it; the Scriptures of truth are the means of it; the city of God is the cistern in which it collects; the congregations of the citizens are the openings at which it breaks forth; and their lives the plains over which it flows. Then let us provoke ourselves to rejoice in His goodness and truth and power. In our island the Lord hath done great things, is doing great things, and according to our hope will do great things. III. EXCITATION TO REJOICE NEEDS TO BE ACCOMPANIED WITH INSTRUCTION CONCERNING THE EXPRESSION OF OUR JOY. We shall set before your faith some expressions of joy which correspond to the admonition, and by which it ought to be honoured in the city of God. Particularly, by observing the works of the Lord in the administrations of providence; adoring His glory breaking forth in these works; honouring His name appearing in them with the obedience of faith; trusting in His promises; praying for the performance of the promises which remain yet to be fulfilled; and waiting for the performance of these promises. Then take care to express your joy in each of these forms distinctly. (A. Shanks.) *The Divine response to the challenge of evil*.—I. Our attention is arrested first by THE "GREAT THINGS" OF SIN AND JUDGMENT. Some scholars give the text and context literal interpretations; they construe it to mean that in consequence of the sins of Israel God will send upon the land swarms of locusts which shall destroy every

green thing. Others give the text an allegorical interpretation. They say that God threatens to let loose upon Israel a fierce invading army, which like a swarm of locusts will eat up the nation. Be this as it may, the chapter unmistakably sets forth the terrible, devouring power of sin, and the retributions which arise out of sin, and this is a warning that all generations ought to consider and respect. The swarming locusts remind us of the multitudinousness of evil. Evil envelops us, attacks us, torments us on every side. You may crush a locust, you may crush a score, you may crush a thousand, it makes no appreciable difference, myriads more crowd in hungrily, and give you the sense of hopelessness. So the evils that afflict the world are manifold, and it seems useless to resist them; practically they are infinite and overwhelming. What a picture this chapter gives of the fiery energy, the swiftness, the restlessness, the practical irresistibility of the locusts! "The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen so shall they run." "Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble." So there is an awful wrathfulness, facility, and effectiveness about evil passions, evil movements, and evil things. It takes a century to build up an oak, but the lightning flash blasts it in a moment. Again, these locusts remind us of the pervasiveness of evil. "They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall; they shall climb up upon the houses; they shall enter in at the windows like a thief." You cannot exclude evil; it penetrates everywhere, it defiles everything. It mocks at personal vigilance. The black locusts swarm on all the roses of our pleasure, they devour the golden fruits of our industry, they strip the vine and fig-tree of our domestic felicity, they defile the pomegranates and palms of our sacred places. These locusts suggest another terrible aspect of evil, namely, that it expresses a certain law, order, and government. "They shall march every one on his ways, and they shall not break their ranks." The New Testament makes this clear, that the world of iniquity is a realm of government. Finally, the locusts symbolise the destructiveness of sin. "The land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness." We cannot to-day look upon this world without feeling how awful sin is, and how terrible its consequences are. How painful are the aspects of the world beyond Christendom, how painful the scenes on which we look! Sin has "magnified itself to do great things," and it has done them. It has boasted itself against nature, and filled the earth with disorder, cruelty, and anguish. It has boasted itself against man, and covered him with dishonour, pierced him with misery, dug his grave. It has boasted itself against God, spoiling His works, thwarting His purpose, grieving Him at His heart. It has done great things. It is doing them, it is preparing to do them. We often stand appalled in the presence of evil; we are awed by it, staggered by it. There is something in it that is so mysterious, immeasurable, unfathomable, unaccountable. All our efforts to arrest it seem ridiculous. Scientists identify it with the cosmical force. Philosophers recognise in it the authority of necessity. Reformers and educationists faint as they struggle against the sea-power of evil. And the religious worker often feels the terrible chill of despondency and despair.

II. We dwell upon THE "GREAT THINGS" OF THE DIVINE GRACE. "Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the Lord will do great things." The adversary has magnified himself, vaunted himself, to do "great things," and God responds to his challenge: "I, the Lord, will do great things; I will show that My strength prevails against the rage of evil, I will drive the locusts into the sea, I will destroy the destroyer, and bring his work to a perpetual end." 1. Let us notice the wonderful way in which God limits evil. "But I will remove far off from you the northern army, and will drive him into a land barren and desolate, with his face towards the east sea, and his hinder part towards the utmost sea, and his stink shall come up, and his ill savour shall come up, because he hath done great things." If we look into nature we see that limits have ever been put to the destructive forces. The geologists tell us this. The wild, terrible, murderous dragons of the primitive age were held in check. According to the theory of some scientists, the stronger animals invariably destroy the weaker, but, if that be so, how is it that these awful primeval monsters, all teeth and claws, did not take possession of the earth and keep possession? It is certain that they did not; palæontology answers us that the best armed species are those which have almost always disappeared. There were laws and forces which hedged in the wildest elements, and gave security and permanence to the weaker but nobler races. And we

to-day see the same restraints put upon the noxious things of nature. The naturalist makes this clear. In New Guinea is a venomous bird known as the "Bird of Death." Its bite causes excruciating pain, blindness, and lockjaw. No person bitten by it, it is asserted, has recovered, and death comes within a few hours. How is it that this bird of bad omen has not multiplied and taken possession of the forests? How is it that the birds of Paradise manage to survive by its side? Or, to come nearer home, how is it that the hawk does not exterminate the sweet singers of our woods? The "devil plant" of the Mississippi is most fatal; it kills insects and cattle, and rich meadow lands shrivel at its insidious approach as if they had been touched with fire. How is it that the infernal thing remains within certain regions? In Nicaragua is the "vampire vine," which seems literally to drain the blood of every living thing which comes within its death-dealing touch. How is it that this vampire vine does not prevail, and drive out the vine whose purple clusters make glad the heart of man? One of the old kings had a garden planted solely with poison flowers; how is it that the whole earth has not become such a garden? The fact is, there is a vigilant, benign law, a balance of nature, which keeps these formidable growths within limit beyond which they cannot pass, and, instead of sickly colours, vile odours, and deadly poisons dominating the panorama, the landscape is full of loveliness, fragrance, and health. The octopus, the alligator, the shark threaten the seas, but the same law prevails there that prevails on the land, shielding whatsoever passeth through the depth of the seas. And the physiologist tells us the same story. One would expect that diseases of the blood and brain would be transmitted from one generation to another, until the whole race would become infected, and the earth degenerate into a lazar house; but the physiologist answers us that there is "a limit to the transmission of abnormal characteristics." And if you look into history you are taught exactly the same lesson. The Pharaohs, the Neros, the Attilas, the Mahomets, the Tamerlanes, the Alvas, the Napoleons now and again threaten civilisation; it lies helpless and bleeding at their feet; but the historian shows that there is always a rock on which their Armadas suffer shipwreck, a Moscow in which their armies perish. And it is thus to-day in this world of ours. All about us are horrible things, infectious literature, vile institutions, degrading practices, which threaten the very life of the nation. And prowling around are thousands of selfish, cruel monsters, ready to prey on their helpless fellows. It is a mystery that they do not eat us up. But they do not. Just as there is a secret law circumscribing the shark, the vampire, the corpse plant, the upas, so God's eye is upon the drinking saloon, the infamous press, the gambling club, the camera obscura of lust, the prize ring, the opium den, and all the rest of the terrible things which menace civilisation, and the proud, raging waves of hell foaming out their own shame are broken on unseen, mystic sands which God has fixed as the bounds over which they may not pass. He limits one bad thing by another bad thing; He limits one bad thing by a thing less bad; He limits all bad things by the golden ring of His perfect sovereign government.

2. But God does not merely intend to limit evil; He designs the full triumph of righteousness. It is not enough that He should restrain the force and fury of the devil within given breakwaters; He means to confound evil, to abolish it. "Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the Lord hath done great things." "And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten." "The Lord hath done great things" in the direction of this absolute victory. The Gospel is a revelation of "great things." The advent of our Lord; His personal moral glory; His ministry; His passion; His atoning death; His resurrection; His ascension into heaven; His sending forth of the Holy Spirit; His session at the right hand of God,—these are the mighty accomplished facts of redemption which justify our boast that the Lord hath done "great things." Over against the destructive things and methods of wickedness He has put a "great salvation" which was first spoken by the Lord, and which was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him. And in its application the "great salvation" has vindicated its name. At once in the actual world the first evangelists proved its efficacy. The "great things" of God at once assert themselves against the "great things" of darkness, against the rulers of this world. And is not Christianity the great force that overcomes evil in the world of to-day? It is the saving power in the heathen world. And here at home the "great things" of the Gospel are the hope of society. Nothing goes to the root of the evil we bemoan but the doctrines

of the Gospel; nothing really grapples with sin but the power of grace; nothing creates amongst us a living, organic righteousness except the truth and love and power of God in Jesus Christ. And it will continue to save and bless. Do not lose heart, do not be overwhelmed by the vision of evil. (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *Gracious promises* :—These promises are applied and amplified. Application is made to the land, that it should not fear, but rejoice, seeing God was to do great things; and to the beasts, that they should lay aside their fear, since the earth was to be blessed with pasture and fruit. Learn—1. The Lord would have His promises and comforts applied to them to whom they are given, for their refreshment. 2. God's kindness to penitents will be such, as not only to refresh themselves, but to gladden and refresh their land, their beasts, and all in their kind. 3. Penitents are instrumental to draw down blessings on themselves and on what they enjoy. 4. God's care of the earth, and of the very cattle, may assure penitents of His respects to them. 5. God, when He pleaseth, can make fears end in joy, and the hope thereof should bring joy, when fear is yet on. 6. God's great power who promiseth, and who hath given proof thereof in executing threatenings, may guard against fear, and afford ground of hope, were the thing promised never so great and difficult. 7. God can, and in due time will remove the fears of His people, by giving actual proofs of His love, for so are they encouraged by the promises made to the beasts for their sake and good. (*George Hutcheson.*)

Ver. 25. *I will restore to you the years which the locust hath eaten.*—*The great Restorer* :—Locusts are happily unknown in England. We have only the harmless grasshopper here. Where plagues of locusts are known no one could wonder that the writer of this book should represent them as a veritable army, leaving the desolations of war in their train, a desolation which would naturally take whole years to repair. Herein is a picture of some years in the life of humanity. A German philosopher has summed up our earthly state in the words, "Man has two and a half minutes here below—one to smile, one to sigh, and half a one to love; for in the midst of this minute he dies." It is so apart from God. He is the only Restorer. Deny God, and the locusts are victorious for ever; the desolation is final and complete. Some years in some lives, and some lives as a whole, do seem to have fallen a prey to the locusts. We all know when we are wronged. And most of us feel keenly wrongs endured by others. The words of the text are spoken to a repentant nation. "I will restore." God is pledged to do so by His very being. To that He must be true. So great is this necessity that God—may I say it?—does not trouble to be consistent on any lower plane. He is ever true to that name, which means far more than anything we know under the name Love. Years may be apparently eaten by locusts which are not really so. When God's hereafter is recognised, what possibilities of restoration appear! The Incarnate Word came to do the work of restoration from sin, and the miseries it has caused and causes. (*W. A. Cornaby.*) *Lost years* :—Lost years can never be restored literally. Time once past is gone for ever. The locusts did not eat the years—the locusts ate the fruit of the years' labour, the harvests of the field: so that the meaning of the restoration of the years must be restoration of those fruits and of those harvests which the locusts consumed. You cannot have back your time; but there is a strange and wonderful way in which God can give back to you the wasted blessings, the unripened fruits of years over which you have mourned. The fruits of wasted years may yet be yours. By giving to His repentant people larger harvests than the land could naturally yield, God could give back to them, as it were, all they would have had if the locusts had never come; and God, by giving you larger grace in the present and in the future, can make the life which has hitherto been blighted, and eaten up with the locust, the caterpillar and the palmer-worm of sin, and self, and Satan, yet to be a complete, a blessed, and useful life to His praise and glory. Linger over this mystery of love. Picture the spirits of evil, year after year bearing away from the fields of human life all their harvests. Whither have they borne the precious products? The fruits of wasted years are gone—gone past hope. Yet the Lord will bring forth life out of the tomb; those long-lost spoils shall be restored. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Does not the very difficulty, yea impossibility, of the enterprise make it the more worthy of the Almighty? To him that believeth all things are possible. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The cankered years* :—The moral not the picturesque aspect of the visitation of locusts is uppermost in the prophet's mind. He

proclaims it as a punishment for the people's sin, and as a call to repentance. If they shall repent, he promises a blessing which shall amply atone for past suffering. Wasted and blasted years are a fact in most human lives. The appalling thing is the years which have been eaten up by little, scarcely appreciable agencies, like a caterpillar or a canker-worm. Years which have gone, frittered away, we do not know how, and for which we have nothing whatever to show, years devoured in trifles; years that fled, as on the wings of a hurricane, in the wild rush of dissipation, and out of which are left only the broken strains of old songs, and a few dry leaves of withered garlands. The exquisitely bitter thought in this vision of wasted years is that of our own share in the desolation; and when our eyes are once fairly opened to the waste, our first impulse is to cast about for some method of restoration. How does God deal with facts like these? Does His economy include any law of restoration? It is evident that any economy of restoration must not only be based on superhuman wisdom, but must include superhuman compassion. "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap," is a law which God does not violate in morals any more than in the fields. Viewed simply as a matter of law, the wasted years cannot be restored. The element of expiation only evades the difficulty. It does not meet it. Suffering is not a fair equivalent for the results of neglect or of wilful wrong. How contrition may affect one's moral relations to God is one thing; how it affects the results of his wrong-doing or idleness is quite another and a different thing. An ocean of tears will not give back life nor innocence. Repentance is a great power, but there are some things which repentance cannot do. On this side the truth is awful in its inflexibility. I pity the materialist when he comes to the question of repairing moral waste. I pity the positivist before the frantic appeal of a remorseful soul. If God does not ignore the action of the physical law, which is none the less His law, that law must at least be taken up and carried somehow in the sweep of a larger law. Perhaps it is not possible to formulate that larger law. At any rate it is not necessary, however desirable it might be. We want to know how it touches a man standing penitently in view of his eaten years. Some things may give us consolation and hope. 1. We have the general sweeping promise of God. "I will restore the eaten years." We might fall confidently back on that alone. Restoration, according to the Divine ideal, is a possibility and a fact in the Divine economy. And some features of the process we know. For example, God turns the man entirely away from the thought and the work of literal restoration. He does not ask him to make good, in the sense of a literal equivalent, the waste of the past. His concern is with the present and the future, not with the past. Whatever God may do with the faultful past, a penitent soul can only leave it in God's hands. His work now is not to make good the past, but to give himself to the development of his new life as a new creature in Christ Jesus. The self-scrutiny of a repentant and forgiven man ought to be directed not at what he has been, but at what he is. Still, it is not restoration, that a man should simply leave the past behind him. God gives certain things which were forfeited in the wasted years of sin. God does not let the darkness of a man's past come up like a cloud between the man and the outraying of His Divine tenderness. The faultful past may, and often does, poison human affection. Human nature forgives hesitatingly, and there is a background of suspicion behind reinstated confidence. But God believes in the possibility of a genuine repentance, and frankly accepts it. Repentance is a factor of immense meaning in God's economy of restoration. When God heals a man's backslidings, He loves him freely. Restoration is included in restored sonship. There are certain incidents on the line of actual restoration which are noteworthy. God has a wonderful power of bringing good out of evil, and of getting interest even out of the evil of wasted years. In manufacturing communities, large fortunes are sometimes made out of what is technically called "waste." God discerns facts and possibilities in waste which we cannot see and could not be trusted to see. Illustrate from the story of John B. Gough. God strikes at the evil, but He saves the power out of the wreck, and the man carries the matured power over to the side of God's kingdom, and makes it an instrument of spiritual victory and conquest. We do not, and we cannot know what God does with the irrevocable and the irremediable in men's evil past; but we do know that He makes those barren and blasted heritages bloom again, and bring forth thirty, sixty, and an hundredfold. Both the Bible and Christian history are full of the grand fruitful work of restored men, men with large tracts of blasted years behind them. The

best thing in restoration is getting back to God. Renewal, fruitfulness, peace, are not in our new resolutions, nor in our turning to new duties; they are in His presence, His touch upon us, His guidance. The promise of restoration shall have a higher fulfilment by and by. "In God all lost things are found, and they who habitually plunge themselves in God and abide in Him, never become too rich. Nay, they find more things than they can lose." Let us not, however, presume upon all this to neglect our heritage. Let us not be tempted by this revelation of God's amazing goodness and restorative power, to think lightly of blight and bareness. God's promise of restoration is no encouragement to presumption. It does not make any less terrible the blight and canker which are due to our neglect or waste. God help us all! These lives of ours have been so faulty, so fitful, so unproductive. What shall we do? Surely not unduly mourn over the past, when He says, "I will restore." (*M. R. Vincent, D.D.*) *Twofold restoration*:—These words refer to a twofold restoration. I. The restoration of lost MATERIAL MERCIES. "I will restore you the years that the locust hath eaten." Restoration is God's peculiar work. Who but He can restore the earth? An insect may destroy a giant; but God alone can restore the life of a dying flower. Restoration is God's constant work. From death He brings life to all nature. Spring is the grand annual illustration of it. God restores lost temporal blessings to His people in two ways—1. By giving back the same in kind, as in the case of Job; and 2. By restoring that which answers the same purpose. II. The restoration of lost RELIGIOUS PRIVILEGES. What are these? 1. Worship. "And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and My people shall never be ashamed." 2. Communion. "And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God, and none else." (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 26. *And ye shall eat in plenty.*—*The promise of plenty a motive to gratitude*.—I. THE BRANCHES OF THIS PROMISE. 1. "Ye shall eat in plenty." To eat and to eat in plenty, are pleasures which threatenings have disjoined and separated. 2. Satisfaction. "Be satisfied." 3. The body is refreshed and nourished. 4. Contentment with our portion. 5. The power to eat. 6. Interest in the promise of eating is manifested and apprehended. 7. The blessing is in satisfaction. 8. God is enjoyed as our God in Christ. "And praise the name of the Lord." These words point to a comprehensive duty. 1. Acknowledging the goodness of the Lord our God in creating plenty and bestowing satisfaction. 2. Rejoicing in the goodness of the Lord our God, "who giveth us fruitful seasons, and filleth our heart with food and gladness." Joy in His name is a chief part of praise. Though the good be a material or sensible good, the joy in which we praise Him is a spiritual joy. 3. Serving the Lord our God, in holiness and righteousness, all the days of our life. 4. Exercises concerning the person, and office, and beauty, excellence, riches, treasures, fulness, and sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ, are essential in the praise which glorifies the name of the Lord God. II. THE MOTIVE TO HUMBLE OURSELVES AND PRAISE THE NAME OF THE LORD GOD. There is something in God's dealing that is wondrous. See in Joel's sphere. 1. Calling off and destroying the devouring army is wondrous. 2. After the devastation, the springing of the earth is wondrous. 3. The seasonable rain which cooled the air and moistened the earth is wondrous. 4. The uncommon fertility of the years which succeeded the ravages of the army and the drought is wondrous. Make application to those who are in easy and affluent circumstances. Also to poor householders, &c. (*A. Shanks.*) *Using aright God's restored blessings*:—What use should be made of these returns of God's mercy to them? 1. God shall have all the glory thereof. What is the matter of their rejoicing shall be matter of their thanksgiving. The plenty of our creature comforts is a mercy indeed to us, when by them our hearts are enlarged in love and thankfulness to God, who gives us all things richly to enjoy, though we serve Him but poorly. 2. They shall have the credit, and comfort, and spiritual benefit thereof. When God gives them plenty again, and gives them to be satisfied with it—(1) Their reputation shall be retrieved. (2) Their joy shall be revived. (3) Their faith in God shall be confirmed and increased. We should labour to grow in our acquaintance with God by all providences, both merciful and afflictive. 3. Even the inferior creatures shall share therein, and be made easy thereby. They had suffered for the sin of man, and for God's quarrel with him, and now they shall fare the better for man's repentance and

God's reconciliation to him. This may lead us to think of the restitution of all things, when the creature, that is now made subject to vanity and groans under it, shall be brought, though not into the glorious joy, yet into the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. viii. 21). (*Matthew Henry.*) *Harvest thanksgiving*.—Joel comforts Israel with a declaration of God's mercies. He speaks of a change for the better which God would bring upon the Jews' land,—a change from drought and barrenness, from blight and devouring insect, to fertility and large increase. Joy in harvest is a practice as old as any that is in the world. We find it in heathen as well as in Christian times. Especially do we find it among God's own people, the Israelites. Their Feast of Tabernacles is also called the Feast of the Ingathering, or the Feast of the Harvest. For seven days they rejoiced together before the Lord. They brought an offering, some fruit of their land, each according to his ability, and as God had blessed him. In this they are our example. To a certain extent this joy at harvest has always been found amongst us. The shouting for the last load, the harvest supper in the master's barn, witness to this feeling. Of late years there have come into use what are called Harvest Festivals. These do not interfere with the old customs of harvest joy. They only lift that joy into a higher sphere by adding the religious element. Praising God is our bounden duty at this time. And an unusual spirit of thankfulness seems to be now upon our people. Such a general remembering of the name of the Lord God is most refreshing to witness, and fraught with good omen for our country. We take our side with those who depart not from the living God, "Giver to all of life and breath, and all things." The praise of our lips must be seconded by the praise of our life. (*R. D. B. Rawnsley, M.A.*) *Praise for plenty*.—I. THE PROMISE OF AN AMPLE SUFFICIENCY OF FOOD FOR THE USE OF MAN. "Ye shall eat in plenty." Such, from the productiveness of the earth, the excellence of the weather to ripen, and for the gathering in of the late harvest, ought to be the case with even the most toiling and humble classes of our fellow-countrymen during the winter. The poor are greatly dependent on the bounties of Providence. II. THE DUTY OF PRAISE. "Ye shall praise the name of the Lord your God." It was a charge brought by Jeremiah against the Jews, that they overlooked the hand of God in filling them with the finest of the wheat. Many considerations are adapted to excite and strengthen our gratitude for the blessings of the harvest. All was suspended on the will of God; and where should we have been if God had rewarded us according to our iniquities? Now turn to consider the higher signification of which the text is capable. Not one thing mentioned, as the subject of promise or the ground of duty, but has an evangelical complexion, and may be applied to the Gospel in its nature and claims. (1) Look at the provision of the Gospel. There is no emblem under which the blessings of salvation are more commonly or more aptly exhibited than that of food. The Gospel is the bread of life. It is placed before us with unstinted and ungrudging liberality. (2) Look at the satisfaction. There is this material difference between earthly and heavenly things. The meat for which men labour is perishable. To live in peace as to the safety of the soul, is not that satisfying? (3) Look at the praise. If praise is due for temporal blessings, how much more is it due for our eternal redemption, for gospel provisions. (*Anon.*) *My people shall never be ashamed*.—*The courage and confidence of God's people*.—Of God the prophet says, "He shall deal wonderfully with you." I. THE NATURE AND GROUND OF THAT CONFIDENCE UNDER WHICH BELIEVERS "SHALL NEVER BE ASHAMED." They that fear the Lord rest upon the strong arm of Omnipotence; therefore they are not afraid. In the hour of their temptation the precepts of God are the source of their spiritual vigour. They build on a foundation which shall never shake under them, therefore they tremble not in the day of adversity. The sure and certain promises of God, given through Christ by the Gospel, afford to the faithful in Christ a never-failing source of courage and confidence in the day of trial. "The righteous is bold as a lion" in the face of danger; for his anchor of hope is thrown out, and holds fast to the eternal rock of his salvation. Time cannot shake the courage of the faithful; for this courage has its graft in a Divine stock, which is eternal. II. THE EFFECT OF THIS GODLY BOLDNESS AND CONFIDENCE. Shame and confusion of face bring distress and disquietude. There cannot be true peace within, where there is habitual feeling of shame, and sense of dread, doubt, and misgiving. The courage of the people of God is a state of peace within, solidly based, strongly secured beneath the adamantine bars of Divine

grace, redeeming love, the Gospel's gladdening voice and elevating spirit. A state of well-trying and well-founded courage is a state of well-assured and well-supported peace. And the tranquillity depends not upon outward things for its permanency, but rests upon the watchful guardianship and unchangeable love of the Shepherd and Bishop of souls. See the great excellency of the benefit of this gift of godly courage. Is it not desirable to be enabled to walk through life, securely armed amid its storms, in a track undeviating, fixed, and steadfast, preserving the even tenor of a godly course, without weariness and without wavering? This is the sound consistency of character which we should all aim after. What shall give you confidence in the day of adversity, but the sure provision of Divine grace laid up in the soul? What shall give you boldness in the day of Christ's appearing, but the love you have had for Christ, the concern you have shown for the "one thing needful," and the diligence you have used in "working out your salvation with fear and trembling"? (*W. Stone, M.A.*) *No condemnation to the righteous*:—There are few men in whom the moral sense is so extinguished that they never think at all of a judgment to come. But there are many deceits by which the worldly minded may impose on themselves. Putting off consideration to a more convenient season. Attempting to serve two masters. But religion is not a thing for half measures. Who are those who shall never be ashamed? They are described as "the people of God." Not persons wholly free from sin. Those who hate sin, and are earnestly striving to be wholly freed from it. Their sins are sins of ignorance or infirmity; and these, though they call for sorrow, can hardly demand shame. The people of God are those in whom there is honesty and integrity of moral purpose, rather than actual conformity to the whole law of God. **I. THE MAN OF GOD HAS NO CAUSE TO BE ASHAMED WHEN HE SEARCHES INTO HIMSELF.** Arraign him before the tribunal of conscience. There could be nothing of shame where there was nothing of sin. Shame entered the world with sin. Our first parents had no sooner transgressed than conscience poured out its reproaches, and they hid themselves from the presence of the Lord. When his own heart is laid open to a man, he shrinks from the scene of foulness and deformity. He cannot look into a single recess of his heart without finding fresh cause for confusion of face. Can a man ever be so transformed that he may search into himself and find no reason to be ashamed? It is not true that he can ever examine himself and find no impurity. But his paramount desire, and unwearying endeavour, may be to obey in everything the law of his God. When he falls into sin, it is not because he loves it; and his every offence is quickly followed by penitence and confession. If a man "have respect unto all God's commandments," conscience may produce the catalogue of his sins, and yet not put him to shame. If a man have not sinned deliberately, and if he have repented sincerely, there is nothing of which he needs to be ashamed. **II. THE MAN OF GOD HAS NO CAUSE TO BE ASHAMED WHEN HE STANDS BEFORE THE WORLD.** Arraign him before the tribunal of the world. Nothing but a clear conscience will enable us to look the world clearly and calmly in the face. We know how, in extreme cases, the inquietude of conscience will make a man afraid to meet his fellow-man. Probably much of the reluctance that is observable among Christians to reprove unrighteousness and assert cause of truth may be traced to a consciousness of their own inconsistency, which makes them ashamed to condemn what they too often practise, and recommend what they are apt to neglect. It is quite essential, in order that we be not ashamed before men, that we be not ashamed at the tribunal of conscience. The world is very disposed to impute wrong motives to the professors of religion—to put a false construction on actions which should excite the praise of all honest and well-meaning men. What is to secure Christians in the midst of unceasing endeavours to laugh them to scorn? They must uphold the characteristics of God's people, and have respect unto all God's commandments. There is no other receipt against shame. The people of God must carry religion with them into every business of life, and see that all scenes are pervaded by its influence. Christians should bear themselves with that lofty dignity which no calumny could disturb. **III. THE MAN OF GOD HAS NO CAUSE TO BE ASHAMED WHEN HE STANDS BEFORE GOD.** Here it will not serve our argument to say that there is no love of sin, for every offence must be known. Indeed, if the blush is to be removed from our hearts, only by a consciousness that though God may search us and try us, He will find no evil in us, we must be left without confidence. But the people of God have respect unto all God's

commandments ; and amongst these from the first have been reckoned the commandments which relate to faith. Here we have the ground-work of confidence before God, notwithstanding our own insufficiency. There is a breadth and fulness in the work of atonement which makes it commensurate with every necessity, leaving nothing unperformed which either human wants or Divine honour could demand. Then how are God's people to be ashamed before God ? (II. Melvill, B.D.) *Never ashamed* :—The explorer may be ashamed because the route he has patiently followed may lose itself in the waste, or the theory he has adopted may fail to explain all the facts. The discoverer may be ashamed because the unknown substance will not yield up its secrets to his tests. But God's people shall never be ashamed—never in this world, never in the next. In the hour of death and in the day of judgment, never ashamed. I. NEVER ASHAMED IN OFFERING PRAYERS WHICH GOD HAS HIMSELF INDITED. There are many prayers, doubtless, in which we shall be ashamed. We endeavour to impose our will on the Eternal, with strong cryings and tears, as though to carry His unwillingness by the rush of our assault. Nay, it is not thus that we shall prevail. Of these prayers we shall often have good reason to be ashamed. But the true prayer is far other than this. II. NEVER ASHAMED IN OUR APPEAL FOR HELP AGAINST TEMPTATION. Temptations do not cease with increasing years. There may be now and then a brief lull and respite, but the storm will break with all the greater intensity. The temptations which you overcame in earlier life will come back again, urged on you by cleverer, subtler, more crafty spirits than before. Our only hope is to remain in union with the Risen, Living Saviour, whose Name is above every name, so that at the Name of Jesus every knee shall bow of things under the earth. III. NEVER ASHAMED IN THE RESULT OF WORDS WHICH HE HAS GIVEN US TO SPEAK, OR IN THE MISSIONS ON WHICH HE HAS SENT US. We may be very often ashamed as we consider the result of the elaborated sentences and perfected style ; very much ashamed of the nett result of enterprises which we have planned and executed with consummate care. Where are your sheaves ? I have none. And why is this ? Because our work has been in the power of the flesh. IV. NEVER ASHAMED OF OUR HOPE. (F. B. Meyer, B.A.)

Ver. 27. *My people shall never be ashamed.*—*Religion, a source of constant confidence* :—Joel was the bearer of very heavy tidings. Their sins had exceeded the bounds of Divine patience. I. THE CHARACTER UNDER WHICH THE PERSONS MENTIONED IN THE TEXT APPEAR BEFORE US. He calls them "My people." This shows that they belong to God by some peculiar appropriation. He speaks of them as having His favour, as deriving blessings from Him, and as feeling, under a consciousness of His presence abiding with them, a confidence which the wicked never possess. They are a chosen people ; a sanctified people ; and an obedient people. They are always set upon obedience, and sorry when they do not render it. II. THE HONOURABLE AND ENCOURAGING STATEMENT WHICH GOD MAKES CONCERNING THEM. "My people shall never be ashamed." 1. They shall not be ashamed of their principles. Which serve them at all times. And they are good, profitable to society, and calculated to advance the interests of men ! 2. They are not ashamed of the singularity which distinguishes their conduct. 3. Of the confidence which they repose in God. And they shall not be ashamed amid the terrors of the last great day. (W. Curling, M.A.) *Not ashamed* :—After the desolation caused by the locusts is to come a time of great fruitfulness. In the words, "My people shall never be ashamed," we have a great principle of God's government announced, and the promise is emphatically repeated. I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROMISE. It covers all history, and the whole individual life, and reaches on "within the veil." The promise involves—1. An implied assertion of surrounding troubles and conflict. Much which is calculated to put men to shame, and to cause doubt and sorrow ; e.g., loathsome diseases, fearful crimes, error perverting and hindering truth, drunkenness, ignorance, immorality at our doors and in our streets. Where sin is, there must be shame. 2. An express encouragement to steadfast faith. God "undertakes for" His people. 3. A sure prediction of final triumph. The promise has progressive fulfilment. Shame and fear are again and again beaten back until the last victory comes, and shame and sin are left behind for ever. II. THE CHARACTER OF THOSE TO WHOM THE PROMISE IS MADE. God's people are put in antithesis with the heathen, the ungodly, the unbelieving. They are those who have turned to Him in true penitence, have experienced His pardoning love, and now trust in

Him. They are "led by the Spirit." Can we take the comfort of this promise? On one side of man's destinies is certainty of shame; on the other, assurance of glory. Troubles shall issue in joy; trials shall conduct to triumph. (*W. Saumarez Smith, B.D.*)

Ver. 28. **And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh.**—*The new Gospel era* :—The prophet had encouraged the nation to repentance by announcing the temporal blessings which would be consequent thereon. They would get the former rain, they would get the latter rain. The floors would be filled with wheat, and the fats would overflow with wine and oil. Desolation would vanish, plenty would return. This was the lower sphere of benediction consequent upon their repentance. Now the prophet mentions the higher blessing to follow,—the spiritual, of which the temporal was but a type.

I. **THAT THE NEW GOSPEL ERA WOULD BE CHARACTERISED BY A COPIOUS OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT** (ver. 28). 1. The time. "Afterward." "In those days." To what time does this refer? To the days of the prophet? To the era of the law? Or, to the time when the promised Messiah should come? This outpouring of the Spirit seems to be connected by the prophet with the secular prosperity of which he had been speaking. He probably did not know the time to which his words had reference; but if it was in the future it was as real to his faith as the present to his sight. This promise no doubt had reference to the Messianic age, though Joel may not have been cognizant of the fact. It was not fulfilled at Bethlehem, nor in Gethsemane, nor at Calvary, nor at Olivet. It was still "afterward." It was partially accomplished at Pentecost (Acts ii. 17), though there was concealed in it a deeper meaning than even Pentecost could impart, the entire significance of which we are as yet ignorant. We live in this afterward of time, and know its meaning, as did not the prophets of old; but the afterward of the kingdom of heaven has yet to evolve the universal reign of the Spirit of God. 2. The author. "I will pour." This outpouring of the Holy Spirit was to be of Divine origin. It is the alone prerogative of the Eternal God to bestow the Spirit upon mankind. Joel did not connect the gift of the Spirit in any way with himself, or with any agency he could command. Nor did Peter on the day of Pentecost. Prophets and apostles, however distinguished they may have been, were not the authors but the channels of spiritual energy. Man cannot give the Holy Spirit to his fellow-man. Thoughtful books cannot bestow it; organisation cannot impart it. This is the testimony of Scripture; this is in conformity with human experience, and with the moral inability of man to originate good. Hence we must go to God for it. We must wait His time. We must comply with the moral conditions necessary to its reception. We must give Him the praise and glory of its advent in any measure. All true spiritual emotion is from above. 3. The extent. "I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh." The Divine Spirit was to be poured out without distinction of age, sex, country, or genius. It should be given to universal man. It would not be confined to the covenant nation. The poor, the slave, the unlearned—all should receive this gift. It would be poured out; not drop by drop, but as a mighty shower; even as copiously as the rain after the prayer of Elijah. The gift of the Spirit is not limited by any restraint upon the Divine ability to give. It is not limited by time. Sin cannot stay it, for grace abounds much more than sin. Then why is not spiritual influence more potently with us? 4. The effect. "And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions." This does not limit the universal application of the promise, but simply gives examples of those who shall realise it, and the effect it will have upon them. In the early ages of the Church, the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were imparted; but they have ceased, and, instead, we have illumination of soul, a beauteous insight into the truth of God, bright visions of destiny; for these are the things which now accompany and evince the presence of the Holy Ghost.

II. **THAT THE NEW GOSPEL ERA WOULD BE CHARACTERISED BY THE MOST ALARMING TEMPORAL COMMOTIONS.** "And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke," &c. God gives successive revelations of Himself; revelations of the spirit of mercy, and also of the spirit of judgment. The phenomena here named are physical in their nature, but have a deep moral significance. The great events of Christianity have been signalled by phenomena in the material universe. The guiding of the star at the birth of Christ. The darkness of the sun at the Crucifixion. The

wind and fire at Pentecost. Nature is in sympathy with the great plans of God. The progress of truth occasions many wondrous phenomena. It darkens many suns. It turns many moons into blood. It is in conflict with dark prejudice, with wilful error, with the carnal mind, with sinful passion, with old custom, with proud philosophy; hence the moral commotion intimated in the text, and illustrated by the history of Christ. But all these commotions will be penetrated and mitigated by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, will yield ultimate quietude when the voice of God shall be heard, and the peace of the Divine reign finally established. III. THAT THE NEW GOSPEL ERA WOULD BE CHARACTERISED BY A MERCIFUL ARRANGEMENT FOR THE SALVATION OF ALL EARNEST SUPPLIANTS. "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered," &c. 1. Salvation in the time of peril. The Gospel era shall provide safety for human souls amidst the awful calamities which shall then befall the world. 2. Salvation in the time of despair. 3. Salvation on easy conditions. There might be mystery in the darkened sun, but not about the salvation to be had. It is to be had from God by prayer. Lessons:—1. That God is the author of all true reviving influence. 2. That the gift of the Holy Spirit is co-extensive with the range of universal life. 3. That in the Gospel era the Divine Spirit is richly manifest. 4. That while we must anticipate times of moral commotion, we must also expect times when the redemptive purpose shall be more fully manifest. (J. S. Exell, M.A.) *The nature of the great spiritual change which we anticipate:—* This prophecy was not finally fulfilled upon the day of Pentecost. The effusion of the Spirit on that day must be regarded as typical of the final outpouring of the Spirit in the last ages of the world. 1. The necessity of an effusion of the Divine Spirit in order to accomplish the change that is needed. There never can be such a transformation, as the principles of Christianity show to be required by the condition of the world, except by a mighty and resistless agency on the hearts of men by the Holy Spirit of God. The necessity of this effusion will appear if you consider—1. The absolute and perfect failure of all agency apart from Him, which hitherto has been employed by man. 2. The precise and essential nature of the change which is anticipated and desired. It is not a change in the external aspect of things, it is a change of principle; it is a change of motives; it is the transformation of all opposition on the part of man towards the government of God, and interests of eternity. 3. The appropriation to the Divine Spirit of the various offices which are assigned to Him in the economy of redemption. It is the Spirit who quickens, who converts the soul, who urges to faith, who instructs, guides, consoles, seals, &c. 4. The ascription to the Spirit of the great change in the latter day which we are led to anticipate throughout the whole structure of the prophetic writings. Whoever looks for the renovation of future times, and the amelioration of the state of man, to any agent short of the one to which we now ascribe it, is most grievously mistaken, and does most impiously blaspheme. II. THE MODE IN WHICH THE EFFUSION OF THE DIVINE SPIRIT WILL BE CONDUCTED. 1. The effusion of the Divine Spirit will be preceded by remarkable and extensive providential changes in human society. With regard to the precise instrumentality employed, few would venture on distinct assertion. Possibly much public agitation and national convulsion may be necessary. 2. It will be immediately associated with the propagation of the Word of God, and the use of importunate prayer. 3. The effusion of the Divine Spirit will be imparted with great and extraordinary rapidity. Hitherto there has been but a slow impartation of spiritual influence. Two topics need consideration. (1) Whether the era of the final effusion of the Spirit will be introduced by miraculous agency. (2) At what time may the effusion be expected. III. THE EFFECTS WHICH THE EFFUSION OF THE SPIRIT WILL PRODUCE. On the Church—removing its ignorance, and healing its divisions: sanctifying its members. On the world—it shall then be given to God. (James Parsons.) *Prosperity and the Spirit:—*Upon the promises of physical blessing there follows another of the outpouring of the Spirit: the prophecy by which Joel became the prophet of Pentecost, and through which his book is best known among Christians. The order of events makes us pause to question: does Joel mean to imply that physical prosperity must precede spiritual fulness? It would be unfair to assert that he does, without remembering what he understands by the physical blessings. To Joel these are the token that God has returned to His people. The drought and the famine produced by the locusts were signs of His anger and of His divorce of the land. The proofs that He has relented and taken Israel back into a spiritual

relation to Himself, can, therefore, from Joel's point of view, only be given by the healing of the people's wounds. In plenteous rains and full harvests God sets His seal to man's penitence. Rain and harvest are not merely physical benefits, but religious sacraments: signs that God has returned to His people, and that His zeal is again stirred on their behalf (Joel i. 18). This has to be made clear before there can be talk of any higher blessing. God has to return to His people and to show His love for them before He pours forth His Spirit upon them. . . . From Joel's standpoint physical blessings may have been as religious as spiritual, but we must go further, and assert that for Joel's anticipation of the baptism of the Spirit by a return of prosperity, there is an ethical reason, and one which is permanently valid in history. A certain degree of prosperity, and even of comfort, is an indispensable condition of that universal and lavish exercise of the religious faculties, which Joel pictures under the pouring forth of God's Spirit. The history of prophecy itself furnishes us with proofs of this. And has it been otherwise in the history of Christianity? An acute historian observes that every religious revival in England has happened upon a basis of comparative prosperity. (*G. Adam Smith, D.D.*) *The manifestation of the Holy Ghost*:—Joel appears to move "in the circle of moral convictions, and of eschatological hopes." He has been called "the prophet of the manifestation of the Holy Ghost." I. A PREDICTION OF THE COMING OF THE HOLY GHOST. 1. "I will pour out." These words suggest the abundance of the gift. 2. The effusion was to be "Of My Spirit," that is, the Holy Ghost. II. THE EXTENT OF THAT MANIFESTATION. 1. "Upon all flesh." This means upon all mankind. Giving the idea of an universal religion. 2. The gift is said to descend upon all "flesh," naming that which is lowest in our nature. 3. The outpouring only began on the day of Pentecost. 4. This outpouring will continue to flow on as long as the world lasts. See three effects of the Spirit's presence and operation in the souls of men, which are of the greatest practical moment—1. His presence has given a greater malignity to sin, in that, through His indwelling, sin is now brought so near to the Holy God; because the light which the Spirit imparts robs sin of the excuse of ignorance. And because sin is now committed, in spite of that new power to resist it which is bestowed by the presence of the Holy Ghost. 2. The presence of the Spirit, with His fruits and gifts, carries with it a higher standard and ideal than that of the old covenant. 3. The presence of the Spirit should impart fervour to all devotional exercises. (*Sunday in Church.*) *The promise of the Spirit*:—We, as well as the people of nineteen centuries ago, have an interest in the prophecy of Joel. Whithersoever the quickening influences of the Spirit of God shall come, there shall be spiritual life. And is not this the real want of the age? The term revival is frequently mentioned in these days. I. WHAT IS A REVIVAL? It is the renewal in effect and continuation of what took place under the preaching of the Word at Pentecost, when thousands of spiritually ignorant and perishing men were first quickened. Religion is a life, even the life of God in the soul. Without spiritual vitality there can be no real personal religion. Spiritual life is kindled in the soul by the Spirit of God. The first indications of this life are generally, not invariably, alarm. Its first act is faith. This life requires nourishment, and that is supplied chiefly by the Word of God and prayer. It has its inward growth and its outward manifestations. The spiritual life may be likened to an exotic. Revivals, or what is equivalent to them, are in separate departments of life found to be universally and indispensably needed. The Reformation in Germany was a gigantic revival. About 1743, within two or three years, thirty or forty thousand souls were born into the family of heaven. Numbers object to extended religious manifestations, because of the excitement which sometimes attends them. Some measure of excitement is, however, in the nature of things, inseparable from a time of awakening, either of one or of many. Many object to seasons of revival, because of the suddenness with which some conversions are effected: but there are various operations of the Spirit. A revival is just the gracious sovereign putting forth of Divine power on a great scale, to effect largely what in ordinary times takes place in one here and there through a community. II. WHAT ARE THE SIGNS THAT A REVIVAL IS NEEDED BY US? Weakness and fainting in some, and death in others. What is Christian life in its essence? It is the implanted, earnest, ever-expanding taste for and aspiration after the living God, reconciled in Christ, as one's all in all. It is that this state may become the state of every one of us, we need a revival. III. WHAT ARE THE HINDRANCES TO A REVIVAL AMONG US? Their name is legion. 1. Hindrances

in the Church. Unbelief is the sin which most easily besets us. It is the common crying sin of the Church. We are straitened in our own faith and hope. Disunion. Conformity to the world. 2. Hindrances in the world. Ignorance, indifference, infidelity, intemperance. IV. WHAT ARE THE MEANS BY WHICH WE AND OTHERS MIGHT RECEIVE A REVIVAL? Earnest, scriptural, impressive preaching. Earnest, instant, individual, and social prayer. Domestic discipline, instruction, and family worship. If we are to be Christians at all, we must be growing Christians. There is no such thing as standing still in the Divine life. Life is a battlefield on which the Christian soldier is either gaining ground or losing it. (*James Stirling Muir.*) *The outpouring of the Holy Spirit essential to a revival of religion* :—I. THE ANIMATING PREDICTION. Note the object promised—it was the Spirit. The term Spirit is used to denote His miraculous and gracious influences. The Spirit is a person. The influences of the Spirit may be considered as miraculous and as common. The former were peculiar to the apostolic age, the latter must be regarded as the privilege of believers in every period of time. Observe the persons who shall receive the Spirit. It will be “poured out upon all flesh.” This embraces the whole human race. Observe the season when this prediction will be verified. The “last days,” i.e., this entire present dispensation, the final economy of mercy to the world. II. THE GLORIOUS EFFECTS CONNECTED WITH THE DISPENSATION OF THE SPIRIT. Notice the blessings of the Spirit, as seen in the apostles—they were qualified by it for their work. And as it respects the revival of religion, the Gospel is attended with extraordinary success. III. THE MEANS BY WHICH THIS DIVINE INFLUENCE MAY BE MORE EMINENTLY ENJOYED BY US IN THE PRESENT DAY. 1. By a more decided and elevated tone of piety in the members of our churches. 2. By consecrating much time to devotion. 3. By a distinguished zeal in the promotion of those institutions which advance Immanuel’s cause. 4. By increasing harmony and affection among the disciples of Christ. Love to the brethren is the peculiar excellence of Christianity, the badge of discipleship, and the glory of religion. (*W. Yates.*) *The promise of the Spirit* :—This is the great Old Testament promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit; the first in order of time, the first in degree of importance. In the earlier Scriptures we find occasional allusions to the work of the Spirit. The prophecy of Joel contains the first utterance upon this great subject. Joel is thought by some to be the oldest of the Hebrew prophets who wrote. The structure of this prophecy is very simple. In the first we find God’s judgments upon His people. Their obtaining mercy. The punishment of their enemies. In the remainder of the book we have—1. The call to repentance. 2. The promise of blessing. 3. The judgment of the ungodly. Of the promise of the Spirit, which is the culminating point in the announcement of blessing, we have the warrant of St. Peter for saying that it received a fulfilment on the day of Pentecost. The expression “pour out” cannot be applied literally to a Divine person. It is symbolical, and adopted from the promise of rain in verse 23. The Lord Jesus, during His ministry, took up the promise, and both expanded and renewed it. There was, however, a condition upon the fulfilment of which the gift of the Spirit was contingent. The glorification of Jesus was to precede the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. It was to be the peculiar office of the Spirit to “testify of,” and “glorify” Christ, by “taking of the things of Christ, and showing them to His people.” But while we see in Pentecost a fulfilment of the prophecy, we may ask whether the Old Testament promise was exhausted upon the day of Pentecost. Certainly it was not. The prophecy is asserted by St. Peter to be co-extensive with the Divine calling, to run side by side with that calling so long as it shall continue, to belong therefore to the whole Christian dispensation. The “last days” is the New Testament term descriptive of the entire interval between the first and second advents. There are certain special and peculiar manifestations of the Spirit. God at times vouchsafes a gracious outpouring both upon the Church and the world. Have we any ground for expecting any such remarkable visitation in the present day? In examining the structure of the prophecy of Joel, we note the following sequences: (1) The call to repentance, addressed to the professing people of God. (2) The promise of blessing, culminating in the promise of the Spirit. (3) The announcements of judgments to be inflicted upon the enemies of God and His Church. This sequence of events took place in connection with Pentecost. There was then—(1) The universal preaching of repentance to the Jewish nation. (2) The outpouring of the Spirit. (3) The infliction of signal vengeance upon those who proved themselves to be the deadly enemies of the true

Church of God. Are there any events of a similar kind taking place at the present time? It has been too much the habit with Christians to rest satisfied with a very partial and moderate fulfilment of the promise of the Spirit. It is scriptural to indulge the expectation of such a holy revival. It is desirable that such fulfilment should take place. It is possible, may I not say probable, that such blessed results may be accomplished. But in what way are we to act, so that we may reasonably expect the blessing? 1. Remove the hindrances which stand in the way of such outpouring of the Spirit. The unholiness which exists in the Church of God. Ignorance and misapprehension regarding the work of the Spirit, and the nature of religious revival. The personal responsibility of all Christians in relation to the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom is not felt as it should be. 2. Adopt the means by which a religious revival may be promoted. The faithful preaching of the Divine Word. Real, hearty, believing, united, and persevering prayer. (*Emilius Bayley.*) *The Holy Spirit promised*:—The development of the redemptive scheme is by a succession of stages. Each stage is an advance upon the preceding. The finger of prophecy as well as of providence points forward. The eyes of the heathen were turned backward. Their golden age was past. Not so the Jews. So Christianity is a religion of expectancy. Though in the final stage of the world's development, we are far from the end of that stage. The remedial agencies are working, but the remedy is not yet wrought. We have a sufficient revelation, but we have not yet fathomed it. We have a fixed though not a finished faith. Christianity is aspiring, hopeful, confident. The Holy Spirit made known, through Joel, that in the ages to come there would be established, through His own abundant and universal effusion, a new order of things unspeakably more glorious and happy than anything hitherto known. I. THE EXTENT OF THE BLESSING. Extent both in the sense of amplitude and degree. The promise is to all, without distinction of age, sex, nationality, or degree. The Spirit of God had been in the world before the last days began, but, in no such plenitude and power as after His effusion. The words "pour out" imply abundance and richness. The three usual forms of special Divine revelation known to the Hebrews,—prophecy, visions, dreams,—indicate the fulness of the blessing; and the inclusion of all classes, down to slaves, shows the extent of the blessing. Nor is the prophecy confined to the Hebrew nation. On the Gentiles as well as the Jews was the Spirit poured out. The true doctrine as to the extent of the Holy Spirit's operation may be thus summarised. 1. The expression "all flesh" is to be taken literally, including not only all the nations of the earth, but every individual of every nation. Not that the Holy Spirit has the same direct influence upon all. That is not possible, since the means and instruments through which He works are not at hand to the same degree in all. Much of his work in the more favoured nations is in behalf of the less favoured. This is true of individuals also. Man is part spirit, and is capable of receiving and recognising the monitions of the Father Spirit. No soul of man, not even the darkest and most degraded, is neglected by the Holy Spirit. However dull it may be, still there is a conscience, a Divine spark, and that is responsive to the breath of the Divine Spirit. In numberless ways does the Spirit make Himself felt all the way from childhood to age. And at times the Spirit makes special appeals. 2. To what extent, in the sense of degree, is the Spirit given? Thus far no response on the part of man has been supposed. The Spirit comes to him self-moved, not because man wants Him, but because He wants man. It is His aim to persuade man to open his heart to receive Him. But man is free, and can open it or bar it closer. With what measure of fulness and blessing does the Spirit come? The language of prophecy leads us to expect great things. The fountain is inexhaustible and the supply abundant. Fulness of possession is the only natural limit of the promised blessing. As a matter of fact the Spirit does fill every soul just so fast and far as He is permitted. It does not follow that, if all were to receive Him to the fullest extent possible, they would have Him in the same measure, or possess the same spiritual power. That depends upon their capacity and ability. Nor does fulness of the Spirit necessarily imply the possession of peculiar miraculous power. That power may depend on the possession of peculiar natural gifts. II. THE NATURE OF THE BLESSING. 1. The gift of the Spirit is a gift of enlightenment. The natural man, however highly endowed, fails to understand "the things of the Spirit." To them his mind is dark; but when the Spirit comes into a soul, light comes with Him. 2. It is a gift of purification.

The Scripture emblems of the purifying power of the Holy Ghost are water and fire. One cleanses by washing away, the other by burning up impurities. Light let into a dungeon does not remove its foulness; no more does illumination purify the heart; the Holy Ghost not only enlightens but cleanses. He is water to wash away the impurities of sin, fire to burn up the dross of nature. 3. It is a gift of power. At Jerusalem the disciples were "endued with power from on high." The Holy Spirit in a man makes him an engine of power. He is strong to endure, for God is with him. He is bold in speech, efficient in action, prevalent in prayer. Illustrate by St. Paul, Luther, Nettleton, Finney, Moody, &c. 4. It is a gift of joy. Illustrated in the ecstasies of the early disciples. There is a "joy in the Holy Ghost." (*Sermons by Monday Club.*) *The outpouring of the Spirit the property and security of the Church of God:—*I. THE SUBJECTS OF THIS ESPECIAL MERCY. It is a word from the God of all grace to that people, and touching their increase, who profess to be "the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood." Their increase are designated as "all flesh," "your sons and your daughters," "your old men, your young men," "the servants, the handmaids." "All that are afar off." With this limitation, "As many as the Lord our God shall call." II. THE MERCY ITSELF WHICH IS PROMISED. The Spirit is the Holy Ghost, the third person in the ever-blessed and glorious Trinity. The effusion, or pouring out, which is here promised, is the communication of His precious influences, for spiritual life, health, comfort, strength, love, wisdom unto salvation. The similitude is taken from abundant and fertilising showers. III. THE PRIMARY DISPLAYS OF ITS RECEPTION ARE TO BE NOTICED. "Sons and daughters prophesy," &c. See Acts xiii. 12. Admonitions against the abuse of these special gifts is found in 1 Cor. xii. 7; xiv. 22. IV. THE PERMANENT POWER AND PRESENCE INVOLVED IN THIS PROMISE. The power of the infinite Jehovah is involved in His perpetual presence with His people. The accomplishment of this promise constitutes the character, and demonstrates the existence, of the true Church of the living God, wheresoever it is to be found upon earth: and the permanent power and presence therein involved ensures the existence and increase of that Church. (*William Borrow, M.A.*) **Your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.**—*Dreaming dreams and seeing visions:—*The age is against us. The youth of the world with its buoyancy has given place to the *fin de siècle*, the old age of the weary Titan, with its spiritual fatigue. You feel this everywhere. It is not only in our hard, analytic views of nature that we feel this death of dreams; all life is alike. The young man to-day will find the world no way congenial to the dreamer; it will only be through a thick fog that he will see his visions. Take city life. How visionless all life seems to you, covered inch deep with dust, and that not of the cleanest. There is not much space for poetry in the model lodging-house, or furnished apartments. A hive of industry the city may be, but dreams and visions are no part of its output. Turn to the factory. In old times man's work was itself a dream. The factory system has killed all that. To-day in every sphere of life the young man will find a subtle penetrating realism banishing all visions, a fog that can be felt chilling down every enthusiasm. Nevertheless, the prophet Joel was right: dreams and visions are the very salt for all life, its one reality. All life will ultimately be weighed by this one thing,—the ideals to which men stood true in spite of every difficulty. Take the life of a nation. The study of that life is history. Look then at Greece, Rome, Israel, or any other nation, and you will find that its dreams and visions are the all in a nation's history which does not die. History is, in fact, but the science of regulated enthusiasms and their results. Hope makes history a progress instead of a cycle. The deathless element in English life and history does not find its way into our text books. Its real gold is those priceless ideas of liberty, law, and true individuality, which have been the lode-star of her destinies. The most certain verdict of history is this: when a nation once loses its dreams and visions, its end has come. That which is true of the nation is no less true of the individual. The value of every man must ultimately be reckoned by the only changeless standard of value—the dreams and visions that were his. We must be careful not to narrow down the currency of heaven to realisations only. The history of religion, in fact, is but the record of how the enthusiasms of some enthusiast have permeated and changed the lives of men. Buddhism, Mohammedanism, Jesuitism, are all the slowly stiffening result of mighty dreams. Urge every young man to be an idealist. Do not be ashamed to have your enthusiasms.

The true idealist never lives in cloudland; he ever seeks to have his home amid the stern realities of life. He seeks to lift the real up to the ideal. Take the roughest blocks, and be a seer, like Michael Angelo; see in them what God sees, the possibilities of higher things. It is the idealism of Jesus that is the salvation of the world. You can be an idealist even in business. Take your dreams and visions into life as a citizen; into your politics; into your home; into the Church. (*Herbert B. Workman.*) A quickened imagination.—Joel dips into the far future and sees the downcoming of the Holy Ghost. So clear is his vision that he minutely notes the effects of this marvellous effusion. But the signs we expect him to enumerate he misses. Not a word about a whiter heart and a nobler life, about miraculous power, or irresistible speech. All these he ignores; it is the unexpected and apparently the secondary and unimportant effects that fasten his attention. To him the outstanding feature of the days of the Holy Ghost is a quickened imagination—a power to dream dreams and see visions. If man be compared to a house, there is the cellar which is dark and self-contained, representing the appetites and impulses, there is the ground floor with the windows of taste and smell looking out upon the immediate neighbourhood, there is the upper storey whose windows of seeing and hearing command a wider prospect, and there is the highest storey with the window of the imagination opening out into the vast unseen. When this house becomes the temple of the Holy Ghost all the rooms are beautified and all the windows cleansed; but to the prophet the window that gleams the brightest is the roof window, the faculty that is stirred the deepest is the imagination. The old men had been dwelling in the lower rooms all the days of their lives, and during all the long years the upper stories had been all but forgotten. The windows of the imagination are darkened by dust and curtained by cobwebs. When the Spirit comes there is cleansing enough, but on account of the long neglect the window will never become translucent again. The objects seen through will be vague and shadowy. The old men only dream dreams. The dreaminess comes from the neglect. But the young men led by curiosity and romance have explored all the rooms from the roof to the basement. All the windows have been put to use, even if the use has not always been the noblest; and under the influence of the Spirit they become clear as crystal, through which are seen definite and luminous the realities of the unseen. The young men see visions. Their imagination is unspoiled by worldliness and neglect. But in old and young the action of the Spirit is the same, only in the one it revives the embers, and in the other it fans the flame. It is strange that the prophet should have singled out the imagination, for the coming of the Spirit is as the coming of the spring. Everything in its track is born again. The spring causes a tide of life to rush through all creation, and all but burst everything. The buds burst into blossom, the hard crust of the earth bursts into green, and the birds burst forth into song. All nature is roused into an extraordinary activity. When God comes into a man's soul it is the same; every faculty is stirred, every power is quickened, the heart is tenderer, the mind is clearer, the senses are keener, the body is healthier; a wondrous tide of life rushes through the whole man. The Spirit comes as a mighty wind, and as all the multitudinous leaves of a tree are swayed by the wind, so are all the faculties of a man swayed by the Spirit. But stirred as are all the soul's activities it is the extraordinary activity of the imagination that catches the eye of the prophet. But why this strange selection? The choice is strange because it is right, and daring because it is according to the mind of God. He singles out the imagination because when God's Spirit descends on men His principal work is to make them realise the spiritual world; and the realisation of the spiritual world is the task of the imagination. All around us there is a world of matter and motion, with its hills and plains, minerals and forests, towns and streets and factories. We see it with our eyes, and are familiar with its features and movements. But vast as this world is, it pales into insignificance beside the great unseen world that is above and around and within us, a world that outleaps all measurement and outruns all duration, more real than the solid earth, more permanent than the everlasting hills; the home of God and Jesus, of angels innumerable and the spirits of just men made perfect, to be seen by no eyes of flesh, seen alone by the eye of the soul—the imagination. (*Thos. Phillips.*) Seeing God in dreams.—You may say of a dream that it is nocturnal fantasia, or that it is the absurd combination of waking thoughts; but God has honoured the dream by making it the avenue through which He has marched upon the human soul,

decided the fate of nations, and changed the course of the world's history. Does God appear in our day, and reveal Himself through dreams? 1. The Scriptures are so full of revelation from God that if we get no communication from Him in dreams, we ought, nevertheless, to be satisfied. 2. All dreams have an important meaning. They prove that the soul is comparatively independent of the body. 3. The vast majority of dreams are merely the result of disturbed physical conditions, and are not a supernatural message. A great many dreams are merely narcotic disturbance. Do not mistake narcotic disturbance for Divine revelation. 4. Our dreams are apt to be merely the echo of our daytime thoughts. The scholar's dream is a philosophic echo. The poet's dream is a rhythmic echo. It is, however, capable of proof that God does sometimes in our day appear to people in dreams. All dreams that make you better are from God. It is possible to prove that God does appear in dreams to warn, to convert, to save men. Illustrate: John Newton's dreams. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*)

The properties of the Gospel dispensation.—This prophecy was fulfilled to the letter, as described in Acts ii., nine centuries afterwards. By the Gospel dispensation we mean the Church. The Christian dispensation was to be a spiritual dispensation. The older was a religion of form. It represented truth. It was a school of object-lessons, a kind of kindergarten. It was a system of forms so perfect as to command the admiration of all ages to the present time. The kingdom the prophet foresaw would be set up would not be dependent on these earthly forces—authority, wealth, intelligence—but upon something far beyond and above. The Spirit of God was to be its energy, its potent force. This spiritual outpouring had its power in these facts—1. It communicated God to us. 2. It associates God with us. 3. It develops God in us. Observe the development of power when there is this pouring out of the Spirit. A prophesying power; and a witnessing power. We have also brought out in this prophecy the fact of freedom following the outpouring of the Spirit. Freedom from the guilt of sin. Freedom from the bondage of sin. Freedom from all fear because of sin. And we are told that this outpouring of the Spirit would be accompanied with great convulsions, mighty signs. So it proved. In view of our privileges as partakers of the Spirit, what is our duty? We should seek more and more of this outpouring, and we should seek to bear witness everywhere to the truths it reveals to us. (*O. H. Tiffany, D.D.*)

The Gospel dispensation.—This passage exhibits the leading features of Christianity. I. THE GOSPEL DISPENSATION WAS TO BE CHARACTERISED BY SPIRITUALITY. "I will pour out My Spirit." 1. Formerly the Spirit dwelt with man. 2. Whereas formerly the Spirit dwelt with men, now He dwells in them. There is a sense in which the Spirit was not given to men before the day of Pentecost. This sense is explained in John xiv. 15-17. Jesus was the first human being in whom the Spirit abode. II. THE GOSPEL DISPENSATION WAS TO BE CHARACTERISED BY LIBERTY. "In Mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance." 1. The Gospel finds us in chains. (1) In bondage under the tyranny of sin. (2) He also trembles under the tyranny of death. (3) The terrors of hell are upon him. 2. But the Gospel bursts our bonds in sunder. The believer is justified by the merits of Christ. III. THE GOSPEL DISPENSATION WAS TO BE CHARACTERISED BY POWER. "I will show wonders," &c. 1. Here are marvellous spiritual signs. Prophecy, as prediction and as preaching. Visions. At the inauguration of Christianity there were apparitions. Throughout the dispensation there have been spiritual revelations. Dreams. 2. Here also are stupendous physical wonders. Some of these were associated with the great transactions on Calvary. Some were associated with the complementary transactions upon Zion. These wonders show that Omnipotence is behind the truth. IV. THE GOSPEL DISPENSATION WAS TO BE CHARACTERISED BY EXPANSIVENESS. 1. Its salvation is universally free. 2. The conditions of this salvation are level to all capacities. 3. The expansiveness of the Gospel triumphs over conventionalities. Both the social and the national. (*J. Alexander Macdonald.*)

The coming conflict.—No gift of God is intended to remain a gift only. Gifts are means to serve other ends. The rain is a gift, but it is a means toward the harvest. The gift of the Spirit suggests a harvest for which that precious rain of God descended. The gifts are bestowed in anticipation of the hour when they will be needed. The responsibility is not the responsibility of possession merely, but the responsibility of anticipation. The hour comes when the tests of God will be applied. How very real the vision of the great conflict is in the prophet's eyes. It is as real and as vivid in its

reality as the plague of locusts. He has no doubt that it will take place. He has no doubt about its issue. The power which makes certain the issue, and gives security to the combatants has been vouchsafed. The gift of the Spirit is the gift of safety. The principle of spiritual life is independent of time. There are things which we can prepare for better when we know the hour; but in the things of the Spirit it is better to prepare not knowing the day nor the hour; for the readiness is the readiness of a spiritual quality which cannot be attained in a moment, nor yet by a fixed hour. The spiritual principle in the words of the prophet is, that every gift of the Spirit must be followed by some decisive conflict—in which all the forces which are allied with the Spirit are thrown into antagonism with all that are hostile to the Spirit. Was it not so after the day of Pentecost? The gift of the Spirit was the revelation of the kingdom of the Spirit. But what war followed! It is thus that the order of God succeeds itself. His first gift is love. His second is illumination. His last is conflict. In the Gospels, the gift of earth's bounties comes first. Christ feeds the multitude. The gift of vision in the darkness follows. He reveals himself in the darkness on the sea. The third stage is achievement, or readiness to face the conflict. To the disciple ready to venture the raging waves He says, "Come." God never calls men to trial but He first prepares them by a gift of power and illumination. In other words, the fresh baptism of the Spirit is to prepare for the baptism of fire. Fire purges in the truest sense; water cleanses. Fire penetrates to the very heart of things; water may leave much that is corrupt to decay and to destroy. I am no friend of working through mere terrors, but we may remind ourselves that the questions which are stirring around us are just those which are calculated to test in the most complete and thorough way the foundations and structure of society as we now know it. Take the condition of Theology, the tenets of Socialism, the reconstructions demanded by evolutionary theories. But we know enough in current literature and current thought to satisfy ourselves that we need not be shaken in mind or troubled should some fiery trial try us. May we not say that the trial begins in the mind of every man who tries to apply the teaching of Christ his Lord in all loyal simplicity to the facts of life and duty? Who may abide? Who can come forth bright and purged from this flaming baptism that is in store for the men and women of this generation? Would not the answer be, he alone can sustain that ordeal who has been prepared in the fire for the fire; he alone can stand in the day when all things are shaken whose character and spirit are built up of those very things which cannot be shaken? Better fall into His consuming fire than in that flame all evil, self—all folly and weakness may be burned up, than wait unpurged for the day which shall burn like an oven. When He baptized us with the Holy Ghost and with fire, did He not baptize us to sacrifice, even the sacrifice of our bodies and souls, a living sacrifice to Him? He who, led by the Spirit, makes his life a sacrifice, and passes through the fire feeling it for very love's sake to be no fire—need not fear the day of the Lord, for on such the fire of the fierce trial of the world has no power. (*Bishop Boyd Carpenter.*) *The seer*:—The preacher need not fear the taunt that he is an other-worldly man, a dreamer, a visionary. He may accept it with satisfaction, for it is true. His main concern lies in the realm of the unseen. He does business in deep waters. He stands face to face with the eternal. The Japanese cherish a tradition concerning Sho-Kaku. They say that, "even when a lad, he loved to wander among the beech-trees, and up the green slopes of the mountain, where his solitary musings brought him such gentleness that he never hurt any living thing, and such purity that the tropical rains could not wet the web of wistaria fibres which clothed him! Such virtue and merit became his that at length the material world became quite subject to him. He could walk upon the water, fly through the air, see into the future, and heal the diseases of his friends. Then he was commanded to undertake a more difficult achievement, and, as a means towards success in it, to ascend the summit of Mount Omine in Yamato. He neither doubted nor delayed, but hewed for himself a path to the far-away mountain top; and when at last he reached it, standing on the bare space of jasper, no larger than a threshing-floor, polished smooth with many storms, he beheld a weird sight. There stood a huge white skeleton, grasping in its bony hand a great untarnished sword. An inward voice bade him, if he would triumph in the mighty enterprises marked out for him, to secure that glittering weapon. Yet it was no easy task. He grasped the sword, but the dead hand clung to it; he tried to wrench away the whitened bones, but they

were as riveted iron, until he bethought himself of the 'spells of the spirit,' and as he uttered them the skeleton limbs relaxed slowly, and the sword dropped, so that he could seize and brandish it triumphantly in the light of the setting sun." The eastern legend enshrines a truth of universal application. The men who have been most despised as visionaries, as dreamers of dreams, as other-worldly men, have done more to shape this world than have their more practical critics. I. THE PREACHER MUST HAVE A VISION OF DEITY. A man who has had no personal experience of the presence and power of God cannot possibly impress others with the august and intense reality of things eternal. In the journal of an old Puritan Divine were found these words: "Resolved that, when I address a large meeting, I shall remember that God is there, and that will make it small. Resolved that, when I address a small meeting, I shall remember that God is there, and that will make it great." It is said that, when Chrysostom was composing his sermons he was wont to fancy that the communion rails around the pulpit were crowded with listening angels. It was a splendid inspiration. But the truth is grander still. Dr. Gordon dreamed that, when he preached, the Christ sat in the pew. It is verily so. The preacher needs such a vision of Deity as will fill his whole horizon with the grandeur of the Divine, and assure him, in the hours of loneliness and listlessness, of the stupendous fact that God is his Witness and Co-worker. II. THE PREACHER MUST HAVE A VISION OF HUMANITY. 1. He needs a vision of the sinfulness of men. 2. He must have a vision of the inner life of men. He must know that the most careless of his hearers is not really so callous as he seems. Every man, in his secret and silent moments, has thoughts of God, and sin, and eternity, that will not be silenced. And no man who has had a true vision of humanity will take it for granted that any man is absolutely without some prickings of conscience with regard to personal sin. He will carry Christ to every soul that is "aching and longing" after Him. 3. He needs a vision of the possibilities of men. The preacher is like Little Nell in "The Old Curiosity Shop." You remember how she discovered the sin in which the old man had become absorbed in the dreadful city. So she took him by the hand and led him away from it all, out into the green fields, and away to a happier, purer life. It is the privilege of the man of God to take men by the hand, and lead them out of the murky atmosphere of their sins into the purity and sublimity of the Divine salvation. Christ saves from the nethermost depth to the uttermost height. III. THE PREACHER MUST HAVE A VISION OF ETERNITY. This will add solemnity to all his work. He cannot afford to trifle. The biographer of Archbishop Leighton tells us that, in the days when it was the custom of the presbytery to inquire if all the preachers had "preached to the times," Leighton acknowledged on one occasion that he had not. He was asked why. "Surely," he replied, "if all these brethren have preached to the times, one poor brother may be allowed to preach for eternity!" Napoleon, we are told, found an artist engrossed in his painting. "What are you doing that for?" the Emperor asked. "For immortality!" the artist proudly replied. "How long will your canvas last?" inquired Napoleon. "It will last for at least a thousand years, sire!" answered the man. "Aha!" responded the Emperor, "we have now an artist's conception of immortality!" We have a loftier ideal than that. The preacher deals face to face with the intensities of eternity. He has a vision of the glories of heaven, and he toils that he may "allure to brighter worlds, and lead the way." He has a vision of hell, and he is prepared to labour day and night that he may save his fellow-men from such a fearful doom. Harrison Ainsworth has drawn, in Solomon Eagle, a picture of the passionate earnestness that becomes an enthusiast who believes his fellows to be doomed, and would warn them of their peril. Lord Lytton has drawn a similar character in Olinthus, who, on the night on which Pompeii was destroyed, hurried from place to place entreating men to repent. "Are we as anxious about men," asked Dr. Dale, "as our fathers were? On any theory of eschatology there is a dark and menacing future for those who have been brought face to face with Christ in this life, and have refused to receive His salvation, and to submit to His authority. I do not ask whether the element of fear has a great place in our preaching, but whether it has a great place in our hearts, whether we ourselves are afraid of what will come to men who do not believe in Christ, whether we, whether our people, are filled with an agonising earnestness for their salvation." (F. W. Borcham.) *The dreams of youth*:—"The thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts." Pity the one who has no dreams, for it means he has no ideals, and if youth has no ideals manhood will be very commonplace. We have no

patience with those who cynically sneer at the visions of youth and dash cold water upon all early hope and ardour, prophesying with a cynical assumption of wisdom an inevitable disappointment, a bitter disillusioning.

I. DREAMS OF PROSPERITY. This may seem to be the basest of all the dreams that youth can cherish, and if it simply means a dream of gain to follow gain till the dreamer can take his place among the wealthy, and secure that which money can purchase, it is not a vision to be encouraged. But there is a limited sense in which the dream of prosperity is not unworthy. If a young fellow starting his business career recognises that there are at least three possible courses open to him: (1) To take always the line of least resistance, and thus to be classed with the great crowd that is to be rated at a current market value for the particular type of labour of which he is capable; or (2) so to devote himself to the details and affairs of his special calling as to make himself of more value than the average employee, and thus to secure a better financial return for his services, a larger respect from his comrades in toil, and the inward satisfaction of "something attempted, something done"; or (3) to so further devote himself to his toil as by the concentration of all his energies, the insight of a quicker intelligence, the application of brains to the problems of commerce, and the possession of the rare gift of recognising an opportunity, coupled with the courage to seize it, he may rise to the front rank of the army of commerce; then I say that the settled determination to take according to his ability either the second or third of these courses, and the dream of legitimate prosperity resulting therefrom, is by no means to be condemned or discouraged. But, young men, let me say to you two things, and do you give them careful thought. (1) In the pursuit of business success many perils are to be encountered; keep a sensitive conscience, and do not purchase gain at the price of guilt. And (2) Keep in mind the fact that no amount of business success alone can ever be regarded as leading to a complete and worthy life in the sight of God. "The world passeth away, and the desire thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

II. DREAMS OF SERVICE. Probably some of you cherish dreams that do not revolve around self-interest. You want to live so that, amid the forces that make the conditions of life easier for humanity at large, your life and influence may find a place. The details of your dream may vary, whilst the aim of it may be the same. If in any sense this be your dream, it is a glorious one. Let me confirm you therein by recalling the wise words that tell us that he that serves his fellow-men receives honour from God.

III. DREAMS OF REFORM. Society must be remodelled; a saner idea of life must be presented to the people; the value of the worker must be recognised; the inalienable right of every individual to the means of subsistence taught, and the lavish waste of the non-producer, the parasite upon the body corporate, sturdily, and if need be forcefully, restrained. By all means recognise the current evils of the day, and, according to your knowledge and opportunity, work for the betterment of all. But at the same time do not let your recognition of wrong lead you to unfair and unjust conclusions; do not indulge in hasty generalisations; do not condemn where no condemnation is deserved, and try honestly to grasp all the facts that go to form the problem in its completeness. Any school-boy will tell you that no problem can be correctly solved if, in your attempted solution, you disregard essential factors. Nor forget that if we could secure to-morrow the equal advantage and opportunity for all that we so desire, the inequalities of to-day would be repeated within a generation. Then to you I say, "Do not put away as idle these fair dreams, but rather learn how they may end in realisation. Spend your energies in resisting abuses, in working for all schemes of worthy reform, but do not forget that the sinfulness of the human heart will militate against their success, and that the heart finds renewal in the power that comes from Calvary, and in that alone."

IV. DREAMS OF CHARACTER. For of this I am confident, that in your dreams you have fair visions of a life controlled by loftiest principle, and by highest ideals, not only of that which you are to do, but also of that which you are to be. It is the noble and almost instinctive hatred of the unreal, the sham and the merely conventional, that makes many a young man so severe and uncompromising a critic of the conduct of others; he makes no allowances, for he does not see that honesty requires that any should be made. As years pass our judgments become kindlier. But this is not the point just now; rather this, that the young man has a splendid ideal of character, a sense of non-attainment, and a dream of future realisation. Herein we wish him "God-speed"; woe to the man who dares to discourage

this hope. Only listen while I give you this from the experience of men of all ages. Character is of slow growth; it is the product of a long process, the issue of much stern conflict. The saint is grown, not made, and the stronger and more valuable growths are always slow; an oak takes many years to mature. As you advance in attainment your ideal will advance in its requirements, so that it will ever be, "Not as though I had already attained"; but of this be sure, every year shall bring the richer graces, the kindlier tempers, the fuller satisfaction of the Christlike character, and you shall realise that these dreams of your youth were not only dreams, but also prophecies. (*J. W. Butcher.*) *Visions of God* (with Joel ii. 8; Hab. ii. 2; Isa. vi. 5):—This is one of the first results of the pentecostal baptism. The young men, the hardened and practical members of the community who look at everything from a common-sense and business standpoint, "shall see visions." It will not make them visionary. They will find in their vision of God the secret of purity and strength and fidelity. But where shall we see visions? Not by gazing into the heavens, but by reading our Bibles. So the prophet Habakkuk says, "Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables." This is the great purpose of the Bible. The daily paper opens a window into the world around us, and we see the craft and cunning, the violence and deceit, the strifes and jealousies of men. But the Bible opens a window into heaven, and reveals to us, the love and goodness and power of God. Have you seen the vision? It is so plain that he who reads may run. Nay, you must not run past it. That is the sin of this hurrying pleasure-loving age. Men will not give themselves time to take in the vision of life. But he who reads will have to run. There will be no loitering then. The vision will fire your soul with such Divine enthusiasm that you will run off to make known what you have seen. Have you seen the vision? The prophet adds, "though it tarry, wait for it!" Yes, indeed, for you are of no use in the world until you have seen it. It is the men who have seen God that are a blessing to others. Esau lacked this vision, and it led him to sell his birthright. The birthright meant spiritual blessing. That is why Esau is called a profane man. The bargain he struck was not only a foolish one; it was a profane one. He sold his birthright because he despised it. But when you have seen God and the opened heaven, your birthright, *i.e.*, your right through the atoning sacrifice to become a son of God and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven, outweighs all the pleasures of sin, and it becomes easy for you to keep first things first. It was this which made Joseph so steadfast. In his youth God gave him dreams: they were not the result of indigestion, but visions of the night. His father had already given him as a special token of his love a "coat of many colours." It was not surely a mere piece of favouritism. The coat was the outward sign of that supremacy which the dreams indicated, and which probably had already been made known to Jacob. Jacob knew the misery that had resulted in the home of his childhood, where the judgment of God choosing the younger before the elder had not been accepted by Isaac his father, and mother and son stooped to falsehood and trickery in order to bring about the counsels of God. So Jacob determined that in his household God's purpose should be known and accepted from the first, and he gave to Joseph this robe of honour. The garment stood then for two things, for royalty and purity. Joseph had his visions, because he was a kingly soul, and of a pure heart. And the effect of these visions is seen all through his future life. That is the necessary result of the vision of God. It dwarfs everything else. It reduces to their true proportions the circumstances of daily life. God never changes. God is working His purpose out. The man who trusts in God will never be confounded. The pit, the slave market, the prison cell may lie before us, but these are only for a time. In the long run God's blessing prevails even in this topsy-turvy world, "and the blessing of the Lord it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it." But the first result of the vision of God is an overwhelming sense of sin. This is the distinguishing characteristic of the men who have seen God. There is about them a depth, a solemnity, a reverence, a brokenness of soul. Yes, though the immediate effect is an overwhelming sense of sin, you will not be left crushed and overcome. Isaiah received the sacrament of cleansing, the live coal from the altar. To John came the reassuring touch and the strengthening word, "Fear not, I am He." Christ knows how to bring His servants over from the despair that comes from the knowledge of self into the rest of faith that comes from the knowledge of God. There is no remedy for our sinfulness in ourselves. No, the transformation is wrought

not by the discovery of any saving merit or qualification in ourselves, but by a clearer revelation of Jesus Christ. A new view of Jesus, a fresh vision of God, is the secret of all blessing. This made Jacob the supplanter a "prince with God," this gave Joshua the victory over Jericho and the king thereof and the mighty men of valour; this enabled Elisha to go in and out throughout Israel as a holy man of God, never faint-hearted, never discouraged, never at a loss, able even when shut in by the Syrians on every side to use the reckoning of faith and reply to his terrified servant, "Fear not, for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." Yes, patience, courage, cheerfulness, strength, all belong to the men who see God. (*F. S. Webster, M.A.*)

Vers. 30, 31. **And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke.**—*The sirocco suggesting prophetic figures*:—We have two kinds of sirocco—one accompanied with violent wind, which fills the air with dust and fine sand; and one of a quieter kind, which yet is often more overpowering. I have often seen the whole heavens veiled in gloom with this sort of sand cloud, through which the sun, shorn of its beams, looked like a globe of dull, smouldering fire. It may have been this phenomenon which suggested the strong prophetic figure of Joel, quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost:—"Wonders in the heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood." The pillars of smoke are probably those columns of sand and dust raised high in the air by local whirlwinds, which often accompany the sirocco. On the great desert of the Hauran, I have seen a score of them, marching with great rapidity over the plain, and they closely resembled "pillars of smoke." (*W. M. Thomson, "Land and Book."*)

Ver. 32. **And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.**—This gracious promise is an instance of the merciful providence of God, so universally displayed in His prophetic revelations, whereby, in the midst of His severest threats of vengeance, He still reserved for His people a refuge against despair. Observe how fatal are the consequences of that state of mind against which it was intended to be a remedy. Despair of God's forgiveness thrusts men into a recklessness of their own spiritual concerns, from which no reasoning can arouse them as long as their state of desperation continues. For why should a man turn to God if He will not receive him? The universal doctrine of Scripture is, that none shall have recourse to God in vain. The Jews did not understand the full import of Joel's prophecy. No prophecy explains itself, nor can its meaning be thoroughly understood, until the event predicted has come to pass; and then the event and the prophecy will throw light upon each other, and the wise counsel of God from the beginning will be made manifest. We find the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy in the early times of the Christian dispensation, and especially in the siege and capture of the holy city. From the dangers of those days the converted Jews escaped. That fulfilment is typical of a more general judgment to come. The third chapter of Joel must be considered as a prophecy hitherto unaccomplished. Some think it refers to the return of the Jews to their own land. (*Jas. Randall, M.A.*) *A great proclamation*:—**I. THE TIME OF THIS PROCLAMATION IS PRESENT.** The time spoken of by Joel began at Pentecost. The Holy Ghost, who then came down to earth, has never returned; He is still in the midst of the Church, performing moral and spiritual miracles in our midst. To-day complete salvation is promised to every one that believeth in Jesus. **II. THE WIDE RANGE OF THE PROCLAMATION.** "Whosoever." All classes, all ages, all conditions, all degrees of guilt and misery and wickedness. **III. HOW PLAIN AND SIMPLE IS THE REQUIREMENT.** "Call on the name of the Lord." This is "The plain man's pathway to heaven." Believe and live. What does calling on the name of the Lord mean? 1. To believe in God as He reveals Himself in Scripture. 2. To call upon His name in prayer. 3. To confess that name. As the requirement is plain, so the assurance of blessing is positive. "Shall be saved." Remember that this is a personal blessing to you. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *A wide Gospel*:—**I. AS UTTERED BY JOEL.** It has a special reference to national and temporary circumstances. Joel depicts the judgments of God on Judah, and calls to repentance. He exhorts to trust in the Lord for deliverance. Then predicts extraordinary gifts of the Spirit; and hints at terrible convulsions of nature in the last times. **II. AS QUOTED BY ST. PETER (Acts ii. 21).** 1. He

gives to the whole passage a Christian signification. Sees in the events of the day of Pentecost an accomplishment of vers. 28, 29. Quotes the text as an exhortation to his hearers to call on the Lord Jesus Christ. III. As REITERATED BY ST. PAUL (Rom. x. 13). The text now gains its widest Christian meaning. 2. It is coupled here with Isa. xxviii. 16, and made applicable to the whole world. 3. It is thus extensive; none are excluded. Intensive; every individual is exhorted to personal faith in Jesus. IV. As TRUE TO OURSELVES. 1. It points to a means of safety. (1) Prov. xviii. 10. (2) Jesus is our Lord. (3) Running to and into Him is renouncing all trust in self, and taking shelter in His merits and atonement. 2. By a simple way. (1) Illustrate by Acts xxv. 11, 12. (2) A believing appeal to Jesus means deliverance from the curse of an offended law, from the penalty of sin. (3) Salvation by His intercession. 3. Open to all. (1) Illustrate by Deut. xix. 2, 3. (2) Jesus is the refuge of all sinners. (3) Every one may be saved by Him. None are so sin-stricken that they cannot call. None so guilty that they may not call. None so righteous that they have no need to call. (*J. H. Barnett.*)

CHAPTER III.

VER. 1. For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem.—*The year of recompense.*—I. IT SHALL BE THE YEAR OF THE REDEEMED. Though the bondage of God's people may be grievous and long, it shall not be everlasting. That in Egypt ended at length in their deliverance into the glorious liberty of the children of God. That in Babylon shall likewise end well. II. IT SHALL BE THE YEAR OF RECOMPENSES FOR THE CONTROVERSY OF ZION. Though God may suffer the enemies of His people to prevail against them very far, and for a long time, yet He will call them to an account for it, and will lead those captive that led His people captive. 1. Who those are that shall be reckoned with. "All nations." This intimates—(1) That all the nations had made themselves liable to the judgment of God for wrong done to His people. But the neighbouring nations should be particularly dealt with. (2) That whatsoever nation injured God's nation, they should not go unpunished. Little persecutors shall be taken account of as well as great ones. 2. The sitting of this court for judgment. 3. The plaintiff called, on whose behalf this prosecution is set on foot. 4. The charge exhibited against them, which is very particular. (1) They had been very abusive to the children of Israel. (2) They had unjustly seized God's silver and gold. 5. The sentence passed upon them. "Return your recompence upon your own head." (1) They shall not gain their end in the mischief they designed. (2) They shall be paid in their own coin. (*Matthew Henry.*) *The persecution of good men.*—I. THERE HAVE EVER BEEN GOOD MEN ON EARTH. 1. "My people." They are His—(1) They have surrendered themselves to His will. (2) He has pledged them His loving guardianship. 2. "My heritage" (Exod. xix. 5). He who owns the universe, esteems holy souls as the most valuable of His possessions. II. These good men on earth have GENERALLY BEEN SUBJECT TO PERSECUTION. "Whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted My land." There is a persecution that, whilst it does not involve bonds, imprisonments, and physical violences, involves the malice of hell, and inflicts grievous injury. There is social calumny, scorn, degradation, and various disabilities. III. Their persecution WILL BE AVENGED BY HEAVEN. "I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there, for My people and for My heritage Israel." Ah! the time hastens when persecutors of all types and ages will have full retribution dealt out to them in some great valley of Jehoshaphat. (*Homilist.*)

VER. 9-17. Prepare war, wake up the mighty men.—*The final battle between good and evil.*—I. IN THIS BATTLE EVIL WILL GATHER ALL ITS AVAILABLE ENERGIES. "Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles; Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up." This is sublime irony. The wicked will collect all their agencies for this last struggle.

The prophet intimates that all this shall only render their destruction more complete. Great armies are arrayed against God. They are bold in atheism. They are cunning in sin. They are malicious in temper. But "let them come up," and they shall be consumed by the breath of the Lord. Evil has many agencies. It has many "mighty men" on its side. They are united in their purpose. Their dormant energies will be awakened. But they cannot be finally victorious.

II. IN THIS BATTLE EVIL WILL TURN MANY USEFUL AGENCIES INTO DESTRUCTIVE INSTRUMENTS. "Beat your ploughshares into swords, and your pruning-hooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong." When Isaiah and Micah prophesied of the kingdom of Christ, they said, "Beat your swords into pruning-hooks, and your spears into ploughshares" (Isa. ii.; Micah iv.). This sentence is now inverted by Joel. The words of Isaiah show the condition of the world under the rule of goodness. The words of Joel show the condition of men under the tyranny of evil. Sin converts the instruments of peace into the implements of war. And in the last great battle between good and evil, many useful principles and institutions will be converted into the means of attack upon truth. The peaceful life and words of Christ have been turned into swords; and eminently will this be the case in the last great conflict with evil.

III. IN THIS BATTLE EVIL WILL PRESENT ITSELF AS NATURALLY READY FOR DESTRUCTION. "Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great." There are here two metaphors, one taken from the harvest, the other from the vintage,—indicating that sin shall reach its limit. This gives us insight into the method of the Divine government. Sin is not always destroyed in its earliest stage. It remains as a discipline to the world. It tests the patience and moral resistance of the good. The time of its harvest is not yet.

IV. IN THIS BATTLE THE NATURAL AND HELPFUL AGENCIES OF THE UNIVERSE SHALL AID THE DEFEAT OF MORAL EVIL. "The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining." When the wicked gather for the great battle they will find the ordinary agencies of the universe against them.

V. IN THIS BATTLE THE GOOD SHALL ENJOY THE DIVINE PROTECTION. "The Lord also shall roar out of Zion," &c. Lessons:—1. That evil often leads the Church of God into captivity. 2. That moral evil is advancing to its perilous destiny. 3. That the good will finally triumph over the combined forces of evil. (*J. S. Exell, M.A.*)

Ver. 13. Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe.—*The end of the world represented by the harvest.*—All things are evidently tending to decay and dissolution. As there was an hour fixed from all eternity for the creation of the world, so there is an hour fixed for its dissolution. Many scriptural figures represent the brevity of human life, the frailty of man's existence. The text contains a prophetic description of the destruction of all God's enemies, who are represented as a field of corn.

I. THE RIFENESS FOR THE GREAT HARVEST. There is a ripeness to which every one must attain. Even the wicked fill up the measure of their sin. The righteous are acquiring ripeness; and for this due preparation and daily cultivation are needed. True, thorns and briars spring up among the flowers; but they are only allowed to grow together for good and useful purposes.

II. THE HOLY SCRIPTURES ALONE CAN FURNISH THE TRUE TEST OF THE RIFENESS REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT. Compare the condition of a sinner meet for destruction with the happy state of a soul ripe for the blessedness of eternal glory. Such a review must induce every one to pray that the life he lives in the flesh may be a life of faith on the Son of God; of conformity to the will of God; and of preparation for the judgment of God.

III. WHEN THE CORN IS FULLY RIFE, THE SICKLE IS TO BE PUT IN. When our measure of sin and holiness is complete, we shall be reaped down: the saints will depart and be immediately with God. Address the undecided. (*Nat. Meeres, B.D.*)

Harvest.—This emblem of the harvest is used elsewhere in the Bible. The text probably refers to the harvest of the wicked. Two things for consideration.

I. THE PROCESS OF RIPENING. In the natural world we think of the later period of growth, after the ear is formed, as the ripening time. Consider the process of ripening as regards the wicked. (Gen. xv. 16.) "The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." It was ripening, but not ripe. Sin has dominion over a man. Sin is the spring and root of eternal ruin. The signs that sin is ripening are two.

1. The habit of sinning wilfully, and living wilfully under the dominion of known sin.

2. Growing insensibility to the truths which have a tendency to awaken

the mind. The ripening process as regards the righteous is the converse of that which takes place with the wicked. There is a ripening process going on in every child of God. That which is the cause of this ripening in the Christian is holiness. Increasing holiness alienates him more and more from sin, and from the follies and vanities of the world. Signs of the ripening process are—**I. A deepening sense of our own personal unworthiness, and helplessness, and guiltiness in the sight of God.** **2. Growing simplicity of trust in the person and work of Christ.** It is the work of the Spirit to reveal Christ to the soul. **II. THE HARVEST ITSELF.** For the individual the time of death. For the world the judgment day. The children of God are ripening for a blessed harvest. The wicked are ripening for a harvest of wrath, of fiery indignation. (*Emilius Bayley, M.A.*) *Character*.—These words suggest three remarks concerning man's moral character. **I. It is a GROWTH.** The harvest begins with the germinating seed. Moral character, both good and bad, is a growing thing; thoughts grow, affections grow, principles grow, habits grow. Character is not like a rock, which remains the same from year to year; but rather like the tree, ever growing. Men get worse or better every day. **II. It has a MATURITY.** Every character ripens, reaches its harvest. Hemlock as well as wheat ripens; character, both evil and good, comes to maturation. **III. It has RETRIBUTION.** "Put ye in the sickle," "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." "He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, he that soweth to the spirit shall reap everlasting life." The time for the sickle hastens to all. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 14. Multitudes in the valley of decision.—*The valley of decision*.—These words were spoken in a time of deep depression. Joel says the sadness and gloom were mainly due to the indecision of the people, who did not know whether to trust foreign alliances or Jehovah. So they would have to be led into a valley of judgment, from which they would not emerge until they had come to a decision. In our day much of the prevailing darkness is due to indecision. We feel that things are wrong, but we are not exactly sure what is required to set them right. **I. IN REGARD TO WHAT WE BELIEVE.** There is peculiar difficulty in this generation, owing to the methods of modern inquiry and discussion. This is an age of specialism. Each branch of theology has its own special students. Each presses his own conclusions to the furthest limit. It is our duty to look for ourselves at the general lines of revealed truth, and to measure our relation to them. We must come to a decision with regard to Jesus Christ. Certainly—**1. Christ was the revealer of God.** **2. He was the remover of barriers.** **3. The guidance He gave us for our actual conduct was authentic.** These three simple truths can be isolated from all disputed doctrines, and used as a test. The man who sincerely accepts these truths has found his way out of the valley of decision. **II. IN REGARD TO WHAT WE DO.** We can test ourselves by our conduct in business, in the family, in general society. There are various plain questions which we ask ourselves too rarely, although we all in the long run shall require to answer them. Do we always do our duty, or only when it suits our plans? Has our life any principle, any plan? We know the road in which we ought to walk, are we walking in it? Do we always follow conscience? God often thrusts us into the darkest caves of the valley in order that we may learn our need for giving a plain answer to these questions. In the valley of decision you are bound to fix your faith in God and Christ, and to take the path of goodness. (*A. R. MacEwen, M.A., B.D.*) *The valley of decision*.—There is something very wonderful, and very awe-inspiring in the thought of the multitudinous, the immeasurable multitudinousness, of created things. Infinite space is thronged with multitudes of worlds, and every world with multitudes of things. When we think of the race of mankind, how vast and inconceivable are the multitudes of men. Each individual that has ever lived exists somewhere. Once born, they can never die. Yet these vast hosts lie easily enough within the reckoning of God. Known unto Him are the history and the character, the temptations and the opportunities, of every single individual of the vast whole of the human race, both quick and dead. One by one each will personally appear before the personal God in the valley of decision. Where is this valley? Tradition identifies as the valley of Jehoshaphat. But the wady of the Kedron cannot properly be called a valley. Joel invented the name for "Jehovah's judgment." Christ never localised the seat of judgment,

any more than He announced the time of judgment. But what is judgment? It is not Christ our judge who decides the bliss of the blessed or the curse of the accursed. The blessed are deciding their own blessedness when they cultivate holiness of character, and the cursed are deciding their own doom when they are forgetting God and living in sin. The valley of decision is the valley which each man treads in the road of life. It is here and now. Divine decision, or final judgment, is no swift, sudden, arbitrary act of God's; but a long, slow process performed by ourselves. In the valley of decision there is no standing still. (*Canon Diggle.*)

The valley of decision.—A sense of ultimate personal responsibility is inseparable from the mind of man. There is a consciousness within him, which announces the existence of a God who judgeth in the earth, and warns him that the great object of his life must be to prepare to meet Him in a final account. In the text is a striking exhibition of this final judgment of man, the great day of his account with God. The "valley of Jehoshaphat" means the "valley of the judgment of the Lord." The time and manner are His own appointment. In its practical application to man the day of final judgment makes no change in his real character. It simply proclaims that which was before the fact. It declares the sentence which has long been determined. Man's real time of probation is in the present life. Here is the valley of decision.

I. WHAT MAY BE UNDERSTOOD AS THE VALLEY OF DECISION FOR MAN. It is the whole life of man upon the earth. There is actually but a single question proposed from God to man. As a wandering, rebellious creature, he is invited and commanded, to come back in the spirit and act of reconciliation unto God. Will he lay hold of the hope set before him? This is the great question of human life, and it is generally determined by man long before the last hours of his life have come. Many have settled this question for themselves, and so have passed out of the valley of decision. Others have decided, but have chosen death rather than life. These, too, have passed out of the valley of decision. We cannot therefore justly say that all men, now alive, are in the valley of decision. We must narrow down our view to those for whom the great question remains undecided.

II. THE GREATER PORTION OF THOSE TO WHOM THE OFFERS OF ETERNAL LIFE ARE MADE ARE UNDECIDED. The great majority who listen to the Gospel are still in the valley of decision. A blessing and a curse are yet before them.

III. THE GREAT DECISION MUST SPEEDILY BE MADE. "The day of the Lord is near." By that day we understand the time of final determination of the destiny of the children of men. Soon for every man, this day must certainly come at the period of death. Then this is the accepted time, and this is the day of your salvation. (*S. H. Tyng, D.D.*)

Turning-points in life.—It has been well said that in every life there is a turning-point, as in a fever, a turning-point that brings either life or death. Napoleon said, "In every battle there are ten minutes on which hangs the fate of nations." Hundreds of soul battles are fought and won in a few minutes. Unspeakably solemn are the silence and the quickness with which these spiritual battles are fought. (*Old Testament Anecdotes.*)

Decision.—There is a fascination, even a terror, in the appearance of a great multitude. Where is the valley of decision? First of all, here in this world. The world all unconsciously to its teeming myriads is a valley of decision in which they gather together to certain ends and work out certain definite issues. What is being decided in this valley? 1. Character. That strange stamp which gives to each one of us his own individuality, that personality which spreads itself over our likes and dislikes, that stamp whereby men can label us and catalogue us, and yet feel at the end that we elude classification. Circumstances are the material of life, good or bad. It is we who take up our circumstances, and out of them make habits, and habits decide or form our character in this valley of decision which we call human life. 2. Our own happiness or misery. Life was meant to be happy. But this is placed in our own hands for decision. 3. Eternity. The great decision is not, after all, the sudden thing we suppose it to be, except in very rare cases. Here in this world a decision may be altered, it may not be final. The prophet looks on to a day when the decision will be final; it is the great day of judgment at the end of the world. Is this a belief which is still a living and a practical one to you? Then judge yourselves that you may not be, in that day, judged of the Lord. (*Canon Neubolt.*)

Armageddon.—The matters between two armies are going to be finally decided: therefore the valley is called, "the valley of decision." This place is to-night a valley of decision. See some of the things

you have to decide. 1. Whether you will adhere to sin or renounce it. Not your pleasures, but your positive sins. You cannot become a child of God and adhere to any one of your transgressions. Will it pay you to keep your sin? Sin never pays. 2. Whether you will have Christ or refuse Him. There is no pardon or heaven without the friendship of Christ. And He is such a precious Jesus. 3. Whether you will have Christian associations or unchristian. Need not apologise for everything that is in the Church. There is some bad and much good in the Church. The fact that there are inconsistent Christians is nothing against Christianity, and nothing against the Church. Come, then, into the ranks of Church members. 4. Whether you will have a Christian death-bed or an unbeliever's departure. There is a triumphant and there is an ignominious way of getting out of this life, and we come here to choose which it shall be. 5. Whether yours shall be a future world of sorrow or a future world of joy. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Reason for decision* :—What is here called "the valley of decision" (i.e., of sharp judgment), is called in ver. 12 "the valley of Jehoshaphat" (God judgeth). This was locally the valley of Kedron; the later associations of this valley (Gethsemane was there) figuratively present a great spiritual crisis. The prophets show themselves to be taught of God in the breadth and extent of their visions. While speaking to their own nation only, they announce God's dealings with all the world. They look forward into the distant future—to the end of time. From time to time God specially interferes, either to enlighten and encourage His own when the adversary is too strong for them; or to overthrow those who are opposing His will. The final interference is what is called "the day of the Lord." In this chapter is a vision of the final judgment of mankind, and of that which is to precede it. 1. The wickedness of the earth is full. 2. Drawn by a mighty influence, the enemies of God, to a place whither He has summoned them. 3. The powers of nature sink and fade before the presence of the glory of God. 4. But the Lord is the strength and hope of His own people. Note—(1) The great issues of good and evil which are working out in the world. (2) Contemplate the predicted end, the final victory of Christ and His people. 3. Decide on which side we take part in the conflict. (*S. J. Hulme, M.A.*) *The valley of decision* :—There is a day coming when all the uncertainties of life will be at an end, when every mask will drop off, when every hidden thing will be exposed to view, and the secrets of every life will be told. The prophet is here looking forward to an occasion of judgment, and every occasion of judgment must of necessity be an occasion of decision. But the work of judgment is by no means confined to the future. Wherever the Gospel message goes, wherever the truth of God is revealed to the understanding of man, there the work of judgment necessarily commences. Our Lord taught that it was in virtue of the relation in which men stood to the Son of Man that their position before God was to be decided. So it is still. The presence of Christ in His Spirit among us still must needs cause judgment. The first work of the Holy Spirit is to convict the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. The word "convict" is a judicial term. It may be said of redemption itself, that the Divine mercy is ordained to flow into the human heart through judgment. Unconditioned mercy—mercy that does not come to me through the forms of judgment, and with the sanction of justice—might have a demoralising effect upon me. Ours is a Gospel of mercy flowing through judgment. So then, not only does the Holy Ghost judge us when He first brings our sins to remembrance and pronounces us guilty, but in the very act of justifying us He still exhibits, in the most impressive manner, God's righteous judgment against sin; for it is through the Cross that grace flows forth to us, and the Cross is, above everything else, the place of judgment—the most amazing and impressive vindication that God could give of the majesty of law. We may say that every day of visitation from God to the soul of man is in some sense a lesser judgment day. On the last august occasion, the decision will lie simply and solely with the Judge. There will be no appealing from His judgment. Now, the decision lies with ourselves. It is the work of God the Holy Spirit to bring all with whom He strives, into the valley of decision, the place of judgment. There are two ways out of this valley. Through the gate of life and through the gate of death. (*W. Hay Aiken, M.A.*) *The valley of judgment* :—Note the vast appearance that shall be in that great and solemn day. 1. The judgment day, that day of the Lord, has all along been looked upon, and spoken of, as "nigh at hand." We ought to be always ready for it. 2. The day of judgment will be a day of decision, when every man's

eternal state will be determined, and the controversy that has been long depending between the kingdom of Christ and that of Satan shall be finally decided, and an end put to the struggle. The Chaldee calls it, "the valley of the distribution of judgment." Marg. has "valley of threshing," carrying on the figure of the harvest. 3. Innumerable multitudes will be gathered together to receive their final doom in that day. O what vast multitudes of sinners will Divine justice be glorified in the ruin of at that day! (*Matthew Henry.*) *The valley of decision* (Sermon to Children):—The text struck me when I was a lad. Children have a strange way of mixing up things, and I came to think of these words as in some way connected with a place near my native town. Away out on those wild cliffs, with the fierce Atlantic rolling in upon them, there is a valley which came to be in my mind a sort of "valley of decision." I. THE VALLEY OF DECISION IS A PLACE FOR SOBER THOUGHT. There is the little stream hurrying on between the banks, always hastening away to the great sea. Is not that just like our life? It is hurrying away to the great sea of eternity. II. A PLACE OF SOLEMN WARNING. Just under this little valley a merry party had come one day for a picnic. One young man slipped away to bathe. Suddenly, as the others sat singing on the rocks, one sprang up and pointed to their friend as he was being borne away by the current. He was drowning before their eyes. What is death but the sweeping in of the waves of eternity, bearing away one and another? Think of these things deeply and seriously. III. THE PLACE SUGGESTED OUR DANGER AND OUR DELIVERANCE. There was a huge, black, rounded cavern, called Ralph's Cupboard, in a steep, precipitous cliff, never accessible from the land, and scarcely ever to be entered from the sea. A smuggler, hard pressed by the coastguards, turned his boat towards this cave, caught the swelling wave, and was swept into what seemed the jaws of destruction, but to him was harbour of safety. We, too, have broken the law. We want a refuge. And the Bible says, "A man shall be as an hiding-place." Our only safety is in Him, our only hope of escape is there. Yet all this will not make a place the valley of decision. When we have made up our mind, the day of the Lord is near. (*Mark Guy Pearse.*) *Multitudes*:—Joel was a prophet in the older sense. He was a *seer*; he had visions. He had, indeed, a work to do for his own generation; but this was all to be impressed by the solemnity of the visions given to him. One of these visions we follow. In Eastern houses there is often a little upper chamber, available for prayer and meditation, and we may imagine Joel, in such a place, poring over the records of Divine law and Divine leadings, and bending in earnest supplication before his God. As he thinks and prays the daylight fades; gradually he becomes absorbed; other scenes open up before him; he sees more than the bodily eye can see; age after age passes in hurried march; dimly, indistinctly, he traces the progress of events as these ages roll on; and gradually he becomes aware of an extraordinary excitement. As the vision clears it is as though heaven were preparing for some grand event; the angelic warriors are girding on their armour, though evidently rather for a day of glory than a day of battle. The angelic attendants are preparing thrones of judgment, palms of victory, robes of beauty, crowns of glory, songs of triumph; and, strangely enough, also chains of darkness and of woe. Hell is moved. Out of its depths spirit after spirit is appearing to join the procession that is ever forming and passing on. The sea is moved, and casts out the dead that are in her. And even as the prophet watches, he sees the last midnight darkness pass away; gradually the grey of dawn streaks the skies, and at the moment when the sun first looks upon the hills, a mighty angel stands forth and cries—"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision, for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision." The "day of the Lord" is yet to come. The day of the Lord's glory, when the multitude of the redeemed shall crown Him with many crowns. The day of the Lord's vindication, when He shall break down the rebellion of lost souls with the proofs of His forbearance, and the memory of His repeated calls. The day when the "wrath of the Lamb" must be revealed, and He shall come "in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of His Son." There must be an end of this dispensation of redemption. There must be a completion of Christ's special administration. There must be the "day of the Lord." As Joel's vision gains distinctness, his attention is arrested by the people assembled on that day. Language fails him in attempting a description. All around, wherever the eye can reach, he sees people, people everywhere; and overwhelmed, he can only cry,—*"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision!"* Few things make stronger impressions

on us than the sight of a multitude of people. Many of the greatest wrongs the world has known have been committed under the passionate, unreasoning impulses of multitudes. Many of the most impressive Bible narratives concern multitudes. But if a multitude on earth can exert such power on us, what shall be the effect of multitudes to which our present earth-crowds form no comparison: multitudes in the day of the Lord; multitudes in the valley of decision? Numbers altogether fail for recording that multitude. Language altogether fails for describing it. Even imagination, in its highest flights, utterly fails worthily to conceive it. We may venture to contrast in one or two particulars the ordinary crowds of earth, and the multitudes in the valley of decision. 1. In an earthly crowd the individual is lost in the multitude. In that multitude the number is lost in the individual. Each person will stand out distinct to view, as though he alone were placed before the Judge. And each individual will feel as though he were alone. It will be a time of awful self-consciousness. 2. In an earthly crowd there are almost infinite disguises. The people are not in reality what they seem. The dress of the gentleman too often covers the profligate; the lowly look, and humble clothes, often cover the self-righteous hypocrite. The garb of poverty often hides the noble and generous-hearted. In the valley of decision there are no disguises. All disguise drops off at death. Men's shrouds are pretty much alike; and even they soon rot and perish in the dampness of the grave. Men rise to judgment with no disguises upon them. Stern, unflinching truth shall dispel all mists, all doubts, and set our characters forth clear as in the sunlight. And what are the great distinctions which shall mark these "multitudes"? We notice the utter absence of all merely human distinctions. Riches—nothing. Poverty—nothing. Position—nothing. Fame—nothing. Knowledge—nothing. Character—everything. One test for everybody—righteous or wicked. The Scriptures do not satisfy our questionings concerning the precise terms of the decision at that assize, but they intimate that there will be a more general term, and a more particular one. The general term is thus expressed,—“Condemned already, because they believed not on the Son of God.” The particular term is thus expressed,—“We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” How these are to fit into each other, it is beyond any human power to explain. But we can see the two separate facts very clearly. Our life, in its minutest acts, has eternal issues. Everything we do, beyond its bearing on our present character, has its bearing on our eternal destiny, because on our eternal character. Our every-day conduct is, in sober reality, raising our mansion of eternal bliss, or preparing the dungeons of the eternal death. And the general test that is to decide in that great day is very simple. It is this—in Christ or out of Christ? The answer to that question settles all else. And that test may be put now. We shall come out upon that “day of the Lord” as though from a room where we had rested awhile upon a landing-place, from which steps wind upward into a place of beauty and delights; and from which other steps wind downwards into ever-deepening darkness. If out of Christ when you yield up the ghost, then you must be borne downwards, until it can be said of you, “The darkness took them.” If in Christ now, and when the spirit parts with its earthly tabernacle, then, loving angel arms shall entwine you; loving angel songs shall cheer you; loving friends, long lost, shall beckon you; the loving Saviour shall Himself be with you, as you journey up the steps of glory everlasting; the gates of the golden palace shall be flung back for you, and with shouts of triumphant welcome, “the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” (*Robert Tuck, B.A.*) *A time of judgment*:—Multitudes in the valley of judgment; multitudes come together that they may be examined, criticised in the light of heaven, judged by the standard eternal and unchangeable. Why not accept that as the basis of an appeal to human intelligence and human conscience? There is to be a time of judgment, when the right and the left shall be specifically distinguished; when the bad and the good shall be known one from the other, and separated for ever. Who undertakes this marvellous classification? Blessed be God, not man; thanks be unto heaven, we are to be judged by the Creator, not by the creature. What man could judge his brother? What does man know about his dearest friend? He knows nothing. We live upon appearances. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 16. **But the Lord will be the hope of His people.**—*The haven of repair*.—The margin reads, "The Lord will be a place of repair, or a harbour for His people." As a secluded, landlocked haven, where storm does not rock, is to a dismayed vessel, so will our God be to those who come in live spiritual need. He will be a haven of repair. **I. THERE ARE MANY EXPERIENCES WHICH CAUSE US TO NEED A PLACE OF REPAIR.** Who does not suffer through the fault of others? In every department of our existence we are eyes and hands and feet to each other, in the same body. What is true amongst the smaller things of life's healthy competition is found also in that more important world, where hearts are wounded, where confidence is shaken, and where hopes are too often crushed. The world is rich in afflictions which are unintentionally caused. Who has not suffered from his own unwisdom? By lack of caution or by over-caution moral weakness is often induced. By hesitation or by impulsiveness we bring disaster upon ourselves. We need some kind of repairing very frequently, and, for the most part, it is on account of self-inflicted damage. The need of repair may come through some want of knowledge. We did not know the seas of life; did not expect a sudden storm; did not understand our own weak side. And so we spread full sail when caution should have counselled; we went right on when we should have sought the anchorage of prayer. But most vessels seek a haven of repair on account of the common wear and strain of voyaging. And so it is with human hearts. We know that we often need a refuge where there is the hope of refitting our shattered strength. **II. THE LORD WILL BE OUR HAVEN OF REPAIR.** He alone combines the knowledge, the ability, and the will which are needful. No need or danger can be unknown to Him "whose eyes are in every place." No inability to do after His heart's desire can fetter Him who "created all things by the breath of His mouth." His knowledge, His love, and His power, are the three mountains which enclose a haven of blessed security and peace for the sons of men. Storms of temptation should drive us to the refuge that is in God. The winds of intellectual difficulty should drive us to this Divine haven. **III. A HARBOUR OF REPAIR EQUIPS FOR FUTURE VOYAGES AND SERVICE.** Acceptance with God is not a fact which should be exclusively, or even chiefly, associated with the close of life. It is not life's end, but the beginning of new effort towards a better life. If the truth has done anything in us to make us free, it is that we may go forth afresh to meet the rising storms, ourselves, perhaps, to be yet more beaten about and tried, but as a recompense to know that we help some to find the great salvation, to enter into His rest. There will always be Divine strength for Divine work. Let us remember in our religious joy, that the haven of refuge is a haven of repair, and that this always means more work for God. (*W. H. Jackson.*) **The strength of the children of Israel.**—*Christ our strength*.—Few things have been more coveted by man than strength. But man's superiority to the brutes lies in something more than physical strength. Yet neither a big biceps nor a big brain makes the man in the likeness of God. The really strong men have often to be sought elsewhere than in the ranks of warriors and statesmen. Strength is not the less real for being spiritual. What and whence is such strength as this? **I. THE STOIC IDEA OF MAN'S SPIRITUAL POWER.** Epictetus thus gives man's object in living. It is "to know God perfectly, to love Him, to obey Him, to please Him, to overcome all vices, to acquire all virtues, and so to render ourselves holy and companions of God." Then why did Stoicism fail? Because the Stoic philosopher also claims that man has in himself every means of acquitting himself of all these obligations, and that the means are always within his own power. In man the mind is free to believe only what is true, and the will is free to follow only what is right. **II. THE EPICUREAN IDEA OF MAN'S SPIRITUAL POWER.** This school claims that so far from the mind teaching us truth, there is nothing we can positively state as truth. And so far from our will being always for happiness, and in the right, it is generally likely to lead us into trouble. **III. THE CHRISTIAN IDEA.** Christianity, steering between Hegelian and Calvinistic theories of human nature, teaches that the mind of man, perfectly informed, may possess right knowledge; and the will of man, perfectly established; may be capable of right conduct. But it recognises that man as yet is not thus perfect. His mind is struggling for light, his will for guidance. Christ is the strength of the people of God. In His presence man's pride must go, since he will recognise his incompleteness and weakness; and his idleness must go, since he will recognise the grace offered to honest effort.

Laying hold on the strength of Christ, you are using the resources of Omnipotence. (*II. II. Gowen.*)

Vers. 18-21. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine.—*The golden age*:—I. IT WILL BE AN AGE IN WHICH GREAT TEMPORAL PROSPERITY WILL BE WITNESSED. "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters." Here we have set forth the temporal prosperity which the Church of God is destined to enjoy after the destruction of its enemies. The Church is now in great poverty. It does not possess the good things of the material universe. The world itself is barren. It is rendered so by greed and covetousness. But the day is coming when the meek shall inherit the earth, and when the earth shall spontaneously and richly yield her increase. The earth shall yield her harvest responsive to the smile of heaven. II. IT WILL BE AN AGE IN WHICH THE HALLOWED MORAL INFLUENCES OF THE SANCTUARY SHALL PERVADE SOCIETY. "And a fountain shall come forth of the house of the Lord, and shall water the valley of Shittim." Thus in the age to come there will issue from the sanctuary of the Lord a moral influence as pure, refreshing, and quickening as a stream of water, which shall be beneficial to the social life of men; indeed, society will be pervaded by the tide of thought, feeling, and praise which takes its rise in the secret place of the Most High. This tide shall reach even to the valley of Shittim; the most distant and barren places of society shall be awakened into moral verdure by the advent of the life-giving stream. III. IT WILL BE AN AGE IN WHICH MORAL GOODNESS WILL BE CONTINUOUS AND PROGRESSIVE. "But Judah shall dwell for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation." Then the redemption of the good will be eternal. They shall never again be led into captivity. Their moral condition will be permanent and happy: they shall dwell in it for ever. Sin of every kind is doomed to become a "desolate wilderness"; but purity, righteousness, truth, and virtuous character shall continue and progress in meaning and splendour through the ages. IV. IT WILL BE AN AGE IN WHICH THE DIVINE PRESENCE WILL BE RICHLY MANIFESTED. "For I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed: for the Lord dwelleth in Zion." The men of the age will be made morally pure, and then God will come and dwell in their midst. Lessons:—1. The world has not yet reached its ideal condition. 2. There are agencies at work seeking to bring the world under Divine influences. 3. Let us derive encouragement from this picture of the future of the race. (*J. S. Exell, M.A.*) **For I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed: for the Lord dwelleth in Zion.—Purified**:—These words must be understood in the Christian and spiritual, not in the Jewish and literal sense. The Judah here spoken of is the spiritual Judah; those who are followers of the Lord, by the regenerating grace of God. I. VITAL CONSECRATION TO GOD. "I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed." Take this strictly in a spiritual sense. 1. Medicinally. Illustrate by the circumstances of the cleansing of the leper. It is said, "the priest shall consider"; and we may be sure the Great Physician will consider those who seek Him with their sin-disease. And He will cleanse them, even cleanse the blood which is the life. 2. It relates to their citizenship. For nothing that defileth, worketh abomination, and maketh a lie, can enter into the city, can be reckoned a citizen. II. THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD. "The Lord dwelleth in Zion." 1. As the strength of Zion. It is strong if salvation be the walls. 2. As the security, or peace, of Zion. The defence of His people. 3. As the source of happiness to His people. (*James Wells.*) **A happy Church**:—Three things promised it. 1. Purity. "I will cleanse," &c. Put last here, as a reason for the rest. 2. Plenty. "The mountains shall drop new wine." Such abundance shall they have of suitable provision. 3. Perpetuity. This crowns the rest. (1) The Church of Christ shall continue in the world to the end of time. All the living members of that Church shall be established in their happiness to the utmost ages of eternity. (*Matthew Henry.*) **For the Lord dwelleth in Zion.—God and the Church**:—The statement of the prophet amounts to this—that the Lord bears a peculiar relation to the Church. I. The Church is the greatest WITNESS OF GOD. The very existence of the Church on earth shows that it is a witness of God's being, providence, and redemption. This will appear if we consider—1. The Church of God is decidedly opposed to the principles and practice of the great mass of mankind. Its creed and conduct are thought

to be holy, just, benevolent, and productive of happiness. 2. A great portion of mankind have in every age and clime opposed the Church. You cannot put your finger on a page of ecclesiastical history without discovering this. 3. Still the Church not only has existed, but it has increased. I am not able to account for this unless it be Divine interposition. From these considerations we can confidently say that the Church is a living witness of God in the midst of faithless generations. May it ever be a bold, brave, honest witness against sin in all its forms. II. The Church is the brightest ILLUSTRATION OF GOD. 1. By publishing God's own revelations. This was done by writing, translating, and printing. If this had not been done, we should have been to this day under the influence of Druidism. Let the Word of God have free course, and wherever it goes it will cause the wilderness to blossom as the rose, and the parched earth to appear in verdure, fertility, and beauty. 2. By imitating His moral perfections. It not only says such a being as God exists, but in effect says, Look on me, and you shall see God's character exhibited. One of the servants of Plato said once, very sagaciously, "Plato has written a book against anger, and yet he is one of the most angry of men." Christians speak much of Christianity as a system of love, yet they are hating and persecuting one another. III. The Church is the highest INSTRUMENT OF GOD. 1. It ameliorates the outward sufferings of the world. I believe that there is throughout the world a favourable disposition towards Christianity, because it is calculated to better the temporal condition of mankind. Let us endeavour not to contradict this impression. 2. It converts the moral heart of the world. What a noble work God has given His Church to do; what a solemn charge! The conversion of the whole world. Let every individual feel his own responsibility. Let us unite in prayer, that we may be baptized with the Holy Ghost. (*Caleb Morris.*)