

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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**MICAH.**

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## INTRODUCTION TO MICAH.

"NONE of us liveth unto himself," the apostle Paul says in his Epistle to the Romans. Very careful this should make us about our thoughts and our behaviour, lest we do harm by our example. But very cheering, too, when we are striving to walk as children of the light and of the day, the knowledge ought to be that we are wielding over others a "power which makes for righteousness." The lives of good men—of all who have been in the main, with however many faults, saints and servants of God—have an incalculable value. The influence of a holy example carries weight long after the man himself has gone from the world. Such thoughts as these are awakened in us by the very name of the prophet Micah. It was not the first time in the history of the chosen people that the name had been borne by a minister of the Lord. More than a century and a half before the days when this preacher of judgment and mercy stood up to deliver his message to his nation there had been another Micah, who had testified faithfully for God. We know little regarding him; only one dramatic and thrilling incident in his career has been recorded (1 Kings xxii.). So Micaiah, the son of Imlah—and Micaiah is simply a fuller and more original form of Micah—was summoned; and his single voice was heard, solemn and brave in that turbulent crowd, warning Ahab that he must die, and that his people must be scattered like sheep upon the hills. The bold witness-bearer was smitten and imprisoned, and we hear no more of him. But his words were vindicated. Micaiah means "Who is like the Lord?" There was a trumpet-call in the very title which the man bore. It was in itself an inspiring watchword. It was a challenge to those four hundred blind leaders who stood round him; an assurance given them that Jehovah was about to prove Himself superior to every false god. But the prophet who had been so loyal to God had a further reward. Many years after his time there was need for the unfurling again of the old standard, the uttering afresh of the old watchword. It is sad to think that it was in the Kingdom of Judah, which had been more faithful to the truth than its Northern neighbour, that the need had arisen. Those evil influences had indeed begun to work within its borders which were to lead at last to the destruction of Jerusalem and to the weary captivity that ensued. The people were anxious to walk after the desires of their own hearts, without any disturbing voice to tell them that the wages of their sin must be death; they longed for men who should speak only smooth things to them; and they had their wish. There were many religious teachers in the land who were prepared, for the pay of the hireling, to give those careless and unrighteous souls all that they craved. They condoned their sins; they minimised their unjust practices; they concealed the demands and the penalties of God's law. Then it was that a new Micah arose, possessed of the dauntless spirit of the old. The name which he had received from his parents, in memory, perhaps, of the brave preacher who had gone before him, was full of meaning to him. He determined to walk in the footsteps of his predecessor. He would ring out again the solemn challenge, "Who is like the Lord?" He, too, would show himself

an Abdiel, "among innumerable false unmoved." He would summon the world to behold the conflict, undertaken afresh which God had formerly brought to a triumphant issue. "Hear, all ye people; hearken, O earth, and all that therein is; and let the Lord God be witness against you, the Lord from His holy temple,"—these were his fearless words. Micah had no higher ambition than to reproduce the good soldier of an earlier time, who had been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts. There is a twofold lesson here which we shall do well to lay to heart. There is the comforting truth that the dead are blessed who die in the Lord, because their works do follow them—their example lives on when they are themselves away, to stimulate other souls to think of those things which are true and honourable and just and pure and lovely and of good report. The first Micah is repeated in the second, who is even greater, and who wields a wider influence than himself. So it is very often. Our success as husbandmen in God's vineyard may seem to us meagre indeed, and we may not feel ourselves qualified to render Him any large service. But if we speak as He gives us language, and enter willingly the doors which He sets open, and pray without ceasing, He may employ us to kindle into vitality and enthusiasm a life which He is to use for the noblest ends. And the other lesson is similar. It is this, that God will take care to perpetuate His work, and to provide Himself age after age with true-hearted servants and witness-bearers. When one Micah dies, his place will be filled, if need be, by another, who will utter anew the ancient watchword, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear. Micah—the Micah who wrote this book—was a native of the country and not of the town. He was born in Moresheth Gath, a village on the Philistine frontier, which could still be identified when, long centuries later, the Christian father Jerome lived in Palestine. It was from the thrifty and industrious peasantry of Judah that the prophet sprang. He was essentially a man of the people. As we read his words we can see how all along his sympathies continued to go out towards the humbler classes, the toilers of the land, those who bound the sheaf and built the house and dug the grave. There is a burning indignation in his tone when he speaks against the tyranny of the rich and noble. It is a vivid picture which he paints from his own observation of the sufferings of the commonalty at the hands of their lords. Those proud and wealthy men seemed to imagine that all who were beneath them in social station existed but for their benefit. "They coveted fields, and seized them; and houses, and took them away." The poorer agriculturists were robbed daily of their holdings by violence or by false judgment. And so to Micah the worst enemies of Judah were not the Assyrians; they were the men of her own household—the haughty grandees who were hostile to God, because they oppressed those who were under God's most immediate care, the needy and the helpless and the destitute. Micah was a social reformer as well as a prophet. It appears strange that the sins which he denounces in such burning words should have prevailed in what to outward seeming was a period not only of great prosperity, but even of great attention to the observances of religion. The word of the Lord came to him, the heading of the book informs us, "in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah."<sup>1</sup> It may be, as recent expositors incline to believe, that the larger part of the prophetic utterances which follow must be assigned to the last of these reigns; but the life of the prophet himself extended over them all. Now, two of the kings who are named were anxious to know and do God's will, and sought to induce their subjects to act wisely and uprightly. Ahaz, it is true, was anything but a God-fearing prince, and we need not be surprised that in his time truth should stand on the scaffold, and wrong be seated on the throne. But it is grieving to learn that, under the rule of Jotham and Hezekiah, evils should abound like those which Micah exposes and condemns. The sympathies of the sovereigns were with what was good; they were careful to see that God was outwardly honoured and obeyed; but they could not change the hearts and characters of their people. Under their government, injustice and corruption were rampant still, and the prophet had to utter severe and awful words concerning the crimes of the land.

<sup>1</sup> That is, between 759 and 679 B.C. But only a small part of Micah's prophetic activity may have fallen in the reign of Jotham; and he must have been called away from the earth early in the reign of Hezekiah, for in chap. i. he speaks of Sargon's capture of Samaria as still future, and that occurred before Hezekiah had been many years on the throne. A period of thirty years may cover all his labours as a prophet.

It was at a national crisis that he began to speak. Ruin was impending over the Northern Kingdom of Israel. There the storm, which had been gathering for long, was about to burst at last. Ere many months had gone Samaria would be a heap of the field; the stones of her bulwarks were to be rolled down into the valley, and her graven images dashed to pieces by the soldiers of Sargon, the Assyrian king. Amid such clouds and darkness, such wars and rumours of wars, Micah lifted up his voice. But it was not to the Kingdom of the ten tribes that he was eager to bear God's message. It was to his own land of Judah. It, too, had shared the transgression of Samaria, and the same judgments menaced it. Outwardly it looked strong and noble; never since the time of David and Solomon had its wealth and power been greater; it seemed to be religious, too; but there was a canker eating at its heart. Beneath the fair covering, what unrighteousness dwelt, and what neglect of the Divine law! And now, when the Lord's punishments were abroad and Israel was tottering to its fall, would Judah not learn righteousness? Would it not be roused into concern? The task given Micah to accomplish—the revealing to the Jewish people of their evil and of the grievous judgments which awaited them—was not a light or an easy task. It was one under the burden of which he would often be ready to sink. But at those moments when heart and flesh are like to fail it must have encouraged him to know that he was not alone in doing God's strange and heavy work. He had a great coadjutor and friend. Isaiah, the noblest of all the prophets, had begun his ministry before Micah, in the reign of Jotham's father Uzziah; and when Micah laid down his armour he left Isaiah still labouring and battling on. And we may regard it certain that the two were not contemporaries merely, but helpers one of another. In what fashion, then, did Micah finish the work given him to do? We have only to read the book in which he collected the substance of what God had taught by him, to feel assured that, if it had been possible to stir within the proud hearts of the Jews that godly sorrow which needeth not to be repented of, this was the man to break and bend and melt them. I like that old division of the prophecy, though some of the critics reject it, which finds in it three distinct parts, each of them introduced by the call, "Hear ye!" (See i. 2, iii. 1, vi. 1.) If we look at the separate sections we shall discover that in all there is first an unveiling of the national sins, and then a solemn prediction of the woes with which God must visit such transgressions; and finally—as if the heart of the prophet, and the heart of the Lord whose spokesman he was, relented and shrank back from the strange work of judgment—a multitude of exceeding great and precious promises. The sins against which the preacher inveighs are sins both against God and man—a religion full of idolatry, and a false confidence in Jehovah fostered and encouraged by lying oracles; these on the one hand, and, on the other, the unjust dealing which abounded, and the oppression of the poor by the rich. Evils like these God could not leave unpunished. If Micah spoke of the terrors of the Lord—if he felt that he must put the trumpet to his lips and blow what Milton calls "a dolorous blast," in order that the careless in Zion might be aroused—he could not refrain from telling out, too, God's mercy and grace. He was compelled by stern necessity to show himself a Boanerges, a son of thunder; but we cannot help seeing how much rather he would have been a Barnabas, a son of consolation. And had he no reward given him for all his faithfulness? Yes, a rich and enviable reward. God's approval rested upon him; the Master whom he served was well pleased with him. But, more than that, he was honoured to work a great reformation in the guilty land. The Divine judgment, he saw, must come sooner or later; the nation had sinned too deeply to escape the infliction of punishment; but he delayed the evil day—he rendered it possible for God to spare the erring people yet a while. His message stirred within some who listened to it a deep and saving repentance. It is the prophet Jeremiah who narrates the story (Jer. xxvi. 10–19). When his own life was endangered by his uncompromising words, and the priests and false prophets were crying out for his blood, he tells us that certain of the elders of the land took his part and secured his safety. And this was how they argued, "Micah the Morasthite prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah; and he spake to all the people of Judah, saying, 'Zion shall be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest.' Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him at all to death? Did he not fear the Lord, and entreat the favour of the Lord, and the Lord repented Him of the evil which He had pronounced against them?" Here, then, is the completion of Micah's history. His proclamation of lamentation and mourning

and woe—his sharp and piercing words—penetrated the hearts of Hezekiah and of numbers of his subjects. To this prophet the conversion of the king may be traced, and all those noble reforms which the king inaugurated. For a time the sword of Jehovah was put away into its scabbard, and His fierce anger tarried. He saw the nation awake to sorrow and to righteousness under the rebukes of His servant; and He heard it ask the way to Zion, setting its face thitherward. Was not Micah blessed indeed? If many went on still in their wickedness, there were some whom he plucked as brands from the burning, and whom he led into the ways of wisdom which are ways of pleasantness and peace. Probably his office on earth closed shortly afterwards. (*Original Secession Magazine.*)

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## MICAH.

### CHAPTER I.

VERS. 1, 2. **The Word of the Lord that came to Micah the Morasthite.**—*Divine revelation*.:—I. IT IS THE WORD OF THE LORD. What is a word? 1. A mind manifesting power. In his word a true man manifests himself, his thought, feeling, character. His word is important according to the measure of his faculties, experiences, attainments. Divine revelation manifests the mind of God, especially the moral characteristics of that mind—His rectitude, holiness, mercy, &c. 2. A mind influencing power. Man uses his word to influence other minds, to bring other minds into sympathy with his own. Thus God uses His Word. He uses it to correct human errors, dispel human ignorance, remove human perversities, and turn human thought and sympathy into a course harmonious with His own mind. II. IT IS MADE TO INDIVIDUAL MEN. It came to Micah, not to his contemporaries. Why certain men were chosen as the special recipients of God's Word is a problem whose solution must be left for eternity. III. IT IS FOR ALL MANKIND. God did not speak to any individual man specially that the communication might be kept to himself, but that he might communicate it to others. He makes one man the special recipient of truth that he may become the organ and promoter of it. God's Word is for the world. (*Homilist*.) *Moresbeth*.:—This was a place in the Shephelah, or range of low hills which lie between the hill country of Judah and the Philistine plain. It is the opposite exposure from the wilderness of Tekoa, some seventeen miles away across the watershed. As the home of Amos is bare and desert, so the home of Micah is fair and fertile. The irregular chalk hills are separated by broad glens, in which the soil is alluvial and red, with room for cornfields on either side of the perennial, or almost perennial streams. The olive groves on the braes are finer than either those of the plain below or of the Judæan tableland above. There is herbage for cattle. Bees murmur everywhere, larks are singing, and although to-day you may wander in the maze of hills for hours without meeting a man, or seeing a house, you are never out of sight of the traces of human habitation, and seldom beyond the sound of the human voice—shepherds and ploughmen calling to their flocks and to each other across the glens. There are none of the conditions, or of the occasions, of a large town. But, like the south of England, the country is one of villages and homesteads, breeding good yeomen—men satisfied and in love with their soil, yet borderers with a fair outlook and a keen vigilance and sensibility. The Shephelah is sufficiently detached from the capital and body of the land to beget in her sons an independence of mind and feeling, but so much upon the edge of the open world as to endue them at the same time with that sense of the responsibilities of warfare, which the national statesmen, aloof and at ease in Zion, could not possibly have shared. Upon one of the westmost terraces of the Shephelah, nearly a thousand feet above the sea, lay Moresbeth itself. (*Geo. Adam Smith, D.D.*)

VERS. 3-7. **For, behold, the Lord cometh out of His place.**—*God's procedure in relation to sin*.:—This is a highly figurative and sublime representation of the Almighty in His retributive work, especially in relation to Samaria and Jerusalem.

He is represented as leaving His holy temple, coming out of His place, and marching with overwhelming grandeur over the high places of the earth, to deal out punishment to the wicked. "The description of this theophany," says Delitzsch, "is founded upon the idea of a terrible storm and earthquake, as in Psa. xviii. 8. The mountains melt (Judg. v. 4, and Psa. lxxviii. 9) with the streams of water which discharge themselves from heaven (Judg. v. 4), and the valleys split with the deep channels cut out by the torrents of water. The similes 'like wax,' &c. (as in Psa. lxxviii. 3), and 'like water' are intended to express the complete dissolution of mountains and valleys. The actual facts answering to this description are the destructive influences exerted upon nature by great national judgments." The reference is undoubtedly to the destruction of the king of Israel by Shalmaneser, and the invasion of Judah by the armies of Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar, by the latter of whom the Jews were carried away captive. The passage is an inexpressibly grand representation of God's procedure in relation to sin.

**I. As it APPEARS TO THE EYE OF MAN.** The Bible is eminently anthropomorphic. 1. God, in dealing out retribution, appears to man in an extraordinary position. "He cometh forth out of His place." What is His place? To all intelligent beings, the settled place of the Almighty is the temple of love, the pavilion of goodness, the mercy seat. The general beauty, order, and happiness of the universe give all intelligent creatures this impression of Him. But when confusion and misery fall on the sinner, the Almighty seems to man to come out of His "place," to step aside from His ordinary procedure. Judgment is God's strange work. He comes out of His place to execute it. 2. God, in dealing out retribution, appears to man in a terrific aspect. He does not appear as in the silent march of the stars or the serenity of the sun; but as in thunderstorms and volcanic eruptions. "The mountains shall be molten under Him," &c. **II. As it AFFECTS A SINFUL PEOPLE.** In God's procedure in relation to sin what disastrous effects were brought upon Samaria and Jerusalem! 1. God, in His procedure in relation to sin, brings material ruin upon people. Sin brings on commercial decay, political ruin; it destroys the health of the body, and brings it ultimately to the dust. 2. God, in His procedure in relation to sin, brings mental anguish upon a people. A disruption between the soul and the objects of its supreme affections involves the greatest anguish. The gods of a people, whatever they may be, are these objects, and these are to be destroyed. Conclusion—Mark well that God has a course of conduct in relation to sin, or rather, that God, in His beneficent march, must ever appear terrible to the sinner, and bring ruin on his head. It is the wisdom as well as the duty of all intelligent creatures to move in thought, sympathy, and purpose, as God moves—move with Him, not against Him. (*Homilist.*)

*God's way of taking vengeance.*—The justice of God taking vengeance on enemies is further described from the way of manifesting thereof, which is slowly but certainly; the Lord forbearing, neither because He purposes to give, nor because He wants power; as may appear from His majesty and state, when He appeareth environed with whirlwinds and tempests raised by His power. Doctrine.—1. The Lord, even toward enemies, is long-suffering, and slow in executing of anger, that their destruction may be seen to be of themselves, that in His holy providence they may stumble more upon His indulgence, and fill up their measure; and that His Church's faith and patience may be tried. 2. When the Lord spareth His enemies, it is not because He is not able to meet with them, nor ought we to judge from any outward appearance that they are invincible; for, how unlikely soever the destruction of enemies may be in the eyes of men, yet the Lord who is "slow to anger" is also "great in power." 3. As the Lord is able to reach His enemies when He pleaseth, so His forbearing of them is no evidence that they shall be exempted altogether; but He will undoubtedly give proof of His power, in dealing with them as their way deserveth. 4. The Lord is able by His power speedily to bring to pass greatest things, and can, when He pleaseth, overturn, confound, and darken all things which appeared to be stable, well ordered, and clear. 5. The Lord, manifesting Himself in His great glory, doth but, so to say, obscure Himself in respect of our infirmity, which cannot comprehend His glory in its brightness; for so much doth His manifestation of Himself environed with dark storms or tempests and thick lowering clouds teach. 6. God's dispensations, even when they are most dreadful and terrible in effects, may yet be deep and unsearchable, and His purpose and counsel in them hard to discern; for so much doth His way in whirlwinds, storms, and clouds (which involve and darken all) teach. (*George Hutcheson.*)

Vers. 8, 9. **For her wound is incurable.**—*Moral incurableness* :—Samaria and Jerusalem were, in a material and political sense, in a desperate and hopeless condition. I. **MORAL INCURABLENESS IS A CONDITION INTO WHICH MEN MAY FALL.** 1. Mental philosophy shows this. Such is the constitution of the human mind, that the repetition of an act can generate an uncontrollable tendency to repeat it; and the repetition of a sin deadens altogether that moral sensibility which constitutionally recoils from the wrong. The mind often makes habit, not only second nature, but the sovereign of nature. 2. Observation shows this. That man's circle of acquaintance must be exceedingly limited who does not know men who become morally incurable. There are incurable liars, incurable misers, incurable sensualists, and incurable drunkards. No moral logician, however great his dialectic skill, can forge an argument strong enough to move them from their old ways, even when urged by the seraphic fervour of the highest rhetoric. 3. The Bible shows this. "Speak not in the ears of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of thy words." "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes." We often speak of retribution as if it always lay beyond the grave, and the day of grace as extending through the whole life of man; but such is not the fact. Retribution begins with many men here. II. **IT IS A CONDITION FOR THE PROFOUNDEST LAMENTATION.** "Therefore I will wail and howl, I will go stripped and naked. I will make a wailing like the dragons and mourning as the owls." Christ wept when He considered the moral incurableness of the men of Jerusalem. There is no sight more distressing than the sight of a morally incurable soul. There is no building that I pass that strikes me with greater sadness than the Hospital for "Incurables"; but what are incurable bodies, compared to morally incurable souls? There are anodynes that may deaden their pains, and death will relieve them of their torture; but a morally incurable soul is destined to pass into anguish, intense and more intense as existence runs on, and peradventure without end. The incurable body may not necessarily be an injury to others; but a morally incurable soul must be a curse as long as it lives. (*Homilist.*) *An incurable wound* :—The late Dr. A. J. Gordon gave the following anecdote in one of the last sermons he preached: "Dr. Westmoreland, an eminent army surgeon, tells of a soldier who was shot in the neck, the ball just grazing and wounding the carotid artery. The doctor knew that his life hung on a hair, and one day as he was dressing the wound the walls of the artery gave way. Instantly the surgeon pressed his finger upon the artery, and held the blood in check; and the patient asked, 'What does this mean?' 'It means that you are a dead man,' answered the doctor. 'How long can I live?' 'As long as I keep my hand on the artery.' 'Can I have time to dictate a letter to my wife and child?' 'Yes.' And so the letter was written for him, full of tender farewell messages, and when all was finished he calmly closed his eyes and said 'I am ready, doctor.' The purple tide ebbed quickly away and all was over. What a parable is here of a far more solemn fact. Oh, unsaved one, you are by nature 'dead through trespasses and sins'! But God keeps His hand upon your pulse, preserving your life that you may have an opportunity to repent and be saved."

Ver. 13. **Blind the chariot to the swift beast.**—*Be quick* :—These words are addressed to the inhabitants of Lachish. Our subject is promptitude in action. I. **BE QUICK IN YOUR MATERIAL ENGAGEMENTS.** The distinction between the secular and the spiritual is not real but fictitious. A man should be quick in all his legitimate temporal engagements, whatever they may be. By quickness is not meant the hurry of confusion, but adroit expertness, skilful promptitude. As Shakespeare said, "What the wise do quickly, is not done rashly." 1. The quicker you are the more you will accomplish. An expert man will accomplish more in an hour than a slow man in a day. 2. The quicker you are, the better for your faculties. The quick movement of the limb is healthier than the slow; the quick action of the mental faculties is more invigorating than the slow. As a rule, the quick man is in every way healthier and happier than the slow. 3. The quicker you are, the more valuable you are in the market of the world. The skilful man who cultivates the habit of quickness and despatch increases his commercial value every day. II. **BE QUICK IN YOUR INTELLECTUAL PURSUITS.** You have an enormous amount of mental work to do, if you act up to your duty, and discharge your mission in life. 1. The quicker you are, the more

you will attain. The more fields of truth you will traverse, the more fruits you will gather from the tree of knowledge. Some men in their studies move like elephants, and only traverse a small space. Others, like eagles, sweep continents in a day. The quick eye will see what escapes the dull eye, the quick ear will catch voices unheard by the slow of hearing. 2. The quicker you are, the better for your faculties. It is the brisk walker that best strengthens his limbs, the brisk fighter that wins the greatest victories. It is by quick action that the steel is polished and that weapons are sharpened. Intellectual quickness whets the faculties, makes them keen, agile, and apt. "Bind the chariot to the swift beast." III. Be quick in your SPIRITUAL AFFAIRS. 1. Morally you have a work to do for your own soul. The work is great and urgent. 2. Morally you have a work to do for others. There are souls around you demanding your most earnest efforts, &c. (1) Be quick; the work must be done during your life here, if ever done. (2) Be quick; your life here is very short and uncertain. (3) Be quick; the longer you delay the more difficult it is to do. (*Homilist.*) *Promptitude in action*.—An officer of high rank in the British Army relates how he won the first step of the ladder to recognition and promotion. He was then a young sub-lieutenant of engineers in Ceylon. One morning, while at a quiet game in the amusement-room, unaware that any duty was being neglected, the governor of the island saw him. "What are you doing here, youngster?" said his chief. "I thought you would have been at Negombo by this time!" "What to do there, sir?" "What! Have you not received your orders? Go to the quartermaster-general at once." But it was nearly one o'clock before the young fellow could find that officer. When found, his instructions were to proceed to Negombo, an old fort twenty-three miles north, make a plan of the barracks there, and note various important details. But the sub-lieutenant was vexed; for that evening he was obliged to attend a dinner-party at the Government House, and there was not much time to spare. However, he saddled his Arab horse, that could do almost anything except fly, and covered the twenty-three miles in two hours. Next, field-book and tape-line in hand, he made the necessary measurements and calculations, sketching plans, and writing down facts and figures. Having drafted an accurate report, he remounted his faithful steed, and was back in Colombo before the dinner-hour. Walking in quietly with the other guests, the governor saw him, and exclaimed: "You here, sir! What were your orders? Why are you not attending to them? Be off at once!" "My orders were to go to Negombo, sir," replied the young officer, repeating the instructions. "Then, what do you mean by neglecting them?" "I have not," was the answer. "The report is finished, and will be laid before you to-morrow morning." The governor showed his delight by the glow of satisfaction on his face. He detailed the matter to his staff, dwelling on the smart and accurate obedience manifested, and from that day the young man rose steadily in his profession. (*Sunday Companion.*)

## CHAPTER II.

VERS. 1-4. And they covet fields, and take them by violence.—*Avarice*.—Greed is the spring and spirit of all oppression. Here rapacious avarice is presented in three aspects. I. *SCHEMING IN THE NIGHT*. When avarice takes possession of a man, it works the brain by night as well as by day. What schemes to swindle, defraud, and plunder men are fabricated every night upon the pillow! II. *WORKING IN THE DAY*. The idea esteemed most is the worldly gain of avaricious labour. So it ever is; gain is the god of the greedy man. He sacrifices all his time and labour on its altar. Shakespeare compares such a man to a whale which plays and tumbles, driving the poor fry before him, and at last devours them all at a mouthful. III. *SUFFERING IN THE JUDGMENT*. For judgment comes at last, and in the judgment these words give us to understand the punishment will correspond with the sin. "Because they reflect upon evil," says Delitzsch, "to deprive their fellow-men of their possessions, Jehovah will bring evil upon this generation, lay a heavy yoke upon their necks, under which they will not be able to walk loftily or with extended neck." Ay, the time will come when the avaricious millionaire will exclaim, "We be utterly spoiled."

"Go to, now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you," &c. (*Homilist*.) *The wrong which Micah attacks*.—Micah scourges the avarice of the landowner, and the injustice which oppresses the peasant. Social wrongs are always felt most acutely, not in the town, but in the country. It was so in the days of Rome, whose earliest social revolts were agrarian. It was so in the Middle Ages; the fourteenth century saw both the Jacquerie in France and the Peasants' rising in England; Langland, who was equally familiar with town and country, expends nearly all his sympathy upon the poverty of the latter, "the poure folk in cotes." It was so after the Reformation, under the new spirit of which the first social revolt was the Peasants' war in Germany. It was so at the French Revolution, which began with the march of the starving peasants into Paris. And it is so still, for our new era of social legislation has been forced upon us, not by the poor of London and the large cities, but by the peasantry of Ireland and the crofters of the Scottish Highlands. Political discontent and religious heresy take their start among industrial and manufacturing centres, but the first springs of the social revolt are nearly always found among rural populations. Why the country should begin to feel the acuteness of social wrong before the town is sufficiently obvious. In the town there are mitigations, and there are escapes. If the conditions of one trade become oppressive, it is easier to pass to another. The workers are better educated and better organised; there is a middle class, and the tyrant dare not bring matters to so high a crisis. The might of the wealthy, too, is divided; the poor man's employer is seldom at the same time his landlord. But in the country power easily gathers into the hands of the few. The labourer's opportunities and means of work, his house, his very standing-ground are often all the property of one man. In the country the rich have a real power of life and death, and are less hampered by competition with each other, and by the force of public opinion. One man cannot hold a city in fee, but one man can affect for evil or for good almost as large a population as a city's, when it is scattered across a country side. This is precisely the state of wrong which Micah attacks. This is the evil, the ease with which wrong is done in the country. "It lies to the power of their hands; they covet and seize." Micah feels that by themselves the economic wrongs explain and justify the doom impending on the nation. (*G. A. Smith, D.D.*)

Ver. 3. **Therefore, thus saith the Lord: Behold, against this family do I devise evil.**—*The great antagonist*.—Here is Micah, the fresh child of the country, who has communed with the Lord God in the ploughed field, in the fragrant vineyard, amid the primeval forest, in lonely wilderness, and in secluded height. He comes to human affairs with keen and unblunted perceptions. Through this man's eyes we may gaze at the outlines and colours of the golden age, we may look upon the causes of lukewarm and congealed affection, and we may also contemplate the fated and inevitable consequences of sin. It is this latter awful vision which I want to bring before you. "Behold, against this family do I devise an evil." Let us get the connection of this word. In an earlier chapter I come upon this indictment: "Woe to them that devise iniquity upon their beds." The people are busy devising, planning, plotting, scheming. They are building upon falsehood. They are arranging the items of their life in evil sequence. But there is a Counter-plotter! "Against this family do I devise an evil." The human schemer is confronted by a great Antagonist, God. The Antagonist evidences His working in adversities, disappointments, dissatisfactions, in failures, in fundamental and ignominious defeat. Micah's initial teaching is therefore this: Every sin has its deliberately planned penalty. We cannot isolate the bacillus of sin; it makes its appointed ravages, and no human ministry can fashion an escape. Man devises iniquity; God devises the appropriate issue. One is as certain as the other. Prussic acid is not more certain in its ravages than sin. Now, with this expression of a general and unescapable law before us, let us see what this sharp-eyed prophet regards as some of the inevitable consequences of sin. "Uncleanness that destroyeth with a grievous destruction." All sin is uncleanness, and uncleanness is a monster of destruction. As sure as a moth eats away the fabrics of a garment, so sin consumes the robes and habits of the soul. As sure as rust corrodes an instrument of steel, so sin destroys the implements of life. What does sin destroy? Our philosophers arrange the powers and endowments of man in a heightening scale. They begin with mere animal vitality, sheer naked energy, the basal aptitudes

and passions, and they ascend through the senses, the intellectual perceptions, the powers of reasoning, the æsthetic tastes, up to the moral realm, and higher still to the peerless sphere of reverence and veneration, where life looks out upon God! It is all-important that we remember this range of endowment when we are considering the destructiveness of sin. And I will tell you why. When sin breaks out in the life there are parts of this extensive range which appear to be untouched, and if a man looked at these alone it might appear that sin has committed no ravages at all. Let us look at this. When a noxious gas gets into a greenhouse the most delicate things are the first things to suffer. When the coarser plants are smitten the finer ones have long been dead. It is so in the life. When destructive uncleanness enters, the coarsest thing is the last to be hit. The body preserves its life the longest. Let us assume that a man has become ridden by lust. When that man's body begins to shake the more delicate things of the soul are already destroyed. When the passion for drink shows itself in the face, other parts are already in ashes. The fire of sin always begins to flame in the upper chambers, and burns down towards the basement. The first thing to suffer is our affection. When purity goes out of life love droops like a bird whose cage is near the ceiling, and which faints amid the accumulated fumes of the burning gas. Let a man live an impure life, for one day; let falsehood, passion, malice, bear down upon him, and let him watch the effect upon his affection for wife and child. "Uncleanness," according to this prophet, "destroyeth with a grievous destruction." "It shall be night unto you, and ye shall have no vision." You will not be surprised to be taken this second step under the guidance of the prophet Micah. The sentence is descriptive of a second penalty. What is that? It is the loss of spiritual perception. In the higher realms of our being we are like instruments to be played upon by the Spirit of God. But what is the worth of the harp when the strings are eaten away? What is the use of a piano when the wires are corroded? The executant is unable to convey his message because the instrument is unable to receive it. And when the instrument of our higher self is corrupted or impaired we cannot perceive the approaches of the Spirit or discern the whispering counsels of our God. This is a law whose working I have proved by sad experience in my own life. There have been days when the Book of Scripture seemed closed before me. The page appears commonplace; it does not glow with the heavenly Presence. But on the day of moral alertness and strenuousness of spiritual nearness to my God the common bush is aflame, and His word becomes "a light unto my path." Sin spoils our spiritual eyes and ears, and makes us poor receivers. "Thou shalt eat and not be satisfied." This is the third of the penalties of sin. Sin issues in deep-seated weariness and unrest. The man makes money, but he sighs amid his abundance. His friends speak of him in terms of admiration: "He has got everything that heart could wish." Ah, that is just what he has not got! He has got everything that flesh could wish, but the heart is mourning in secret impoverishment. These dissatisfied souls are all about us, in the pulpit and out of it. But our very dissatisfaction is more than the issue of sin; it is the merciful judgment of infinite grace and love. If our Father left us in satisfaction our perdition would be hopeless and complete. (*J. H. Jowett, M.A.*)

**Ver. 7. O thou that art named the house of Jacob, is the Spirit of the Lord straitened?**—*The criminality and folly of limiting the Holy Spirit*.—1. Amongst the numerous instances in which Christians conduct themselves as if they imagined that the Spirit of the Lord is straitened, notice the following. (1) Their conduct is of this description, when they expect little or no benefit from the Word of God and the ordinances of His worship. (2) When they shrink from the discharge of necessary duty. (3) When they are unduly afraid of their enemies. (4) When they sink under the pressure of adversity. (5) When they limit the operations of the Spirit to particular periods of time, or to any particular denomination of professed Christians. 2. The unreasonableness of such conduct. It is at once sinful and selfish, unreasonable and absurd. Consider—(1) That the Spirit of Jehovah is a Spirit of unbounded intelligence and power. Dependent and limited creatures may soon become straitened. (2) He is a Spirit of infinite goodness and love. (3) He is a Spirit sent forth by the Father and the Son. (4) The Scriptures contain rich promises of the continued agency of the Holy Spirit. (5) The gracious and mighty works which have already been effected by the Spirit of Jehovah. Let us all be impressed with a sense of the necessity and

importance of the Spirit's agency. It deeply concerns us to inquire whether or not it is our privilege to have the Spirit dwelling and operating in us. (*D. Fraser, D.D.*) *The influence of the Spirit,—the doctrine abused by straitening the Spirit:—*1. The work of the Lord, the Spirit, is wide, extended, and extensive. He is emphatically the "Comforter"; this is His principal work. He comforts the soul, made conscious how little there is in himself to nourish and strengthen; stripped, in a sense, of his self-wisdom, self-power, self-importance, and self-complacency. He testifies of Jesus as having "all fulness" in Him. He comforts the poor, tried, and harassed soul, in the midst of its trial, sorrow, and affliction, by unfolding the man of sympathy, the sympathy of the God-man Mediator. He comforts the soul by revealing the character of God; in His gracious character; in His sin-forgiving character; in His tenderness, compassion, gentleness, and holiness. He comforts His saints as they pass through the changes of a changing world, by revealing the covenant, "ordered in all things and sure." He unfolds the gracious promises of the God of grace. He is called "the Comforter," because it belongs to Him especially to comfort the saints of the Most High. But He is a Rebuker as well as a Comforter. Here it is to be feared that He is not glorified as He ought to be. He is a "Spirit of judgment" in our souls. There is no court that a natural man so dislikes as the court of an enlightened conscience. It is a solemn place. Not only in the first awakening of the soul, but in all after revealings of the Lord Jesus Christ to our hearts, there is still something of a rebuking Spirit. We have to learn out our truths in the school of God, who will be a light to guide in the way. 2. God's Word yields to the spiritual pilgrim food and nourishment, as well as light. 3. As the pilgrim's way lies through an enemy's country he is liable to various assaults, and the Word of God will furnish him with armour of defence. It is his shield and buckler, to ward off and repel the fiery darts of the wicked one. 4. When the Christian begins to be weary and faint in his mind, God's Word becomes his stay and support. 5. It is a comfort to travellers to have a prospect, though a distant and imperfect one, of the place whither they are going. The Divine Word is both a map of the heavenly country and a perspective glass through which we may view it. It is the prospect of that better country which cheers the Christian by the way, and quickens his steps through the wilderness. (*B. Beddome, M.A.*) *The plenitude of the Holy Spirit's influence:—*The prophet is reproving the people for their opposition to the servants of God, and their attachment to false prophets. Their rulers would silence the prophets of the Lord, because they wished to hear no more of their alarming predictions, but to be told only smooth and flattering things. Micah is therefore commissioned to declare that they should be deprived of this privilege. I. THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN OUR SALVATION. The recovery of fallen men to the love and likeness of God is usually expressed by the word "salvation." Salvation is ascribed in Scripture to the love of God the Father, in whose infinite benevolence it originated. It was, however, necessary that an adequate atonement should be made for human transgressions. This work, assigned to Christ in the economy of redemption, He voluntarily undertook, and He alone could execute it. All the blessings of salvation are ascribed to Him. But the death of Christ would have been fruitless without the work of the Holy Ghost. Without this there could be no conviction of our need of salvation, no discernment of the way in which alone it can be obtained, no desire to possess it, no faith, no hope, no love, nothing of that purity of heart, destitute of which no man can see the Lord. The Spirit proceedeth from the Father. He gave His Son that He might send His pure and Holy Spirit into our depraved hearts to form us for communion with, and the everlasting enjoyment of Himself. We are equally indebted for the Spirit to the love of God and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. II. THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE PLENITUDE OF HIS INFLUENCE. It is perfectly consistent with the practical design of Scripture to apply a truth spoken on a particular occasion to the general purposes of the Christian life. Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? No; we are to set no bounds to His power; we are not to circumscribe the measure of His influence; our expectations and our endeavours should correspond to the fulness of His grace. We may infer that the influences of the Holy Spirit are not straitened from the extent and merit of the Saviour's sufferings, and the greatness and design of His exaltation; from the abundant measure in which the gifts of the Spirit were communicated on the day of Pentecost; from the predictions of Scripture concerning the future prosperity of the Christian

Church, and from the eminence in piety and usefulness to which many have attained. The truth we press on attention is, that every one may, through faith in the Saviour, and in answer to prayer, certainly obtain all the assistance from the Holy Spirit which he needs. This is evident from a multitude of promises. The subject calls for an admonitory application. 1. It condemns an undue dependence on instruments. 2. It forbids an exclusive attachment to particular subjects. 3. It censures those who despair of the conversion of others. 4. It remonstrates with such as are ready to abandon their efforts to do good from a feeling of their own insufficiency. 5. It should urge us to unite in all scriptural plans of usefulness, instead of confining ourselves to particular methods. 6. It frowns on a bigoted party spirit. 7. Beware of resisting and grieving the Spirit. (*Essex Remembrancer.*)

*The straitened Spirit.*—Regard the Holy Spirit as that most glorious and blessed agency by which our depraved nature is purified, our bondage of evil turned into freedom, our spiritual darkness enlightened, our penitent sorrows exchanged for feelings of joyousness, and our rugged path on life's upward journey made smooth and plain. In the time of Micah the inspiration of prophecy was regarded by the people of the Jews as the result of this agency; but they were not always pleased with it. The prophets who were faithful were men who did not seek to please the public ear by prophesying what was most palatable to its pride and luxury, but what was calculated to humble and alarm. And if this offended some, was their offence to be the guide and rule of the prophet's teaching? Was the Spirit of God to be straitened or limited in His operations because His inspired messages were not acceptable? Hence the question of the text. I. THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD ACTS WITH UNLIMITED SOVEREIGNTY. He is not bound by human laws and human opinions, neither is He fettered in His movements by any dogmatic assumption or priestly power. What is to hinder Him from doing His Will? An earnest seeking for His aid, an humble trust in His love, a devout prayer for His deliverance, and a persevering hold upon Christ as our Sacrifice and Mediator may soon bring to the soul that bright light of life which speaks of His indwelling presence and resurrection power. II. THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD ACTS WITH AN UNCHANGEABLENESS OF LOVE. And who can give any bounds to this love, not only in its objects but in its intensity? It never changes. Time can never alter it, and nothing in the great universe about us can either divert it from its course or weaken its power. III. THOUGH THE SPIRIT OF GOD IS NOT STRAITENED, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT IT MAY APPEAR SO. But this arises from our own disobedience. We may have stifled His convictions. We may have deserted His counsels. We may have rejected His offers, His promises, and His invitations. IV. SOME WISH THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD TO BE STRAITENED TO THEIR OWN VIEW OF THINGS. Some would straiten the Lord in the execution of His judgments. To the fainting, weak, and doubting spirit of the Christian there is something very exhilarating in the thought that the Spirit of the Lord is *not* straitened in His power and love and wisdom. Troubled as He oftentimes is from a deceitful heart and powerful temptations, how great a privilege to feel His nearness and to realise His inspiration in the prayer that goes up like incense to the throne of heaven. In the infinitude of the Spirit's power there is liberty—a vast ocean of life, that seems to spread out more and more before the eager and aspiring soul. But, on the contrary, this very truth of the Holy Spirit's illimitability will be a cause of condemnation to those who continue to reject Him. (*W. D. Horwood.*)

*The Spirit of the Lord not straitened.*—Here God is expostulating with His Church, when in a low and languishing state, as to the cause of this. He is vindicating Himself from all share of blame in the matter,—He is showing them where the blame lies, even with His professing people themselves, in their want of faith and prayer. It is their unbelief that mars all. This straitens, shuts up, imprisons their spirits, so that their desires do not flow forth with any enlargement after Divine communications. It is not the Spirit of the Lord that is straitened. There is a straitening, but it is all on their part. I. THE QUESTION IN THE TEXT IMPLIES THAT THE SPIRIT IS NOT STRAITENED IN THE SENSE WHICH OUR UNBELIEF WOULD SUGGEST. 1. The Spirit is not straitened in respect of His own inherent sufficiency. All grace, wisdom, might, and faithfulness are in Him. The creature is limited in duration; He is eternal. The creature is limited in respect of knowledge. "The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." The creature is limited in respect of power; not so the Spirit. The creature is limited in respect of moral excellence; the Spirit is distinctively and supereminently

the Spirit of holiness. 2. In respect of the Saviour's purchase of Him for the Church. As the Head of His Church, Christ is its source of spiritual influence. In Him, for the use of His Church, the Spirit dwells in immeasurable degree. Mark the encouragement afforded us by the death of Christ to expect free and full communications of the Holy Spirit. 3. In respect of the offer of Him in the Gospel. (1) He is offered universally. (2) Freely. (3) Largely. II. THE QUESTION IMPLIES THAT HE IS OFTEN STRAITENED OR DIMINISHED IN RESPECT OF HIS ACTUAL COMMUNICATIONS TO THE CHURCH. It is a fact that the presence and power of the Spirit are not enjoyed by the Church at some periods as much as at others. Point out some of the characteristics of a Church from which the Spirit has withdrawn much of His presence and power. 1. In such a Church the truth will not generally be preached with evangelical purity, faithfulness, and power. 2. There will be a general departure from the simple and scriptural principles of government and discipline on which the Church is founded. 3. There will be a sad lack of zeal in propagating religion and extending the means of grace. The missionary spirit will be all but extinct. 4. There will be few conversions. 5. Even the people of God themselves will not be possessed of so high a tone of spirituality as they ought to be. In short, there will be little personal piety and family prayer; but, on the contrary, much worldliness, much ungodliness, much hostility to anything like zealous Christianity. In the same proportion as the Spirit departs will spirituality decay and carnality increase. What should we learn from this but our entire dependence upon this blessed agent? III. THE QUESTION IS INTENDED TO CONVEY A REBUKE TO THE CHURCH FOR ITS NOT HAVING SUFFICIENTLY VALUED, AND THEREFORE ASKED AND RECEIVED, THE HOLY SPIRIT. If the Spirit is restrained in His actual communications, this must be either because He is unwilling to bestow His influences upon us, or because we are unwilling to accept of them. It cannot be the first; it must be the last. Apply—1. To the unconverted; there are some who are entirely destitute of any work of the Spirit of God upon their hearts. Dare they say that they have long been willing to receive Him, but have found it impossible? Their consciences would not suffer them to say so. 2. To those who have in some measure received the Spirit. They often complain of the low state of religion in their own hearts, and in the world around them. Hard thoughts of God suggest themselves to them, as if He had become careless of the interests of His Church. But they will find reason to exonerate God of all blame, and to place it to their own account. Have they cherished, as they ought to have done, the visits of this Divine Person to their own souls? Is it not true that they have, in a great measure, ceased to realise their dependence on Him? Thus religion decaying in their own hearts, they become less concerned about the progress of religion in the hearts of others. IV. THE QUESTION IS INTENDED TO CONVEY AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO US TO ASK HIM—TO ASK HIM CONFIDENTLY AND LARGELY. The encouragement is twofold, drawn—1. From the form of the question itself. It is evidently designed to teach us that the Spirit of the Lord is not straitened, not limited nor confined in the sense our unbelief suggests. It is as if it were said—Set no bounds to your desires; ask more and more; ask again and again. 2. Notice to whom the question is addressed. "O thou that art named the house of Israel." It is addressed to the professing Church and people of God, and it is designed to put them in mind of the relation God bears to them as their God, and the warrant thereby afforded them to ask and expect the Holy Spirit. There must be a want, and what can that want be but the want of sufficiently earnest and believing prayer? Immediately, then, let this want be supplied. (*A. L. R. Foote.*) *Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened?*—I. THE PROMISE OF PENTECOST. What did it declare and hold forth for the faith of the Church? 1. The promise of a Divine Spirit by symbols which express some, at all events, of the characteristics and wonderfulness of His work. The "rushing of a mighty wind" spoke of a power which varies in its manifestations from the gentlest breath that scarce moves the leaves on the summer trees to the wildest blast that casts down all which stands in its way. The natural symbolism of the wind, to popular apprehension; the least material of all material forces, and of which the connection with the immaterial part of a man's personality has been expressed in all languages, points to a Divine, immaterial, mighty, life-giving power which is free to blow where it listeth, and of which men can mark the effects, though they are all ignorant of the force itself. The twin symbol of the fiery tongues which parted and sat upon each of them speaks in like manner of the Divine influence, not as destruc-

tive, but full of quick, rejoicing energy and life, the power to transform and to purify. Whithersoever the fire comes, it changes all things into its own substance. Wherever the fiery spirit comes there is energy, swift life, rejoicing activity, transforming and transmuting power which changes the recipient of the flame into flame itself. In the fact of Pentecost there is the promise of a Divine Spirit which is to influence all the moral side of humanity. This is the distinction between the Christian doctrine of inspiration and all others which have, in heathen lands, partially reached similar conceptions—that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has laid emphasis upon the Holy Spirit, and has declared that holiness of heart is the touchstone and test of all claims of Divine inspiration. Gifts are much, graces are more. An inspiration which makes wise is to be coveted, an inspiration which makes holy is transcendently better. There we find the safeguard against all the fanaticisms which have at times invaded the Christian Church. The Spirit that came at Pentecost is not merely a spirit of rushing might, and of swift flaming energy; it is a Spirit of holiness. Pentecost also carried in it the promise and prophecy of a Spirit granted to all the Church. "They were all filled with the Holy Ghost." Further, the promise of the early history was that of a Spirit which should fill the whole nature of the men to whom He was granted. Each man, according to his character, stature, circumstances, and all the varying conditions which determine his power of receptivity, will receive a varying measure of that gift. Yet it is meant that all shall be full.

II. THE APPARENT FAILURE OF THE PROMISE. Will anyone say that the religious condition of any body of believers at this moment corresponds to Pentecost? Do any existing Churches present the final perfect form of Christianity as embodied in a society? Estimate by three tests. 1. Does the ordinary tenour of our own religious life look as if we had that Divine Spirit in us which transforms everything into its own beauty, and makes men, through all the regions of their nature, holy and pure? Does the standard of devotion and consecration in any Church witness of the presence of a Divine Spirit? 2. Do the relations of modern Christians and their churches to one another attest the presence of a unifying Spirit? 3. Look at the comparative impotence of the Church in its conflict with the growing worldliness of the world. III. THE SOLUTION OF THE CONTRADICTION. It is sometimes urged that the Spirit of the Lord is straitened. Some say, Christianity is effete. Others say, God in His sovereignty is pleased to withhold His Spirit for reasons which we cannot trace. But there is always the same flow from God. There are ebbs and flows in the spiritual power of the Church. It is our own fault, and the result of evil in ourselves that may be remedied, that we have so little of this Divine gift. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Why is the Spirit straitened?*—In view of the large effusion of religious knowledge in our days, we inquire, Why does not the fear of God more abound? Whence is it that, even where true piety really exists, it is so little deep, spiritual, and full of love, warmth, and holy unction? Shall we reply that the blessing must be from above, and that God alone can re-model the human heart? This indeed is true; but then occurs the question, "Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened?" If He be not straitened, whence comes it to pass that His gracious influences are not more fully manifested? Is the fault in ourselves or in God? The influences of the Holy Spirit are His miraculous and His ordinary manifestations. Is He straitened in either of these? I. IS HE STRAITENED IN HIS MIRACULOUS INFLUENCES? Miracles, we say, are not now to be expected. They have done their work. But God is not therefore straitened. He could, if He saw fit, revive His miraculous influences. And even now we have remarkable effusions of grace, as in revival times. He could, if He so willed, bring back even a second day of Pentecost, with all its miraculous outpourings. II. IS HE STRAITENED IN THOSE ORDINARY PROMISED INFLUENCES UNDER WHICH WE OURSELVES LIVE? Take the following influences—as a Teacher, as a Sanctifier, as a Comforter. Is the Holy Spirit less an Enlightener, a Sanctifier, and a Guide now than He was in the days of Abraham, or David, or St. Paul? Is He less powerful? Is He less willing? Is He less gracious in His promises? Whence, then, comes it to pass that, after so many centuries of nominal Christianity, more spiritual good has not been effected? In particular, what are the causes which impede in our own age, our own country, our own families and congregations, and above all, in our own hearts, the operations of the Holy Spirit? The Spirit of the Lord may be straitened, on account of the finite capacity of the recipient. If the Holy Ghost consecrates our hearts for His temple, He chooses a shrine in which He can exhibit,

so to speak, but a small portion of His glory ; it will be enlarged in heaven, but even there it will be finite. Take the love of St. John, the fervour of David, the heavenly mindedness of St. Paul ; these fruits of the Spirit in those blessed men were eminently great ; but they were bounded by the mortal mould, and for them to be enlarged to the elevation of a Gabriel death must intervene. But the littleness of the human heart is not the only cause why the Divine manifestations appear straitened. Its corruption and sinfulness are far more powerful causes. Think of the innate workings of human depravity ; the stubbornness of the soil which is to be broken up and cultivated ; the natural enmity of the human heart to God, and all that is like God ; the prejudices which exist against the Gospel of Christ ; the evil devices of Satan ; the "infection of nature" which remains "even in them that are regenerate." In addition to the deadening effects of sin generally, every age and country has its own special temptations, which in a peculiar manner seem to restrain the effusion of the Divine influences at that particular place and season. 1. Being satisfied with a low standard of spiritual attainment. Look at apostles and prophets ; look at saints and professors and martyrs. Are we like them ? 2. Another cause of check to the Spirit's work in our day is excitement. Not religious excitement so much as the rush and hurry and worry of modern business and social life. The Spirit needs quiet times and moods in which to carry on His hallowing work. (*Samuel Charles Wilks, M.A.*) *The Holy Spirit not straitened* (marg., "shortened") :—The meaning is, not limited, bound, restrained, but free to work and bless at all times, and in unlimited measure. We pray and act as if God were subject to metes and bounds,—confined to times and seasons—unable or unwilling to do for His cause and people on a scale commensurate with His own infinite grace and power and purpose. I. GOD THE SPIRIT IS NOT STRAITENED IN HIMSELF. This were impossible, as His nature and all His attributes are infinite ; His love, mercy, grace, power are unbounded. II. HE HAS NOT TIED HIS OWN HANDS, by His decrees, or in any other way, so that He cannot work to save even to the uttermost all that will come to Him. His arm is never shortened that it cannot save. If the Church is in a feeble state, the fault lies at her own door. III. GOD IS NOT STRAITENED BY REASON OF ANY LACK OF PROVISION IN THE GOSPEL ECONOMY, or efficacy in the atoning sacrifice, or fulness of the Spirit's power. IV. NEITHER IS THE SPIRIT STRAITENED BY REASON OF THE UNBELIEF AND OBSTINACY OF SINNERS, OR THE ABOUNDING INFIDELITY AND WICKEDNESS OF THE TIMES. The power that could change Saul of Tarsus into Paul the Apostle ; that could plant and maintain flourishing Christian Churches in such corrupt heathen cities as Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome ; that could resurrect the Church of the Reformation from the grave of the dark ages and the corruptions of Rome ; that is achieving such glorious conquests to-day, not simply in heathen lands, is equal to any emergency, any work, that prayer and Christian endeavour can compass. If God is ever straitened, it is in His people. Their unbelief, supineness, inaction, serve to restrain the Spirit's power, and block the wheels of salvation. What a tremendous responsibility ! Who is willing to share it ? (*J. M. Sherwood, D.D.*) *The straitened Spirit* :—The Lord's people were now so far degenerated as to continue and oppose God's messengers, as if they might limit His Spirit to speak only what pleased them ; or as if His Spirit were straitened to do them good. Doctrine.—I. It is a deplorable case, and sadly to be lamented, when men stand in opposition to the Word of God, and the carriers thereof. So much doth this expostulation and these pressing interrogatories imply. 2. Men may both think and do many things with great boldness, which yet, if they would seriously think upon, they would be forced to condemn, and find a witness against in their own bosoms. For these questions put to their consciences imply, that God had a witness for Him there, and they durst not say or do as they did if their consciences were put to it, as in His sight. 3. Many have and study to keep up a name which they are ill worthy of, and no way answerable to it. 4. God can discern betwixt shows and substance, and will see a fault in such as glory in fair titles ; for He calls them as they are. "Thou art named the house of Jacob, and hast but a name." 5. It is an evidence that a visible church is degenerated, whatever show they have, when they turn opposers of the Word of the Lord in the mouth of His servants. 6. Such as oppose and fight against the Word of God and His messengers do in effect fight against the Spirit of the Lord, whose Word it is. These opposers are challenged as "straitening the Spirit of the Lord." 7. It is a high presumption and injury done to the Spirit, to think to imprison and deny Him liberty in the

mouth of His servants, to speak anything but what men please. It is not seemly that men should limit God in giving commission to His servants. 8. The Lord hath a storehouse of Spirit to bring forth comforts, and of power to produce mercies, if His people were fit for them. 9. When the Lord sends forth and threatenings in the mouths of His servants, it becomes a people seriously to examine their ways. (*George Hutcheson.*) **Do not My words do good to him that walketh uprightly?**—*The privileges of the upright*:—Weary of correction and reproof, the house of Jacob refused to receive instruction, and said to the prophets, "Prophecy ye not." The Lord appeals to them that the messages sent by His servants were intended for their good, that even the threatenings were designed to correct and to reclaim, that He was ready to pour out of His Spirit upon them, but for their impenitence and unbelief and rejection of His testimony; and that His words were acceptable and profitable to the upright, how much soever they might be despised by the apostate house of Jacob. I. THE CHARACTERS TO WHOM THE WORD OF GOD IS PROFITABLE ARE THE "UPRIGHT." 1. The truly upright are those whose hearts are right in the sight of God; Israelites in whom is no guile. They are no dissemblers in religion; truth is stamped upon their words and actions. Their faith is unfeigned, and their love without dissimulation. An upright man is what he appears to be. 2. The upright are such as walk by a right rule, the Word of God, making this the guide and standard of their actions. He who is continually gadding about to change his way cannot be in the right way. Uniformity of conduct is essential to uprightness. 3. The upright are represented as "walking," or making progress in the way to heaven. True religion means not only persevering, but making some proficiency in the good ways of God. Hence we learn that—(1) True religion is practical. (2) It is personal. (3) It is free and voluntary. (4) It is imperfect at present, though tending to perfection, and there is room for continual improvement. II. THE ADVANTAGES WHICH THE TRULY UPRIGHT DERIVE FROM THE WORD OF GOD. To him that walketh uprightly, the word of real experience, and we are taught them oft in the school of painful experience; it is in this way He applies them. All His rebukings are for our sanctification. II. THE CAUSE FOR CAUTION ON OUR PART, THAT WE TURN NOT AWAY FROM A WHOLE CONSIDERATION OF THIS WIDE, EXTENDED, AND EXTENSIVE WORK OF THE SPIRIT. Do not imagine that a man can really "straiten the Spirit of God." I might as well imagine that a molehill could change the course of the planets. Our blessed Spirit is Jehovah, omnipotent. Some attempt to straiten the Spirit of God by confining their ideas of His operation on the soul to that which is pleasant only, to that which is refreshing, to that which is comforting, to that which is elevating. They see not that there is as much the work of the Spirit in that which humbles, in that which reproves, in that which cuts down, in that which dries up, in that which lays low, and keeps the soul as in a low place. (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*) *Upright walking, the condition of profiting by the ministry of the Word*:—The greatest blessings when perverted become the greatest curses. An unimproved or an abused privilege becomes a positive evil. It were easy to adduce a host of illustrations to confirm the justice of these observations. There is hardly a temporal blessing to be named, in respect of which it may not be shown that its abuse becomes a curse to the possessor. Take the endowment of intellect or of reason. Or the case of one to whom providence has allotted a more than common abundance of this world's wealth. Spiritual mercies may be equally abused with temporal, and the result which ensues from their misuse is to the full as disastrous. The prophet, speaking in the name of God, demands, "Do not My words do good to him that walketh uprightly?" But the form of interrogation clearly implies, that to such as walk not in uprightness, the words of the Almighty will rather do injury. It was in reply to the solicitations of those who entreated of the prophet not to prophesy that he delivered the emphatic appeal which we have in the verse containing our text. We are, however, concerned with the broad principle which it seems to imply. There is pointed out the condition of all profitable hearing of God's words. It is—upright walking. The precept must be embodied in practice, or it will not only be useless, it will be positively injurious. I. WHAT REASONS THERE ARE FOR EXPECTING THAT THE HEARING OF GOD'S WORDS WILL INJURE, RATHER THAN BENEFIT, THE INDIVIDUAL WHO WALKS NOT UPRIGHTLY. Some qualification is necessary at the outset to obviate an erroneous conclusion which might be drawn. It might be said, "What, then, becomes of the utility of the proclamation to the disobedient? And what remains of the office of the Word to convince and to con-

vert the soul?" The apparent contradiction is easily explained. The prophet is clearly speaking of such persons as, under the hearing of God's words, refused to repent and be obedient. The message he had to deliver was calculated to reclaim and convert them, but they refused submission to the authority of Him in whose name the messenger spake, and it was in this case that the tidings injured, in place of benefiting. The guilt and the responsibility were all their own; the fault was not in the Word. The prophet was not to desist from proclaiming that Word, simply because, when its statements were rejected, moral injury would result. And we are not to be deterred from communicating God's words to the disobedient, simply because there is a possibility that they will continue to be disobedient, and in that case be injured and not advantaged by the message. Now take the case of one to whom God's words are sent, but they have never yet led him to a walk of uprightness. God's words have been practically a dead letter. This is the case in which we are prepared to contend that the words of God are turning to that man's injury; the blessing is being converted into a curse. We assume that every man's real and highest enjoyment, his greatest moral advantage, depends upon his conformity to the precepts of God's Word. Each instance in which God's words are heard, and no result towards holiness produced, diminishes the probability of ultimate obedience. He is becoming more hard and inflexible, and less likely ever to become the subject of genuine repentance. It is a law of man's moral constitution, that feelings once aroused, which are not carried out into practice, gradually become feebler and less capable of being awakened afresh. There is no case in which there is greater cause for apprehension than that of an individual who has long been accustomed to the ministrations of the Gospel, without being converted beneath them. II. THE POSITIVE GOOD WHICH RESULTS TO THE UPRIGHT FROM HEARING GOD'S WORDS.

1. Look at the knowledge which revelation imparts. 2. The words of God accomplish a most important purpose with reference to the believer's sanctification, or his actual preparation for heaven. The promise cannot advantage any but the consistent disciple. No man has a right to appropriate a single promise of God's Word, who is not resolved upon striving after obedience. It is the "upright" walker to whom alone the promise in reality belongs. May we carry away with us the recollection of this great truth,—that in order to profit by God's words, whether as communicated to us on the page of inspiration, or by the ministrations of the Gospel, there must be an endeavour on our parts to walk uprightly, or to walk in agreement with what God's Word prescribes. (*Robert Bickersteth, B.A.*) *The Bible vindicated by its good effects* :—There are some difficulties to be found in the Bible, no doubt. There are a good many things that you do not understand in nature, but you do not dismiss them. Whatever may be said against this planet, it is our best standing ground at present. And so long as the Bible vindicates itself in its practical, moral, and spiritual effects, that is enough for us. Look to-day at the nations that do not read the Bible—Turkey, China, India—they belong to the ruined civilisations. Scientists have used the spectroscope lately, and they have found a good deal in the sun that they did not expect. They have found a good many terrestrial elements there. But, so long as the sun keeps on ripening harvests and painting summers, and filling the planet with loveliness and music, we shall respect the sun. And whatever may be the technical defects, or alleged defects of Scripture, so long shall we stand by it whilst it lifts up fallen men into righteousness, and makes the great wilderness of the nations to blossom as the rose. *The social evils of Christendom are not sanctioned by the Bible* :—These are the indignant questions proposed by the inspired man of God when he contemplated the corruption and depravity which had spread themselves throughout the whole Church and nation of the Jews. I. EXPLAIN WHAT I MEAN BY THE SOCIAL EVILS OF CHRISTENDOM. Some would tell us that religion is a social evil; marriage, private property, and equitable laws, social evils. We can all see that ignorance and credulity, superstition and imposture, tyranny and oppression, war and persecution are among the social evils which all good men ought to deplore. 1. Ignorance and credulity. That the inhabitants of those nations who possess a Book that contains a revelation from God of all the great principles of faith and duty, should be in a state of ignorance, seems most extraordinary. Up to comparatively a very recent date, throughout the whole of Christendom the common people were in a state of deplorable ignorance. We count ignorance to be a fearful social evil. Credulity is always the result of ignorance; and thus originates that most baneful maxim, that "ignorance is the mother of devotion."

2. We account superstition and imposture to be great social evils, as they have existed in Christendom. Christianity, as established by the apostles, was a religion of extraordinary simplicity. It had no temples, no altars, no sacrifices, no priests, no pageants, no festivities, no holidays. It was a simple religion, plain and unadorned, addressing itself to the judgment and to the affections of men. To meet the prejudices of the vulgar, and to gratify the corrupt taste of the multitude, pompous ceremonies were introduced, which easily reconciled the pagans to a worship that appeared so like their own. It is a matter beyond all controversy that the old demigods of paganism were worshipped under new names by these very questionable Christians,—worshipped at the same wells, on the same mountain sides, in the same groves, and with the same rites,—and that nothing was changed but the name. Surely those things do not result from God's Holy Word!

3. Tyranny and oppression, as they have existed in Christendom, are social evils which must be deplored. They are as old as the apostasy of man from God. When man would not submit to God, he soon sought to usurp authority over his brethren. In private and in public life it will be found that those who are least disposed to submit are most disposed to usurp. Those persons who are least patient of restraints themselves, are most willing to put restraints on others. We refer, however, not so much to oppression and tyranny in civil affairs, as to that spiritual usurpation which arose in the Church, when the humble presbyters became priests, patriarchs, and popes. We lament over all proofs of spiritual tyranny and oppression.

4. Wars and persecutions are amongst the social evils that have afflicted Christendom. Some of these have been political contests—wars undertaken upon questions of international polity. But religious wars now demand our attention. The history of Christian nations is like Ezekiel's roll, "written within and without with lamentations and mourning and woe."

II. THESE SOCIAL EVILS ARE NOT SANCTIONED BY THE BIBLE, BUT CORRECTED BY IT. It must be conceded, however, that there are some facts connected with the history of the Jews in the Old Testament which appear at first sight to sanction at least some of these acts of violence and bloodshed. Some are explained by God's right to visit and punish guilty nations, as well as guilty individuals. These are reserved and excepted cases, and those who now dare to plead for the extirpation and oppression of their enemies, or for acts of violence and persecution from the facts of the Old Testament, are altogether beside the mark, unless they can show that they possess the power of working miracles to sustain the assumption.

1. We account the Bible to be the enemy of ignorance and credulity. That which is a revelation necessarily supposes the dissipation of ignorance. The very communication of a Book that must be read, studied, and illustrated by various other critical, scientific, and historical inquiries, compels intelligence, and shows that the Word of God is the friend of knowledge, the fountain of wisdom.

2. The Bible is the enemy of superstition and imposture. There were many ceremonies in the Jewish Church, but these were "a shadow of good things to come," and were only to continue until the substance should appear. When Christianity was revealed, Judaism passed away. Primitive Christianity and the Word of God are not answerable for the accumulated ceremonies and superstitions of the modern Christian Church.

3. The Bible is the enemy of tyranny and oppression. The Word of God professes to be the Word of the Most Upright; just and right is He! Rectitude characterises the mind and government of God. That Word would be inconsistent with its Author if it were found to sanction tyranny and oppression in any form.

4. The Bible is the enemy of war and persecution. Our Lord inculcated in His disciples a spirit of forbearance, a disposition not to resist evil, not to take offence. Then if we desire important changes in human society, it is that there may be more equal happiness. Let us then become Bible Christians. If we really take the Book as our guide, we shall not be ignorant or superstitious or tyrannical. We shall avoid the mischiefs by which the Christian name is dishonoured, and we shall exhibit to those around us the blessed influence of the religion of Jesus on the character and lives of men. (*John Blackburn.*)

*God's Word good to the upright:—Micah* says, You are trying to do the right thing in a wrong way: you are wasting the bread of the kingdom of heaven: you have mistaken the right beginning and the right continuance of all this ministry of revelation. My sun will never do good to a dead creed; every beam of that sun is a sword striking at that poor outcast dead thing. "Do not My words do good?" To whom? To the man who wants them, longs for them, represents their purpose, walks uprightly. Literally, Do not My words do good to him that is upright? You

must not only have right food, you must have the right appetite and the right digestion. God's revelation is lost upon the man who cares nothing for it. It is within the power of the eyelid to shut out the midday. The Bible has nothing to say to the froward soul. The revelation of God never talks to the critic. Intellect, unless a servant, has no business with things spiritual, supernatural, ineffable. Let every man then test himself by this one standard. The Word of the Lord is meant to be good to the upright. Not necessarily to the personally perfect. There are no such people, except in their own estimation, and therefore there are none perfect at all. What is it to be upright then? To be sincere: to mean to be right. There is a middle line in every man's thought and life and purpose. Do not judge him by the higher line, or by the lower level; you will find the average thought, and tendency, and pressure—judge by that. When a man says, I want to be right, though I am failing seven times a day,—he is right. . . . To walk uprightly is not to walk pedantically, ostentatiously, and perfectly in the estimation of the world; but to walk uprightly is to have the stress of the soul in the right direction. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *God's truth*:—"Thou called house of Jacob, is the patience of Jehovah short then? or is this His doing? Are not My words good to him that walketh uprightly?" Such is a modern translation. We prefer the translation of Henderson, as follows: "What language, O house of Jacob! Is the Spirit of Jehovah shortened? Are these His operations? Do not My words benefit him that walketh uprightly?" These words seem to be a reply to an objection raised against the prophets in the preceding verse. The objector did not approve of predictions so terribly severe. "It is not strange," says Matthew Henry, "if people that are vicious and debauched covet to have ministers that are altogether such as themselves, for they are willing to believe that God is so too." I. That the SPIRIT of Divine truth CANNOT BE RESTRAINED. "Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened?" There is no limit to truth; it is an ocean that has no shore, a field whose everspringing seeds are innumerable. "The Lord hath yet more light and truth to break forth from His Word." II. That the PRACTICE of Divine truth CANNOT BUT DO GOOD. "Do not My words do good to him that walketh uprightly?" Though you have never heard the particular truth before, though it may be too severe to please you, though it may clash with all your prejudices and wishes, if you practise it, it will do you good. 1. It is to be practised. It is not merely for speculation, systematising, controversy, and debate, it is for inspiring the activities and ruling the life. It is a code rather than a creed. It must be incarnated, made flesh, and dwell in the land. 2. When practised it is a blessing. "Do not My words do good to him that walketh uprightly?" Yes, they do good. When they are translated, not into languages and creeds, but into living deeds. A man gets good only as he builds up a noble character. (*Homilist.*) *An upright man reaps the full benefit of God's Word*:—The leading circumstances which gave rise to these words was the degeneracy of God's ancient people, the Jews. This degeneracy was very prevalent in the days of Micah, both in the kingdom of Israel and that of Judah. Let it be remembered that the covenant engagements into which the Divine Being enters with man by no means preclude His hatred and condemnation of sin; neither do our covenant engagements with Him exempt us from the liability of falling into sin. Nothing that was said to them by God and His servants met their approbation. Everything was wrong, and, in their vitiated judgment, unlike what it had been. And, to make good their own case, they were presumptuous enough to charge the cause of all their woes upon God; but He nobly vindicated Himself, and tacitly condemned them in these words, "Do not My words," &c. The drift of the text, or the doctrine contained therein, is this,—that however painful and offensive God's Word may be to those who live in the love of sin, it is highly beneficial to those who walk uprightly; and that if it does not please and profit the soul, it is not owing to any defect in the Word, but to some defect in us. 1. TO THE CHARACTER OF AN UPRIGHT MAN. The husbandman, in winnowing his grain for the market, divides one heap into two. The one he calls corn, the other chaff. And thus does the Bible deal with the human family: it divides the whole into two classes—and into two only, as to kind. The one it calls good, the other bad. But the husbandman, by putting his corn through another process or two, divides it into three or more portions, according to its quality. The best he calls saleable; the next best, hinderends; and the rest, hen-corn. After the same way does the Bible divide the righteous into classes; and in the same way will they be

disposed of at the last day. Nearly all the good men we read of in the Bible and elsewhere excelled in one or two branches of piety; but few excelled in all. Christ, however, did this. An upright man is one who strives to know as much of the will of God as he can, in order that he may live according to it. His main object is to live well and die happy. 1. He is a religious man. Not a mere professor of religion, not one whose opinions have undergone a change for the better, nor one whose morality is of a high and refined order; but a man whose heart and mind, principles and practices have been changed by Divine grace. 2. He is a considerate man.—Sensible of the many evils with which he is surrounded, and the proneness of human nature to fall into them, he ponders well the path of his feet. He plans with his head what he executes with his hands. He thinks before he acts. “Thou God seest me” is indelibly engraven on his memory. That he may be found a wise and safe man at last he, at present, considers his ways in his heart (Hag. i. 15). 3. He is a conscientious man. Conscience is prompt in commanding, and he is as prompt in obeying. It speaks, and the upright, God-fearing man responds, “How, then, can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” 4. He is a consistent man. He is actuated by principle rather than passion. II. WE PURPOSE TO SHOW WHETHER SUCH A MAN IS BENEFITED BY THE WORD OF GOD. By the Word of God we understand the Bible. It contains the revelation of His will to and concerning man. And every man who can have the Bible is expected to understand and practise it so far as is essential to his salvation. To an upright man the Word of God proves—1. An instructive Word. The Bible is professionally a book of instructions. Its instructions relate to the highest subjects—to soul matters and matters of eternity. And, apart from its teachings, we cannot gain the same instructions elsewhere. The upright man is quite alive to this; hence he prizes the Bible, and evinces a peculiar aptness for its teachings. By a prayerful perusal of its sacred pages he becomes possessed of much spiritual and Divine knowledge. And Bible light is the best of light. The knowledge that comes from God is the purest of knowledge. It makes us acquainted with God and His will—with man and his ways—with sin and its consequences—with redemption and its effects. These things are spiritual in their nature, and by the upright man are spiritually discerned. 2. It is a corrective Word. Not only are all men liable to err, but all men have erred; for, “to err is human.” Hence all men need correction. But all are not willing to be corrected; some, however, are, and among these may be ranked the upright. The corrective lessons of the Bible are received by him in the same spirit and with the same thankfulness, as what a traveller who has missed his way evinces when put right. It is in this light especially that God’s “words do good to him that walketh uprightly.” 3. It is a pacific Word. The midday sun does not bring its rays more gently to bear upon the virgin flower than are the soothing truths of God’s Word brought to bear upon the good man’s troubled spirit. The gentle rain is not more acceptable to the vegetation of spring than are God’s promises to the tried Christian. The healing balm is not more alleviating to the wounded traveller than is God’s Word to the expiring pilgrim. In conclusion, observe three things—1. The Word of God is full of truth and goodness. Its sole object being to make men wise and happy. 2. That it may “not return unto God void, but accomplish that which He pleases, and prosper in the thing whereto He sends it,” we must be upright. 3. All may become upright, and thereby enjoy all the blessings of the Bible. (*J. Fawcett.*)

Vers. 8, 9. **My people is risen up as an enemy.**—*Sin an antagonist*.—This chapter refers to the character and doings of Israel during the last nine years of Ahaz. A very dark period in Israelitish history was this. “We are told in 2 Chron. xxviii. 24, 25, that Ahaz shut up the doors of the temple and erected altars in every corner of Jerusalem. We may safely conclude, from the language of Micah (chap. ii.) and Isaiah (chap. xi.), that when he did so, abominations of every kind overran the land. A prophet like Micah was no longer permitted to speak. The testimony of Isaiah (chaps. vii., viii.) had borne no fruit; the fruitlessness of invoking the aid of Assyria had taught him no better. Ahaz did not repent, like Manasseh, but persisted in his evil ways. What a melancholy course of conduct! Like Uzziah, Ahaz was denied honourable burial (2 Chron. xxviii. 27). The prophet here, in denouncing the sins which were then most prevalent in Judah and Ephraim, alludes expressly

to the acts of oppression and violence then common, and tells them that for these they would be driven out of the land." The verses lead us to look at sin in the aspect of an antagonist, and suggest—I. That it is an antagonist to the DIVINE. "Even of late [marg., 'yesterday'] My people has risen up as an enemy." "It is not stated," says Dolitzsch, "against whom the people rise up as an enemy; but, according to the context, it can only be against Jehovah." Sin is an antagonist to God; it lifts up the soul in hostility against its Maker. Unregenerated men say that they are not conscious of any enmity in their hearts towards their Maker; on the contrary, sometimes they feel a passing glow of gratitude and adoration for Him. But it is the conduct of a man that proves the settled state of his heart. 1. This enmity is most unjustifiable. Enmity sometimes admits of justification, but never in this case. 2. This enmity is most wicked. It is against reason and justice. 3. This enmity is most miserable. Enmity to God is the fountain of all the misery in the universe. The words suggest another idea concerning sin—II. That it is an antagonist to the HUMAN. "Ye pull off the robe with the garment [marg., 'over against the garment'] from them that pass by securely as men averse from war." Not content with the outer garment, ye greedily rob passers-by of the ornamental robe fitting the body closely and flowing down to the feet; and this you do, not to enemies, but to friends, to those who are "averse from war." More: "The women of My people have ye cast out from their pleasant houses." The widows of the men slain by you in battle you have deprived of their homes. They "devoured widows' houses." This was not all. "From their children have ye taken away My glory for ever." The orphan children you have despoiled. In all this there is the manifestation of sin, as an antagonist to human rights and human happiness. Sin puts man against his brother; hence the slanders, quarrels, litigations, wars that are rife in every human scene. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 10. **Arise ye, and depart: for this is not your rest; because it is polluted.**—*No rest, and the reason why.*—Above all lands the land of Canaan seemed most adapted for a place of rest. And the people whom God had so wondrously led into it, appeared most likely to find a place of rest. Yet to this people, and in respect of this very country, God says, "Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest." I. OUR TERRITORIAL POSITION. "This is not *your* rest." The body is not the resting-place of the spirit. It is a house of dust, a tenement of clay, and it is more like to a tent than to a substantial dwelling. While we are in the body, and while we are resident on the globe, there is very little permanent besides change. If it is true that this is not our rest, no man should try to rest in his temporal condition. And no man should suffer himself to rest. And no man should murmur when he is disturbed. No man should live unprepared for change and disturbance. II. THE ECHO OF A VOICE WE OFTEN HEAR. "Arise ye, and depart." In events that happen, in circumstances that arise, we hear this voice. Hourly do we listen to it. Do not neglect events. See that the voice calls you not only to submit to change, but to acquiesce in it. III. A REASON FOR SUCH EXPOSURE TO CHANGE. "Because it is polluted." The body is born in sin, and is an instrument of unrighteousness, and this is the reason why the body is doomed to die. God could, if necessary, have changed the body without death. The earth has been the theatre of transgression, and it must be destroyed. Everything we touch we pollute. Nothing is really right here. Everything must be changed until everything becomes right. The removal of sin is essential to rest. We may, from Jesus Christ, find rest within. And there shall be rest in a glorious body, rest in a perfect paradise, rest in an incorruptible inheritance, and rest in the eternal God. (*Samuel Martin.*) *This world is not a state of happiness:*—This world is not and never was designed to be the place of our happiness or long abode; and it highly concerns us, whilst we are in it, to raise our hearts above it, and prepare to leave it. I. AS THIS WORLD IS NOT OUR REST, OR THE SCENE OF OUR HAPPINESS, OUR SOULS SHOULD RISE ABOVE IT. 1. Prove the truth of this proposition. All men profess to believe this proposition, and yet look at their pursuits, views, and cares, and you would think they believed nothing less. The truth is that they do not attend to what they believe, or pursue it into its proper and practical consequences. The proposition is not the less certain for the inattention and disregard which some men pay to it, or for their practical contradiction of it. That this world is not and never was designed to be our state of rest or happiness, appears—(1) From the

certain nature and properties of all our earthly enjoyments. (2) From the nature and circumstances of our condition in it; which is in every view a state of imperfection and trial. (3) Setting aside all the distasteful ingredients which the many moral and natural evils of life throw into its cup of pleasures, and suppose them ever so pure and constant, yet they are by no means suited to a soul, an immortal soul, conscious of capacities which such delights can never fill, and of cravings they can never gratify. Objects of sense are ill adapted to the wants of the mind. (4) Appeal to personal experience for a proof of the proposition before us. Did you ever taste a pleasure of earth that fully satisfied you? If this world is not our rest, we should take care not to be over fond of it. How are we to live above the world? The only way is to get our hearts fixed on heaven.

II. WE MUST BE CONTINUALLY ENDEAVOURING AFTER A HEAVENLY DISPOSITION. To have our minds habitually attuned to that blessed world. The true temper of the blessed consists of love and purity. Then let us seek that the love of God may have a prevailing influence on our hearts. The Divine image, or moral likeness to God, which consists in righteousness and true holiness, does in a degree enter into the character of all true Christians now. The more we are fit for a better world, the more we shall be out of love with this. (*J. Mason, A.M.*)

*The soul's exodus*.—This injunction does not mean either of the three following things. 1. It does not mean the termination of our mortal life. Life is a talent which we should guard. 2. It does not mean neglect of material interests and duties. We are commanded to be "diligent in business," &c. 3. It does not mean absolute retirement from the world. 1. There is no rest for the soul in a dominant materialism. "This is not your rest." There are four forms in which this dominant materialism exists amongst us, and in neither of which can the soul find rest. (1) There is the gross, sensual form. The sensualist and the voluptuary live in this, but they have no rest. Ask the epicurean and the debauchee. (2) There is the thoroughly secular form. The man who is absorbed in the work of "making money" lives here; but in it he finds no rest. Ask the man who has become the creature of business, &c. (3) There is the intellectual form. The region of mere "fleshy wisdom":—fleshy arts and fleshy literature;—poetry and novels that appeal to the flesh. There is no rest for the soul here. Ask Byron, Burns, Dryden, &c. (4) There is the religious form. There is a fleshly religion amongst men:—a religion of pictures, music, pompous rites and ceremonies;—all appealing to the senses. There is no rest for the soul here. Let it "arise then and depart." Another reason here suggested is—2. There is pollution for the soul in it. To allow the material in any form to rule us is a sin. (1) Reason shows this. Mind was made to govern matter—the senses were made to be the servants, not the sovereigns of the soul. (2) Conscience testifies this. Conscience is everlastingly protesting against the dominion of the flesh. (3) The Bible declares this. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." 3. There is danger to the soul in materialism. "It shall destroy you." "For to be carnally-minded is death." The work of soul-destruction is going on every moment; the soul decays in this state. Force of intellect, discrimination of judgment, freedom of will, sensibility of conscience, elasticity of soul, are being destroyed. "Arise," then. The voice of philosophy, the voice of history, the voice of the Bible, and the voice of departed saints, all combine in the injunction, "Arise and depart." (*Homilist.*)

*Liberalism in religion*.—Cardinal Newman says that liberalism in religion is an error, overspreading as a snare the whole earth; it is sweeping into its own ranks great numbers of able, earnest, virtuous men, elderly men of approved antecedents, young men with a career before them. The Cardinal calls this condition of things "a great apostasy." He thus defines "liberalism in religion." "It is the doctrine that there is no positive truth in religion,—that one creed is as good as another,—that all are to be tolerated, as all are matters of opinion; that revealed religion is not a truth, but a sentiment and a taste." But this condition of mind is not very widespread in England. Take each mark of this liberalism in religion, and ask, "Does it denote large numbers?" 1. The doctrine that there is no positive truth in religion. The Cardinal says, "Every dozen men you meet in the streets represent one or other of as many as seven religions." Then, on this statement, we must conclude that seven out of twelve profess a definite religion. These seven do not hold that there is no positive truth in religion. And what may we say of the other five? They may be indifferent to religion, but they do not disbelieve it. Positivists are a very small class indeed, and even positivism has developed a religion. 2. The doctrine that "one creed is as good

as another." Are there many who hold this doctrine? Manifestly, if men choose one form of religion instead of another, it must be because they think one better than another. It is the deep feeling that a man has truer views of God to put before his fellows which gives him power to push his way through obstinate dullness or obstructive narrowness. 3. The doctrine that all creeds are to be tolerated because all are matters of opinion. That all are to be tolerated is certainly now a very widespread conviction. Yet for centuries coercion was the invariable custom, and not toleration. Why do the different Christian communities now all approve of toleration? Is it because they think the faiths of the sects are all matters of opinion? They know that, in their own case, their faith is a matter of deep conviction; and if they do justice to their neighbours, they know that their faith is equally matter of deep conviction with them. 4. The doctrine that revealed religion is not a truth but a sentiment or taste. Who is it that professes this? It is almost confined to a single person, if indeed even he would admit it,—Mr. Matthew Arnold. If religion fundamentally is a sentiment, it is a sentiment towards something; that something is something we believe exists; we believe in that something, and that is the beginning of a creed; the sentiment postulates an object; the sentiment is love, and the great object is God. Religious liberalism does cling to positive truth, but she will away with positive lies. It does teach that though all creeds are not equally good, there is some good in all creeds, and this is a very different thing. (*W. Page Roberts, M.A.*) *This is not your rest*.—Canaan was given to Israel on condition of their faithful obedience. That obedience they had failed to render. It is allowed by commentators that these words may be properly applied to the state of men in the present world. Expand them thus—I. This world would have been a rest had sin never entered it: but since it is polluted, there is neither contentment nor continuance here,—neither solid happiness in the enjoyments it offers, nor an abiding city in any of its domains. It is no longer our permanent abode, but our passage to another country; our inn, not our home. 2. To attempt to rest in the creature after God has commanded us to give it up is sinful. To rest in a connection with unrighteous men—satisfied with a world corrupt through "divers lusts"—is still more polluted. 3. Through the selfish passions and oppressive conduct of men, through the numerous troubles which beset this vale of tears,—the pilgrim can find no rest on earth. It is a relief to think of departing to that world where "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." I. THIS IS NOT OUR HOME. Our life is as a "handbreadth." Regular and rapid, like the waves of the sea, one generation sweeps off another into the gulf of oblivion. This is but the threshold of your being, and all before you is a boundless eternity. II. THE WORLD CANNOT SATISFY. Never were the things of the world intended to fill the human mind. In the original formation of man he received a capacity which nothing but God could fill: and though by the fall he lost his relish for God, the same capacity still remains, and all creation cannot fill it now. Many minds, broken loose from their centre, have wandered in search of rest in the creatures; but none have ever found it. III. AN ATTEMPT TO REST IN THE CREATURE IS SINFUL. The first command is, "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." To make a god of anything, is to set the heart supremely upon it, and to attempt to rest in it as a chief source of happiness. To love "the creature more than the Creator," and to look to that for our chief comfort, is to idolise the creature. We may value the creature for the purposes for which it is given to us. To attempt to rest in the creature is to seek a guilty rest. IV. NO ALLIANCE CAN BE FORMED WITH MEN OF THE WORLD WITHOUT HAZARD OF POLLUTION. "Evil communications corrupt good manners." A great part of the feelings, opinions, conversation, and customs of the world are opposed to the genuine spirit of the Gospel. V. NO REST CAN BE FOUND IN A WORLD FULL OF INJUSTICE AND OPPRESSION. The collisions of selfish passions keep the world in a flame, and drench it in blood. VI. NO REST CAN BE FOUND IN A WORLD INUNDED WITH THE FLOODS OF AFFLICTION. Ever since sin entered, this world has been a vale of tears, a house of correction, to break stubborn spirits to submission, to drive wayward children to obedience by the rod, to humble the proud, and to discover God's severity against sin. Why then should we wish to continue here? (*E. D. Griffin, D.D.*) *Rest*.—The prophecy of Micah stands conspicuous for the bright anticipations it gives of Messiah's days. It is to the desolation of the ten tribes and their scattering among the nations that the text refers. I. A TRUTH WHICH WE ARE ALL VERY RELUCTANT TO ADMIT. "This is not your rest." A just estimate of human life is a very

rare thing, and seldom attained but at the price of painful experience. 1. It was never designed to be our rest. We are not forbidden to seek happiness; we are only forbidden seeking it in the wrong direction. The grand mistake of human nature is to suppose that there is some other good, some higher path to happiness than that which God has made coincident with human duty. God has given us on earth every requisite for our pilgrimage, but nothing adequate to our home. Things on earth are too poor to make us rich; too low to raise us to happiness; too limited and shortlived to fill the capacities of our nobler nature. Life, therefore, is a scene of progress towards something better. 2. It is never found to be our rest in actual experience. At our very best estate the world is altogether vanity. All experience tells us, "This is not your rest." Every broken hope, every unsatisfied desire, every withered rose, every opened grave, says, "This is not your rest." 3. Our religion tells us that this is not our rest, for it is polluted.

II. A CHANGE FOR WHICH WE ARE MOST RELUCTANT TO PREPARE. 1. Our love of life induces us to linger. Like Lot's wife in Sodom. Trials, disappointments, bereavements, and the heaviest personal afflictions, instead of teaching us to take wing, by a perverse alternative seem to root us faster to the soil. 2. Our fears of death induce us to linger. We aim to put the subject far from us. Because the future is dreadful, and the realm unknown. 3. Our neglect of the great salvation heightens our reluctance. III. IT IS A COMMAND WHICH IT IS OUR INTEREST TO OBEY. Because the command comes from One who is the Lord of both worlds, and who has the highest interest in our welfare. He knows us better than we know ourselves, as He loves us better too. He knows how poor is this world, and how rich is the next. (*Homiletic Magazine.*)

*The true resting-place:*—The land of Canaan is here spoken of as a land not designed for the rest of the people that dwell in it. Apparently, if any land was properly designated a "land of rest" Canaan was. It is evident that the land had been defiled, polluted by the people, by their idolatries, and by their rebellion against the Most High; and therefore it could no longer be their rest. We may apply the text to ourselves in regard to our own land. Life upon this earth cannot be regarded as man's rest or resting-place. 1. Because man's life on it is brief and short. Scripture images are—fleeting as a shadow; vanishing as the vapour; unsettled and shifting as a pilgrimage; swifter than the transit of a weaver's shuttle, or the arrow that is directed to its mark; transient as a tale that is told, as a dream when one awaketh. To the young, entering upon life, it presents an interminable vista—something in their eye like a little eternity that will hardly ever be passed; and before they have time to realise it, the frost of age is upon their heads, and they count the graves of the companions of their youth. 2. Because even that short life is so changing. External circumstances and relationships are ever changing. 3. Look at the images by which life is represented, and we come to the same conclusion. A pilgrimage, a journey, a warfare, a voyage. 4. Look at man's pursuits, what do they bring? Do they satisfy the wants and cravings of man's immortal soul? One man's pursuit is wealth; another man is bent on enjoying life. Another man's desire is fame. Where then shall rest be found? There can be no consistency between sin and real rest or happiness. The text says the land was polluted, therefore it was not a place of rest. There can be no rest—true, real, abiding rest—except that which is found in God, its only source. (*Joseph Bardsley, M.A.*)

*Rest indeed:*—In deep anger Amos intimated that the Lord would command Israel to arise and go forth into a land of captivity; their own land should no longer be their rest and quiet habitation, for they had polluted it by their idolatry, excess, and iniquity. He would bring upon them enemies who should be His instruments for removing them from their then quiet habitation. Canaan is, when spiritually applied to the condition of the children of God, a very apt type of the heavenly country; and the rest which the children of Israel therein enjoyed, is a type of that "rest which remaineth for the people of God." Regard then the text as addressed to every one of us in reference to our present condition in this fallen world, and our future condition in the kingdom of glory. I. THE MEANING OF REST. By rest we understand cessation from labour, accompanied with peace, quiet, ease, and everything that can mark and constitute comfort, happiness, security. When in a state of rest we do not expect to be troubled with the ordinary perplexities of life. To enjoy rest is to enjoy quietness, security, ease, and peace. II. THE CERTAINTY OF NOT FINDING REST HERE. How stands the case with us in this world, fallen, and shattered, and disorganised as it is, beautiful though it be in its very ruins?

Can we be said to find substantial, solid rest in this world? Has the world no disappointments to meet our best laid schemes? Nothing here is certain. And should worldly possessions and worldly enjoyments remain undisturbed, yet to the man who sets his heart on them, and wishes to be satisfied with them, there is one evil ever near and calculated to mar his enjoyment, and that is the fear of death, which is to such an one a monster evil, which he can find no means of averting. III. THE PROMISE OF REST TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD. The rest is complete and substantial; it is rest from sin. The departed saint is at once removed from the influence of sin and the power of Satan; nothing can then disturb his tranquillity; no counteracting agency can then affect him; he is in God's keeping, he is safe and safe for ever. This rest the redeemed soul is capable of enjoying. IV. THE WAY IN WHICH THIS REST IS TO BE OBTAINED. The Israelites had one leader given to them to lead them into the land of Canaan. A Joshua has been given to us. He leads those who will submit to His guidance into the heavenly rest prepared for the people of God. To effect this He condescended to take our nature upon Him, and to become man. As such He went in and out among His creatures; and after a life of self-denial and active benevolence, died upon the Cross to make atonement for man's sin. The door to this rest has been thrown wide open by Him. (*T. R. Redwar, M.A.*) *This world not our rest*:—Human beings seem universally characterised by a spirit of restlessness. This spirit, existing either as an obvious passion or as a smothered feeling, is inseparably connected with our fallen state, and though very liable to abuse, is yet very capable of producing excellent effects. It excites a propensity to look forward, and to go forward. Hence, the soul refuses to settle into inactivity, and is ever pressing on to the attainment of some future good, real or imaginary. It is very desirable, then, that this restlessness should always be excited by a right cause, and always urge us forward to a right end. I. WHY WE NEVER CAN HAVE OUR REST IN THIS WORLD. 1. Because our continuance on earth is short and uncertain. "What is our life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." 2. Even while life lasts it is full of trouble—it has many changes, labours, disappointments, and sorrows. To what changes are we exposed here below! This is not a place of rest but of labour. Think, too, of the disappointments and reverses of life. In view of these various forms of bodily distress, how foolish it appears to look on this state as a state of rest! Can it be said that though we are exposed to trouble ourselves, we may find rest in our friends? But though it is our duty to love them, and to be grateful to them, we shall suffer for it severely if we idolise them as the authors of our happiness, or look to them as our ultimate resource. Instead of finding rest in them, we may suffer doubly in sympathising with them, and the time is coming when we must part. 3. Though our whole life were steady, prosperous, honourable, and pious in the highest degree, still it would not be a satisfying portion to the soul. Some seem to be, almost through life, free from trouble. But we cannot be sure of this. "Each heart knoweth its own bitterness." And when there are no real troubles men are sure to find imaginary ones. And he who lives many days, and rejoices in them all, yet fears at times that the days of darkness will be many. To be altogether at rest we must be sure that our rest will never be disturbed. Nor can the continuance of positive prosperity and ever-increasing wealth satisfy the mind. Equally unsuccessful is the pursuit of mental tranquillity in scenes of frivolity and mirth. Nor is the more rational pursuit of human knowledge found to secure rest to the soul. As speculation and theory cannot satisfy the mind, so neither can great works, in their undertaking, progress, or accomplishment. It is necessary to add that even the people of God, however spiritually-minded and however advanced in the Divine life, cannot find rest here. However happy they may be, they are still subject to some uneasiness; however calm they may feel, their quiet is sometimes disturbed. 4. We never can have our rest in this world because of the prevalence of sin, because "it is polluted." By an unalterable decree of heaven, sin is inconsistent with happiness. As this is a world of rebellion, it cannot be a world of peace. How can they whose minds have been enlightened to see the evil of sin, and in whom its power is in a great measure broken, be at rest while living in such a world as this? II. ADDRESS TO YOU THE EXHORTATION. "ARISE YE, AND DEPART." 1. Arise and depart in the spirit of your minds. Depart from the idea that the world can give you rest. From all trust in others. But the mind must have something whereon to rest. Without some prop it would sink down into utter despondency. Arise and depart and seek rest directly

from God in Christ. Set your hearts on heaven. So depart in the spirit of your minds as to be willing to depart literally from this life, whenever God shall call you. Cultivate that spirit of faith and hope which, when death is comparatively at a distance, will sometimes fill you with a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better. 2. Arise and depart in the tenor of your conduct. Depart from all such pursuits as interfere with the concerns of eternity. Cease from excessive eagerness in the pursuit of worldly gain. Be found at last actively engaged as becomes those who profess that this is not their rest. III. ADDRESS THREE DIFFERENT CLASSES OF PERSONS. 1. Congratulate those who have ceased to seek their rest in the world—who have arisen and gone to God through Jesus Christ for rest. Recollect that you are only on the way to perfect happiness. Endure, without murmuring, the hardships of the way. 2. Speak to those who are still seeking rest on earth. Boast not of your happiness. The outward appearance is not always the genuine index of the heart. 3. Address those who have lost their former rest and have not found another. We would not have you look again to the world for rest. We would not have you remain where you are. Why not proceed another step and lay hold of those consolations that never fail? In order to this, it is necessary that you do indeed receive the Gospel, and positively join the company of pilgrims. If you would be happy, be decided. Yield yourself up, without reserve, to the Lord Jesus Christ, and He has pledged His Word that He will give you rest. (*James Foote, A.M.*) *No rest here:—*This was the drum-beat of a prophet who wanted to arouse his people from their oppressed and sinful condition; but it may just as properly be uttered now as then. Our great want is rest. God did not make this world to rest in. This world would be a very different world if it were intended for us to lounge in. It does right well for a few hours. You and I have seen men who tried to rest here. In trade. In seeking fame. If there is no rest on earth there is rest in heaven—perfect rest, unending rest. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *The economy of renewal:—*The arising and the departure, as the passage stands, referred to a visible residence; there was to be a literal change of place. But even there the act was required as part of a religious discipline and for a Divine purpose. The national condition that made such a migration necessary was one incident in a peculiar providential history. The outward removal was the result of an inward state,—a state of moral deterioration and danger. Domestic comfort must be abandoned for the sake of the spiritual safety, purity, and progress of a corrupt, imperilled people. The call is made in the name and by the Spirit of the Lord God. There is no violence in transferring it from a Hebrew to a Christian age. The need that a self-absorbed heart should hestir itself and arise—should go forth and follow God's call, should be moulded into a new form and born into a new life, through separation, travail, and sacrifice, is as independent of the differences of time and country as any attribute of humanity. Indeed, this permanence of the essential realities of life through all social changes, wherever a human soul lives, sins and suffers, furnishes the starting-point in this subject. 1. The true growth of every really progressive character is made through a succession of decided departures out of positions, habits, estates of thought and feeling, which have once been familiar, into untried territories. There is the passage from the comparatively irresponsible, and dependent period of early childhood, into the greater self-determination of youth. Within the safe enclosures of a guarded external innocence the moral purposes will not stay any longer. They would not be fulfilling the Creator's design if they did. That is not their rest; they must arise and depart. Youth must see its visions, dream its dreams, and taste its awful liberty. Again, later, there is a transition from youth into maturity. The dream is broken. That graceful, airy tent which the uncommitted thought reared for itself at will is dissolved. A more real habitation, of severer shape, supplants it. Or rather, it is now a field of outdoor service. Chilly as the future looks, the least enterprising must go to meet it. In some vague, indefinite way this decree of departure makes itself felt in all thoughtful souls. Beyond these early and successive departures, from one period of our age to another, there are a great variety of other changes, having the same general purpose and illustrating the same plan of God. Sometimes the dissolution of our former order of life is made unavoidable by conditions beyond our control. A particular line of employment is found to have furnished all of opportunity, or stimulus, or trial, that the great former of our characters intended, and it is broken off. A particular place of residence has exhausted all its helps and ministries upon us, and we must take

up the little parcels that we call our goods, and go to be schooled in some new neighbourhood, &c. In other cases, with less visible signals, but not less effectually, we are moved out of our moral and mental habitations. So long as we are in them nothing seems more fixed than our opinions, tastes, and estimates. But they may become too fixed. Estimates of men and things stiffen into prejudices. And hence by one process and another we are led to give many of them up, or to modify them. Events are ordered to that end. 2. These turns of the inner life will often be painful, demanding something more than a natural, or Stoic courage. Religious indifference wishes only to be let alone. But no. Pain comes. The insensible heart must be startled. The earthly and the Divine fight together within us, and we suffer under the conflict. Sometimes this separation from familiar evil is a struggle as between life and death, shaking the whole soul, and tearing its shrinking quick in torture. And yet, such is the power of the conviction of the spirit of truth when humility has once begun its holy and honest work within us, how many even go out to meet that saving sorrow! Blessed is the mind that springs with alacrity and thanksgiving to its better ministry! 3. All true souls, really touched with the Spirit and consecrated to the fellowship of Christian obedience, will be ready for this sacrifice. Not all equally. This, in fact, is the test of the sincerity of faith: the willingness to give up all that has been precious, but not holy, and launch out upon the future, trusting only to an unseen hand. So, through familiar analogies, we are led to see how the sacred provision is made, in our fallen but still aspiring nature, for that one only radical and complete transformation which changes the governing motive of life,—the “regeneration” of the Gospel. It has been said that no period of our life becomes quite intelligible to us till we quit it for the next. And there is certainly truth here. But retrospect is not all our outlook. Our best wisdom is not gained from what is behind us, but from what is above. When the heart is really made new, and is filled with all the holy life of its Lord, it matters nothing what the outward place or scenery may be. To this, then, we are brought, that there is one migration of the soul more complete and adventurous than all besides: that which takes it over from every kind of self-direction into a pure self-renunciation to the Spirit of God; one “going forth” more decisive and sublime than all journeys and discoveries—from the miserable effort to satisfy ourselves into the liberty of the sons of God; one central and all transforming change—that which refashions us, by a new principle of life, from the likeness of sinful men into the likeness of God’s Son. All other transitions touch us at certain points or parts of our nature: this transfuses another spirit through the whole; old things pass away, because the old evil is gone, and all things are new. (*F. D. Huntington, D.D.*) *A resting-place for the soul*.—Years ago there came to the late Canon Hoare, of Tunbridge Wells, a rich man, then in his old age, to arrange with him about his burial-place, and after they had gone carefully over the churchyard, and had chosen the spot where he was to lie, Canon Hoare turned to him and said: “You have chosen a resting-place for your body, but have you yet found a resting-place for your soul?” Turning round, and looking him full in the face, the old man answered: “You are the first clergyman who ever asked me that question.” He went with Canon Hoare into his study, and, to make a long story short, he gave his heart to Christ, and found his resting-place, and in Canon Hoare’s study to the day of his death a well-known picture representing the saving of a life from a wreck hung. It was the gift of the grateful man, who had found a resting-place not only for his body but for his soul. Ask yourself the question now, before you turn to another page: “Have I found a resting-place for my soul?”

Ver. 11. If a man walking in the spirit and falsehood do lie, . . . he shall even be the prophet of this people.—*Israel’s popular preacher*.—This is Micah’s idea of the kind of prophet (or, as we should say, pulpit) the men of Israel would willingly and unanimously accept. The sketch is marked by two things which always tend to make a preacher generally acceptable to thoughtless men in every age. I. BY EMPTINESS OF MIND. He has nothing in his mind but wind, vain conceits, vapid notions—no deep thought, no rich store of information, no well-digested belief or profound conviction. II. BY MINISTERING TO PLEASE. “I will prophesy unto thee of wine and of strong drink.” These prophets would accommodate themselves to their tastes and habits, and sanction their indulgences. They would not disturb their consciences nor strike

against their prejudices, but talk to them in such a way as to leave them satisfied with themselves. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 12, 13. **I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee.**—*Gospel work*:—The prophet here passes from threats to promises. The future was to embrace two things. 1. A grand gathering. Jacob and the remnant of Israel was to be “gathered” as a mighty flock in the fruitful and lovely region of Bozrah. 2. A triumphant deliverance. “The breaker is come up before them.” Who is the breaker? If reference is here made to Jewish bonds, it was to Moses; if to Babylonish captivity, it was to Cyrus; if to the bondage of the devil, it was Christ. We shall apply the words to illustrate the grand work of the Gospel. “The fulfilment of this prophecy,” says Delitzsch, “commenced with the gathering together of Israel to its God and King by the preaching of the Gospel, and will be completed at some future time, when the Lord will redeem Israel, which is now pining in dispersion, out of the fetters of its unbelief and life of sin. We must not exclude all allusion to the deliverance of the Jewish nation only out of the earthly Babylon by Cyrus; at the same time, it is only in its typical significance that this comes into consideration at all, namely, as a preliminary stage and pledge of the redemption to be effected by Christ out of the spiritual Babylon of this world.” Taking the words, then, as an illustration of Gospel work, two thoughts are suggested. I. **UNIFICATION.** “I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah.” Men are morally divided; there is a schism in the great body of humanity. Men have not only lost interest in their fellows, but an antipathy prevails amongst them. They are scattered abroad in different countries, under different governments, and in connection with different religions and interests. The great work of the Gospel is to bring men together, to gather them together in some moral Bozrah, to unite them in the fold of Christ. There is only one way, and that is the presentation of an object of supreme moral attraction to all men. That object the Gospel presents: it is Christ. And He Himself said: “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me.” As a matter of philosophy, I proclaim that there is nothing but the Gospel that can hush the discords, heal the divisions, and terminate all wars and strifes amongst men; and historically. II. **EMANCIPATION.** “The breaker is come up before them: they have broken up and passed through the gate.” Men everywhere are in moral bondage. They are the slaves of sin and the devil. “Carnally sold unto sin.” Moral bondage is the worst of all bondage; it is a bondage—(1) Connected with self-compunction; it is a bondage (2) Of the soul, the self; it is a bondage (3) That death cannot terminate. Who shall free us from this bondage? There is One, and but One, who can. Christ, the Breaker. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 13. **The breaker is come up before them: they have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it.**—*Christ, as the Breaker, opening all passes to glory that were impassable*:—It is agreed not only by Christian, but even by some Jewish interpreters, that these words have a principal and ultimate view unto the glorious Messiah, and the great work of salvation that He was to accomplish in the fulness of time. The prophet here prophesies that Christ should rid the way, and clear the passage, and make mountains as a plain. I. **THE WAY OF THE LORD'S RANSOMED OPENED UP BY THE GREAT REDEEMER.** “The breaker is come up before them.” 1. The designation given to the glorious Messiah. “The breaker.” Cyrus was an instrument in the hand of God for breaking the Babylonish yoke. Herein he was a type of Christ, by whom the yoke of our spiritual captivity under sin and Satan is broken. 2. We have the courageous appearance of the glorious Redeemer in His breaking work. He “comes up,” He appears upon the field with an undaunted and heroic courage. 3. The party that He heads, or those in whose quarrel this Breaker appears. Enquire upon what account Christ is called the Breaker. (1) In general, because of the great opposition He had to break through. (2) He breaks up a new and living way, by which we have access to God and glory. (3) He breaks through the storms of Divine wrath, the rage of men and devils, in order to accomplish our redemption. (4) In a day of power He breaks the enmity of our hearts against Him. (5) Those who will not bow unto His royal authority He breaks in pieces. 6. He may be called a Breaker because of the breaking trials He brings on His own people, and the judgments and calamities that He brings on an offending Church or nation. II. **THE UPCOMING OF CHRIST AS THE BREAKER.** Understand of His

coming up to avenge the quarrel of His children and people. Like a mighty champion He takes the field. Tell of some seasonable upcomings. 1. He appeared in our quarrel in the council of peace. 2. He came seasonably immediately after the fall of man. 3. Really and personally in His incarnation. 4. In the power of His Spirit in the dispensation of the Gospel. 5. In the outward dispensation of His providence. 6. When He revives His own work in a backsliding land and church. 7. In every display of His grace and love to a particular believer; when He seasonably interposes for the relief of a poor soul sinking under the burden of sin, temptation, affliction, and desertion. 8. At death. Question—In what manner doth He come up in our quarrel, to the help of the weak against the mighty? 1. All His appearances for the help and relief of His people have been well-timed. 2. He comes up solitarily. He alone comes up. It is His own arm brings salvation. 3. With the greatest alacrity and cheerfulness. 4. Speedily, with no lingering or tarrying. 5. Courageously. 6. Victoriously. 7. His coming to His breaking work is irresistible. And—8. It is with much awful greatness and majesty. III. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN HIS “COMING UP BEFORE THEM”? 1. It imports that He has them and their case deeply at heart. 2. It implies that their way is hard and difficult. 3. It implies His authority to rule and govern them. 4. It implies strength and ability to support authority. 5. It implies their inability to break up their own way. 6. As the Breaker is gone up before them, it implies that He has paved the road, and travelled the way before them. He goes before His people in obedience, in suffering, in going through death into glory. 7. It implies His routing and discomfiting all the enemies that stood in the way of our salvation: Satan, sin, the world, death. 8. It implies that the way to heaven is patent. 9. It implies that, whatever dangers, difficulties, or opposition be in their way, they are in absolute safety under His conduct. IV. THE GROUNDS AND REASONS OF THIS DISPENSATION, OR WHY DOETH CHRIST BREAK UP THE WAY TO HIS PEOPLE? 1. Because they were gifted to Him of the Father, as a heritage and possession. 2. Because they are the purchase of His blood. 3. Because His faithfulness is engaged to lead them in their way. 4. Because He has to give an account of them to the Father. 5. Because they cannot break up their own way. 6. Because they trust in Him as Leader and Commander. 7. Because of the near and dear relation that He has come under unto them. (*E. Erskine.*) The Breaker:—Micah lived near the time of the Babylonish Captivity. It is a prominent subject in the prophetic writings. Resembling, as it did, the spiritual captivity of God's people, it is made the groundwork of many glorious predictions relating to the Lord Jesus Christ and His salvation. In this light commentators regard the prediction of the text. It has a reference to the captive Jews, and their liberator Cyrus; but it looks further. In Christ and His ransomed people it has its real, complete fulfilment. It sets forth the Lord Jesus—I. AS INTERPOSING FOR HIS PEOPLE IN A PECULIAR CHARACTER. “The breaker.” The demolisher. One who beats down before them all barriers and impediments that obstruct their way. The figure places us where we really are, far off from God and His kingdom, with many obstructions lying in between God's kingdom and us; with more than distance to be got over—with barriers and obstacles to be surmounted. What are these? Some of them lie out of us, some within us. Out of us is—1. The judicial displeasure of God. It is our guilt which has subjected us to His wrath. 2. The opposition of Satan. By Satan is meant, not one being, but a numerous host of beings in the spiritual world opposed to our happiness. Through this difficulty Christ breaks. Not, as we might have supposed, by exterminating these enemies of our salvation, scattering them out of our path; but in first making His own way to heaven in man's form through them, and then by communicating strength to His people to do as He has done—withstand these enemies, force their way through them, and tread them down. Within His people, what is there to impede them in their way to heaven? We may say that everything within them is an impediment to them in their way. There is nothing within fallen man, naturally, that does not tend to carry him away from God, rather than to lead him to God. See—1. The natural self-sufficiency and pride of heart, which we may call self-righteousness. But Christ comes, and touches the proud heart of man, and this barrier in it falls down. 2. There is the ungodliness of the heart. Almost as stiff a barrier in the way of our salvation as its pride. Here too the heavenly Breaker comes in. He opens the sinner's heart, communicates to it a holy principle; and this principle, warring against the unholiness in him, gradually breaks its

strength, masters and dethrones it. 3. The unbelief of our hearts. This leads to hesitation and delay, under one excuse after another. II. THE ESCAPE OF GOD'S ISRAEL IN CONSEQUENCE OF CHRIST'S INTERPOSITION FOR THEM. Two remarks. 1. A great change has taken place in the spiritual condition of Christ's people, in consequence of what He has done for them. 2. The people really delivered by Christ co-operate with Him in their deliverance. You must be warned against imagining that you have one particle of spiritual ability or strength of your own. But you must be warned as earnestly against taking up with what may be termed a passive religion. III. THE HIGH PRIVILEGE OF THESE ESCAPED LIBERATED MEN AFTER THEIR ESCAPE. "Their king shall pass before them, and the Lord on the head of them." This is more than saying we shall have the Lord for us, we shall have Him *with* us. It indicates not merely the presence, but the near presence of the Lord. It may be a figure taken from the cloudy pillar hanging over Israel, overshadowing them. It is an assurance at once of discipline and of safety on our way to heaven. (*Charles Bradley, M.A.*) *The Breaker*:—Names appropriate to the offices which He was afterwards to fill were bestowed upon the promised Messiah. This is one of them. The name answers to what we call a "pioneer," one who clears the way before an army in its march. 1. It is appropriate to the Lord Jesus, because it was through His agency alone that the power of sin was broken. Our redeemed broke the strength of the law, by obeying its rigid requirements in our stead. 2. This title marks the character and office of the Messiah when, by His death, the destruction between Jews and Gentiles was for ever removed. 3. The title is appropriate, since by His death Christ destroyed death, and by His triumphant resurrection He has given an earnest of what He will one day accomplish for all who fall asleep in Him. 4. Appropriate also when we notice the steady inroads which His kingdom has made upon the widespread dominions of the Prince of Darkness. In vain does infidelity attempt to account for the improvement in morality and refinement by attributing them to the advance of civilisation alone. Stubborn facts, drawn from the history of nations, contradict the assertion. Civilisation, unless animated and directed by the religion of Christ, has uniformly corrupted and deteriorated public morals. We must look to a higher source than the wisdom or ingenuity or strength of man for the agency which has vanquished the powers of darkness, and redeemed the world from bondage; and we need not look for it in vain. (*John N. Norton, D.D.*) *The Breaker*:—I. IN WHAT RESPECTS MAY JESUS CHRIST BE CALLED A BREAKER? Because of the great opposition He had to break through in the work of our redemption. Because He breaks up a new and living way, by which we may have access to God and glory. Because He breaks the enmity of our hearts against Him. Because of the breaking judgments He brings on the world, and the breaking trials on His people. II. IN WHAT RESPECTS MAY HE BE SAID TO "COME UP"? When our first parents sinned, He came up in the promise. He came up really and personally in the incarnation, &c. In the chariots of a preached Gospel. In every display of His grace and love to such as believe. III. WHAT MAY BE IMPLIED IN HIS COMING UP BEFORE THEM? He comes before them as a Shepherd, as a General, as a King. It imports that the way to heaven is patent. IV. THE ESCAPE OF THE RANSOMED BY THIS WAY. They have broken up, &c., out of darkness into light, out of bondage into liberty. They have passed through the law-gate of conviction, and the gospel-gate of conversion. (*T. Hannam.*) *The Lord Jesus as the Leader of His people*:—I. THE LORD JESUS IN THE CHARACTER OF A BREAKER. By breaker understand one who burst through all obstacles. 1. What are the difficulties to be broken through? 2. Jesus, as the Breaker, has burst through every difficulty. II. HIS PEOPLE FOLLOWING IN HIS STEPS. Allusion is to the entrance of a victorious captain, with his troops following. Every act of Christ was done for His Church. How great will be the final glory of the Saviour! How blessed is the lot of the people of God! How awful it must be to be a stranger to Christ. (*J. G. Breay, B.A.*) *The matchless beauty of Jesus*:—Apply the words to the spiritual and eternal salvation of the Israel of God. Consider—I. THEIR CAPTIVITY, IMPLIED IN THE PROMISE OF DELIVERANCE. The people are described as sheep, but their salvation is spoken of in language which implies they are captives, and such captives that no other than the Lord Jehovah can effect their freedom. It is a captivity to sin. It is a willing captivity. They have sold themselves. II. THEIR GLORIOUS REDEMPTION. Who is it that undertakes their cause, and as their Redeemer is mighty to set them free? III. THE MAKING

EFFECTUAL OF THE REDEMPTION THUS OBTAINED IN THE RELEASE AND LIBERTY OF THE CAPTIVES. They break through their unbelief; they break through the barriers of sin, guilt, and death, and lay hold on eternal life. They break, also, from their sins, from the world, from its ungodly ways, and from whatever would withstand them in their following their glorious Lord and King, who goes before them, and whom they obey as their Leader and Commander. A threefold application. 1. Warning to such as go on still in their trespasses. 2. Encouragement to all that are sensible of their sins, and concerned about their souls. 3. Comfort for all such as are following after the Lord. (*J. T. Parker, M.A.*) *Christ the Breaker*.—I. THE GREAT WORK OF OUR DIVINE REDEEMER, BY WHICH HE HAS BROKEN FOR THE CAPTIVES THE PRISON-HOUSE OF THEIR BONDAGE. Many of us know not the bondage in which we are held. We are chained by sin, chained by the habit of evil with a strength of which you never know till you try to shake off. II. JESUS CHRIST AS THE OPENER, AND THE PATH, TO GOD. Our condition is not only one of bondage to evil, but also one of separation from God. We do not know God as He is, except by Jesus Christ. It is only the God manifest in Jesus Christ that draws men's hearts to Him. That God that is in Christ is the only God that humanity ever loved. He, by the fact of His Cross and Passion, has borne and borne away the impediments of our own sin and transgression which rise for ever between us and Him, unless He shall sweep them out of the way. III. CHRIST IS THE BREAKER AS THE CAPTAIN OF OUR LIFE'S MARCH. "When He putteth forth His sheep, He goeth before them." IV. HE IS THE BREAKER FOR US OF THE BANDS OF DEATH. Christ's resurrection is the only solid proof of a future life. It is not possible that we should be holden of the impotent chains that He has broken. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

### CHAPTER III.

VERS. 1-4. Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob, and ye princes of the house of Israel.—*Civil rulers*.—I. WHAT CIVIL RULERS OUGHT ALWAYS TO BE. They ought always to "know judgment," that is, always practically to know the right. What is the standard of right? Not public sentiment, not human law, but the Divine will. God's being is the foundation of right; God's will is the standard of right; God's Christ is the completest revelation of that standard. II. WHAT CIVIL RULERS OFTEN ARE. What were these rulers? 1. Morally corrupt. 2. Socially cruel. 3. Divinely abandoned. The Monarch of the universe is no respecter of persons. (*Homilist.*)

VERS. 5-7. Thus saith the Lord concerning the prophets that make My people err.—*False prophets*.—Here the prophet attacks the false prophets, as before he had attacked the "princes." I. They are DECEIVING. God says, they "make My people err." Preachers often make their hearers err. (1) In theology. They propound ideas, crude and ill-digested, concerning God, Christ, moral conditions and relations, utterly inconsistent with truth. (2) In worship. (3) In morality. Their standard of duty is often wrong. II. They are AVARICIOUS. They "bite with their teeth, and cry peace." Greed governs them in all their ministries. III. They are CONFOUNDED. 1. Confounded in darkness. "Night shall be unto you, that ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them." 2. Confounded in shame. Then shall the seers be ashamed, and the diviners be confounded. Jehovah ignores them. "There is no answer of God." "Those," says Matthew Henry, "who deceive others are but preparing confusion for their own faces." (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 8. But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might.—*The prophetic endowment*.—The three gifts, power, judgment, might, are the fruits of the one Spirit of God, through whom the prophet was filled with them. Of these, power is always strength residing in the person, whether it be the "power, or might of wisdom" of Almighty God Himself, or power which He imparts or implants. But it is always power lodged in the

person, to be put forth on him. Here it is Divine power, given through God the Holy Ghost, to accomplish that for which He was sent. "Judgment" is, from its form, not so much discernment in the human being as "the thing judged," pronounced by God; the righteous judgment of God, and righteous judgment in man conformably therewith. "Might" is courage or boldness to deliver the message of God; not awed or hindered by any adversaries. "Whoso is so strengthened and arrayed uttereth fiery words, whereby hearers' hearts are moved and changed. But whoso speaketh of his own mind doth good neither to himself nor others." So then, of these three gifts, power expresses the Divine might lodged in him; judgment, the substance of what he had to deliver; might or courage, the strength to deliver it in face of human power, persecution, ridicule, death. These gifts the prophets know are not their own, but are from the Spirit of God, and are by Him inspired into them. Such was the spirit of Elijah, of John Baptist, of Paul, of the apostles. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*) *The Holy Spirit the Author of all ministerial qualifications*:—The work of the ministry is the most arduous, the most important, the most honourable work in which a man can be engaged. Arduous, because it requires constant diligence, watchfulness, zeal, and perseverance. Important, because it involves the eternal interests of man. Honourable, because it is the work of God, and in the due discharge of it the glory of God is most promoted. **I. THE MINISTER'S APPOINTMENT.** This is not of man, but of God; of God the Holy Spirit. God has set apart certain persons to this office, who from time to time, as the services of His Church require, are raised up, converted, qualified, and sent for this office. Jesus sends His ministers whither He Himself will come. All the qualifications of ministers for their office are of God, both gifts and graces. Ministers are men of God sent from God to work for God, and bring sinners to God. **I. THEIR FAITHFULNESS IN THE DISCHARGE OF THEIR HOLY DUTIES IS OF GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT.** The first ministers were commanded to tarry in the city of Jerusalem until they were endued with "power from on high" (Acts i. 8). The prophets under the Old Testament and all the ministers of Christ in the present day have been and are equally indebted to this gracious operation. Nor can we be surprised at this, when the blessed Saviour Himself is represented in His mediatorial character as qualified and sustained by the Holy Ghost. Ministers know not what to preach, except as the Holy Spirit teaches them. **III. THAT MINISTERS' SUCCESS IS OF THE SPIRIT.** And this Spirit is poured out just in proportion as Christ is preached. Learn—1. Where to look for a blessing. All our fresh springs are in Jesus. 2. Ask whether the Lord is among us or not? 3. To whom we should give the glory, all the glory, for any benefit that we at any time receive from the ministry. (*R. Simpson, M.A.*) *The true prophet*:—It is supposed that this chapter belongs to the reign of Hezekiah; if so, the mournful state of matters which it depicts cannot have begun until towards its close. These words lead us to consider the true prophet. **I. THE WORK of a true prophet.** "To declare unto Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin." It is a characteristic of all true prophets that they have a keen moral sense to discern wrong, to loathe it, and to burn at it. No man is a true prophet who is not roused to thunder by the wrong. Where have we men now to "declare unto Jacob his transgression, and unto Israel his sin"? 1. This is a painful work. It will incur the disfavour of some and rouse the antagonism of the delinquents. 2. This is an urgent work. No work is more needed in England to-day. To expose wrong goes a great way towards its extinction. St. Peter on the day of Pentecost charged home the terrible crime of the crucifixion to the men he addressed! **II. THE POWER of a true prophet.** "Truly, I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment and of might." There is no egotism in this. A powerful man knows his power and will ascribe it to the right source—the "Spirit of the Lord." His power was moral; it was the might of conscience, moral conviction of invincible sympathy with eternal right and truth. This is a very different power to that of mere intellect, imagination, or what is called genius. It is higher, more creditable, more influential, more Godlike. **III. THE FIDELITY of a true prophet.** This is seen here in three things—1. In the class he denounces. "Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, princes of the house of Israel." He struck at the higher classes of life. 2. The prophet's fidelity is seen in the charges he makes. "They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity." (1) He charges them with extortionate cruelty. (2) With base mercenariness. Money was

the motive power of all. The prophet's faithfulness is seen—3. In the doom he proclaims. The reference may be to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. (*Homilist.*) *A faithful prophet*:—During the Chartist agitation many of Kingsley's friends and relations tried to withdraw him from the people's cause, fearful lest his prospects in life might be seriously prejudiced; but to all of them he turned a deaf ear, and in writing to his wife on the subject he says: "I will not be a liar. I will speak in season and out of season. I will not shun to declare the whole counsel of God. My path is clear, and I will follow in it." (*A. Bell, B.A.*) *Showing the transgression*:—The great power of Charles G. Finney in dealing with awakened souls consisted in this: he used to pin a man down to his favourite sins, and say to him: "Are you willing to give up this in order to obey Christ?" At that decisive point came the defeat or victory. He once knelt down beside an inquirer, and as he enumerated various sins the man responded that he would surrender them. At length Mr. Finney said: "I agree to serve God in my business." The man was silent. "What is the matter?" said Mr. F. kindly; "can you not do that?" "No," stammered the poor fellow; "I am in the liquor trade." And in it he continued. He rose from his knees and went back to his cursed business, with a fresh weight of guilt upon his head.

**VERS. 10, 11. Hear this . . . ye heads of the house of Jacob . . . that abhor judgment, and pervert all equity.**—*Rectitude*:—I. THERE IS AN ETERNAL LAW OF "RIGHT" THAT SHOULD GOVERN MAN IN ALL HIS RELATIONS. Right, as a sentiment, is one of the deepest, most ineradicable and operative sentiments in humanity. All men feel that there is such a thing as right. What the right is is a subject on which there has been and is a variety of opinion. Right implies a standard, and men differ about the standard. Some say the law of your country is the standard; some say public sentiment is the standard; some say temporal expediency is the standard. All these are fearfully mistaken. Philosophy and the Bible teach that there is but one standard, that is the will of the Creator. That will He reveals in many ways—in nature, in history, in conscience, in Christ. Conformity to that will is right. 1. The law of Christ should govern man in his relations with God. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," &c. 2. The law of right should govern man in his relation to his fellow-men—"Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them." This law of right is immutable. It admits of no modification. It is universal. It is binding alike on all moral beings in the universe. It is benevolent. It seeks the happiness of all. II. That a PRACTICAL DISREGARD OF THIS LAW LEADS TO FRAUD AND VIOLENCE. "For they know not to do right, saith the Lord, who store up violence and robbery in their palaces." The magnates of Samaria had no respect for the practice of right, hence they "stored up violence and robbery in their palaces." Fraud and violence are the two great primary crimes in all social life. III. That FRAUD AND VIOLENCE MUST ULTIMATELY MEET WITH CONDIGN PUNISHMENT. "Therefore thus saith the Lord God: An adversary there shall be even round about the land; and he shall bring down thy strength from thee, and thy palaces shall be spoiled." How was this realised? "Against him came up Shalmaneser, king of Assyria; and Hoshea became his servant, and gave him presents. In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan and in the cities of the Medes" (2 Kings xvii. 3, 6; xviii. 9-11). The cheats and murderers of mankind will, as sure as there is justice in the world, meet with a terrible doom. "Punishment is the recoil of crime; and the strength of the back-stroke is in proportion to the original blow." (*Homilist.*)

#### CHAPTER IV.

**VERS. 1-5. The mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains.**—*The moral grandeur of the Christian Church*:—The gift of prophecy would have been to its possessor a source of the most exquisite misery if it had been restricted only to the dark passages of human history. But the

future had a bright side as well as a dark, and it was as cheering to contemplate the former as it was dismal to apprehend the latter. As the sorrows of the prophets were greater, their joys also were higher than those of ordinary men. In the chapter immediately preceding the text the prophet had announced the future desolation of Zion and Jerusalem. The sins of her priests and princes, he foresaw, would attain such a height of aggravation that the very day itself would, in a manner, be dark over them. But as in the ashes of winter the husbandman can read the glories of spring, the prophetic eye could discern in the ruin of one city the establishment of another more glorious by far. So he goes on to expatiate with rapture on the glory that was to follow. By "last days" are meant the times of the Messiah, or, in other words, the Christian era. The meaning is, that the Christian dispensation would be the last of all, and that no other economy would be after it. It was an economy that was to last until the end of time. In these "last days" it is foretold by the prophet that "the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and exalted above the hills." In a mountainous region, among the multitude of hills that rise one above another in sublimity and grandeur, there is generally one that proudly and pre-eminently lifts its head above them all. It is seen from a greater distance than any of the others, and towers in glorious majesty over the heights which are allied to it. Under this bold and significant image, the prophet exhibits to us the moral grandeur and elevation of the Christian Church. It was, like the loftiest of mountains in an extensive range, to be visible from afar. A house, or temple, was to be reared on its summit. The Christian religion would surpass every other in majesty, and look down triumphantly on every other system of worship. This prophecy is fulfilled in part. Where is there a creed or system of theology that can compare with it? In the Gospel there is prominence, there is attractiveness, there is conspicuity. The hill of Calvary is more illustrious than the mountains of any land. He who was lifted up there, draws towards Him the eyes of many nations. The language of the prophet implies that, before this mountain could be exalted, there must be a shaking of the hills around. The prediction is to receive its full and perfect accomplishment in days still future—in, if we may so speak, the latest of the last days. Then indeed shall the mountain of the Lord's house rise sublimely above all the hills. There is reason, too, for believing, that just as at the first propagation of the Gospel, so likewise at its universal diffusion, there shall be a series of great and momentous changes in the political world. The great battle of contending principles must be fought out—the old warfare between sense and spirit must be renewed—and a period of intense misery must precede the final adjustment of the question. Nevertheless, truth which is mighty must prevail. At the close of the first verse the prophet intimates the triumph of the Gospel, and the immense number of its converts. "People shall flow unto it." The metaphor signifies that the triumph of the Gospel would be sure and certain, though it looked like a physical impossibility. The nations of the earth are not only compared to a river, but to a river flowing upward. To a certain extent this part of the prophecy has already been accomplished. The success of the Gospel hitherto in the world has been like the flowing of a river up a hill. Nothing, humanly speaking, could have been pronounced more improbable than the conversion of the nations to Christianity. It is the religion of purity; and the hearts of men are naturally unclean. It is the religion of benevolence and peace; but the spirit that is in men lusteth to envy. It is the religion of principle; and the heart of man is naturally disposed to content itself with forms. It were a curious enough question whether the age in which we ourselves live is an approximation to that glorious period of which the prophet speaks. But we dare not with certainty affirm it. While we rejoice in the symptoms of good, it becomes us, before pronouncing a positive judgment on the matter, to tremble at so many prognostications of evil. We may take warning against any fanatical use of this doctrine. The passage is not to be understood literally. The very terms of it intimate as much. The ultimate establishment of Messiah's throne will not interfere with the forms and modes of earthly government. There will be liberty and equality and fraternity. It will not be the grossly misnamed liberty, equality, and fraternity of infidel and republican France. It will be a liberty, not from the salutary restraints of government, but from Satan and the tyranny of evil passions. An equality, not of spoil, plunder, and substance, but of principle and unity of spirit. A fraternisation, not of robbery, under the mask of communism, but of love and generosity,

and of men preferring one another in honour. (*J. L. Adamson.*) *A vision of the latter-day glories* :—"The prophets frequently described what they saw with spiritual eyes after the form or fashion of something which could be seen by the eye of nature. The Church will be like a high mountain, for she will be pre-eminently conspicuous. I believe that at this period the thoughts of men are more engaged upon the religion of Christ than upon any other. The Christian religion has become more conspicuous now than ever it was. The Church will become awful and venerable in her grandeur. There is something awfully grand in a mountain, but how much more so in such a mountain as is described in our text, which is to be exalted above all hills, and above all the highest mountains of the earth. Now the Church is despised; the infidel barketh at her. But the day shall come when the Cross shall command universal homage. The day is coming when the Church shall have absolute supremacy. Now she has to fight for her existence. The day is coming when she shall be so mighty that there shall be nought left to compete with her. Here is the meaning of the text,—the Church growing and rising up till she becomes conspicuous, venerable, and supreme. But how is this to be done? Three things will ensure the growth of the Church. 1. The individual exertion of every Christian. We shall indeed see something more than natural agency, but this is to contribute to it. 2. The Church has within her a living influence. This must expand and grow. 3. The great hope of the Church is the second advent of Christ. When He shall come, then shall the mountain of the Lord's house be exalted above the hills. We know not when Jesus may come. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The established Church* :—"Such is the established Church predicted in ancient prophecy. Compare the similar prophecy in Isa. ii. In the chapter immediately preceding this passage God denounces the severest and most unsparing judgments upon a guilty people. The text is couched in the language of promise. In order to cheer those on whom God was about to pour many and merited judgments, He gives them—not a precept, which would only depress them; not another threatening, for that might overwhelm them; not an invitation, for that they might not be able to obey—but a promise, causing the future to unbosom rays of light for the comfort of the present. From this prophecy, see that the last days of the Gospel are predicted as the brightest. Divisions and discords have been the history of the visible Church from its cradle downwards to the present hour. Notice the epithet. The Church of Christ is here called "a mountain." This symbol is taken from the fact that the sacred site of the temple at Jerusalem was a mountain—Mount Moriah. It suggests that the Church of Christ shall be exalted above all the obstructions or impediments of the world; principalities and powers bending before it. Notwithstanding then all the difficulties, discords, divisions, heresies, schisms, errors, misconstruction, and misapprehensions that prevail amid the Church of God, not one of them is retarding in the least degree the ultimate and glorious outburst. The Church is beautifully and suitably symbolised by a mountain. A mountain is a fixed and stable thing. In Scripture strength and stability are represented by mountains. A mountain most suitably represents the varied climacterics of the Church of Christ, from this circumstance, that it is sometimes covered with clouds, and thereby involved in darkness, and swept by the hurricane, while at other times it basks and spreads its bosom before the uninterrupted and meridian sunbeams. This is precisely the history of the Church. A mountain is a place of safety or retreat. The true Church becomes a place of retreat, in which there is found the Rock of Ages, and the shadow of those wings beneath which there is safety. A mountain is a source of streams and rivulets. The dews descend from heaven upon it; those dews collect into streams, which irrigate and refresh the valley below. The Church of Christ is the great preserver of the earth. A mountain is the spot, standing on which we can see to the greatest distance. In this is shadowed one of the great functions which the Church of Christ is meant to discharge, namely, to enable the believer to see the Sun of Righteousness more clearly and distinctly. A mountain was selected in the ancient economy for those who sounded the trumpet of jubilee. And the "acceptable year of the Lord" ought to be proclaimed in the pulpits of every true and apostolic Church. It is predicted that this mountain "shall be established in the top of the mountains." "Establishment" is not to be understood as popularly applied to certain modern Churches. The passage does not mean that the Church is established or built upon Peter. There cannot be two foundations. If Christ be the founda-

tion, there can be no room for another; whatever comes next must be laid upon the foundation, and must be part of the superstructure, and not the foundation. The Church is established on Christ, the Rock of Ages. This is a tried foundation. It is called "precious." It is called a living rock, and the corner-stone. This foundation is an everlasting foundation. (*John Cumming, A.M.*)

*A missionary discourse*.—I. A DESCRIPTION OF THE CHURCH. Such phrases as "the mountain of the Lord's house," and "Zion," signify, in such connection as this, the Church of God. The visible Church has, from the beginning, always had an existence; but its boundaries have generally been very limited, and its situation has often been very obscure. But the Church shall be conspicuous to all; as on the top of the mountains. She shall be exalted above the hills. And philosophy, idolatry, superstition, and errors, shall no longer obstruct her view, or obscure her glory. And she shall be established. She has been tossed about by commotions. One day she shall be no longer oppressed by persecutions, or disturbed by the arm of human power.

II. A DISPOSITION IN ALL TOWARDS THE CHURCH. "All nations shall flow into it." Their movements shall be characterised by friendly co-operation. By a definite and sacred object. By proper intentions and correct views. By right dispositions. By confidence in the excellency of the Divine instructions.

III. THE BLESSINGS RESULTING FROM THESE CIRCUMSTANCES. Taught from above, then, nations generally will own the authority of God, acknowledge His right to judge, and submit to His laws.

IV. THE PERIOD OF THESE GREAT EVENTS. "In the last days." The Church of God has had her days; and these days have been somewhat commensurate with the progress of time, and with the limited or more extended population of the earth. Day of patriarchal Church was a day of small things. But patriarchs and prophets spoke of another day, of other days, which they called the "last days." Evidently the prophet referred to the days of the Gospel.

Improvement—1. Let our spirits be cheered though so few have hitherto embraced real Christianity. 2. We may well be excited to renewed exertions in rendering Divine truth conspicuous to all. 3. Let this prospect call forth the gratitude of all who already participate in the blessings of redemption. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*)

*The law of the Spirit*.—Pentecost is the culminating point of Divine revelation. This great event is the focus of all prophecy. The text is not exhausted in its reference to Israel, but stretches forward to the renovation of mankind in the Church by the Holy Ghost.

I. THE LAW OF THE SPIRIT IS AN UNIVERSAL LAW. Adapted to all men, in all circumstances, and in all times. Because it is the announcing of eternal principles, accompanied with Divine power to enforce them.

II. HENCE ITS PRE-EMINENCE OVER ALL LAWS. It absorbs and expresses the truth of all other laws. All nations recognise it as something higher, deeper, more complete than their previous revelation or religion.

III. MARK ITS EFFECTS.

1. In judgment (ver. 3). It is the conviction of right and wrong, good and evil. It is the conviction that right will be maintained and vindicated, and wrong put down. This must be the foundation of all real moral and spiritual life.

2. In producing obedience (ver. 2). Not mere conviction, but submission.

3. In working love. The real root of obedience. Leading men to mutual respect, and to a care for each other's good.

4. In producing safety and security. This can never be fully attained by mere external law and restrictive measures. The best laws will be obeyed only when men's hearts are in harmony with their requirements. The true way to safety is by the spirit of love and mutual consideration. The great lesson of Pentecost is this.—When love is universal, discord of acts and words and purpose will cease. (*William R. Clark, M.A.*)

*The promise of God regarding His Church*.—The sin of the Church had necessitated frequent denunciations and words of warning on the part of God. He had been speaking very tempestuously to His people; He now exhibits the gentler aspects of His character. There is a pause—a calm after tempest; and the sweet birds of promise troop forth with their notes of peace and gladness.

I. THE CHURCH'S HOPE. "In the last days," &c. Who can interpret these words? Not the man of mere dates. The world has not seen its brightest day yet. The light is still struggling—not meridian glory. This world has a rich promise hidden in its heart, like the snow-drops of winter—anticipatory of spring. Death is now in the majority. It shall not always be so. The Church, like youth, lives in hope—of brighter days to come—of what it is to be. Thou livest in the infinitive mood! II. THE CHURCH'S REVIVAL. "And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain

of the Lord . . . and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths," &c. (vers. 2, 3). Then shall the Church illustrate the fulness of meaning contained in the Saviour's words: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." Souls shall be enfranchised, and know the liberty of infinitude, &c. III. THE CHURCH'S SECURITY. "They shall sit every man under his vine, and under his fig-tree; and none shall make them afraid" (ver. 4). The history of human progress has been written in fear. "For fear of the Jews" the disciples had to move about cautiously, and assemble in quiet and concealed places. Not until "the doors were shut" could they worship with any sense of security. And through all subsequent ages the history of religious progress has thus been illustrated. In the fastnesses of the wilderness and fissures of the rocks, the low murmurings of sacred song have been heard by God alone. "for fear" of the persecuting hand; as in the days of the Covenanters, Lollards, and others. But behold, the days come—"the last days"—when doors shall be no longer shut, when bolts shall be all withdrawn, every gate thrown wide open, and no barrier intervene between the soul and its perfected liberty. IV. THE IMPROBABILITY OF ALL THIS. Looked at in the light of the present state of the world, this bright perspective is a dream—an extravaganza—insanity's wild vision. Look at the corruption of the world; look at a Church dying of doctrine; and see whether such a future be probable. Apart from "the Word of the Lord" it is not; but the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it" (ver. 4). What are the improbabilities of a frozen river, or field, in winter? Shall the waters ever flow again, or the field wave its ears of corn again? Yes. What is the guarantee? "The mouth of the Lord" that says: "seed time and harvest, summer and winter, shall not cease." The text speaks of a life flowing upwards—"all people shall flow unto it"—to the "top of the mountains." Who ever heard of water flowing upwards, or fire burning downwards? You say to one unacquainted with electricity: "I can send a message to a friend in India, and get an answer in the course of an hour or two." "How utterly absurd," is the reply. There are laws that defy gravitation; a life sublimer than science, and more eloquent than music. Sceptical science says: "This thing cannot be." Faith says: "It shall be, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *The Gospel age*:—"The 'last days' means the times of the Messiah. I. THE TRUE RELIGION ON THE GOSPEL AGE WILL BECOME A GREAT POWER. The temple was the greatest thing in the religion of the Jews; it was the "mountain" in their scenery. The true religion is to become a mountain. The true religion, where it exists, is the biggest thing. It is either everything or nothing. II. THE TRUE RELIGION OF THE GOSPEL AGE WILL BECOME UNIVERSALLY ATTRACTIVE. "And people shall flow unto it." "This is a figurative expression, denoting that they shall be converted to the true religion. It indicates that they shall come in multitudes, like the flowing of a mighty river. The idea of the flowing of the nation, as of the movement of many people towards an object like a broad stream on the tides of the ocean, is one that is very grand and sublime" (Barnes). In this period the social element will be brought into full play in connection with true religion. 1. They will study its laws, in order to obey them. "He will teach us His ways, and we will walk in His paths." 2. They will study its laws at the fountain head. "For the law shall go forth of Zion, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem." III. THE TRUE RELIGION OF THE GOSPEL AGE WILL BECOME POWERFUL TO TERMINATE ALL WARS. 1. Here is the destruction of war. "Beat thy swords into ploughshares, and thy spears into pruning-hooks." 2. Here is the establishment of peace. "Shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree." Most incredible must this prediction have been to the men of Micah's time; but it will be accomplished, for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it. If He has spoken it and it does not come to pass, it must be for one of three reasons—(1) Insincerity; which cannot be entertained. (2) Change of purpose; which is equally inadmissible. (3) Unexpected difficulties; which is an absurdity when applied to Omniscience. (*Hamilit.*) *Mountain-top religion*:—"The true way to conquer temptations is not to fight them in detail, but to go up into a loftier region where they cease to be temptations. How is it that grown men do not like the sweetmeats that used to tempt them when they were children? They have outgrown them. Then outgrow the temptations of the world! How is it that there are no mosquitoes nor malaria on the mountain-tops? They cannot rise above the level of the swamps by the river. Go up to the mountain-top, and neither malaria nor mosquito will follow you,—which,

being interpreted, is, live near Jesus Christ and keep your hearts and minds occupied with Him, and you will dwell in a region high above the temptations which buzz and sting, which infest and slay on the lower levels. (*A. MacLaren, D.D.*) *The Saviour's kingdom*:—The world has always had its dreams of a Golden Age. A better state of things than that which exists, has been felt to be not only possible, but normal, and so men have reasoned that what ought to be, either has been in the old time, or will be in the new. Either as a memory or a hope, this idea has done much to reconcile men to the confusion and contradictions of life. To the vagueness and mist of that human dream Scripture gives the sharpness and substance of fact. It speaks with positiveness. The Golden Age has not passed. Humanity is on the way to the realisation of its long hope. The Scripture idea, however, differs from the human in the importance which it attaches to the spiritual element. The transformations in society, which must precede the ushering in of the golden age, are moral, not material. Betterment of laws, advance in knowledge, multiplication of industrial arts, increase of wealth—these things cannot transfigure humanity. It is the established and recognised sovereignty of Christ and His truth on which the desired blessedness depends. It is important to emphasise this truth at the present time, when religion is depreciated in the popular estimate. There is a prevalent idea that it is weak and on the wane. It has recently been said that "fifty years hence no one will go to church except for culture." Note that the function of religion is not limited to the regeneration of a single man. It works through the individual, upon the organic life of the race. And it employs varied methods. Sometimes it sparks on the surface of history; sometimes it works out of sight. There is a river in Kentucky that, after unrolling its silver thread through leagues of verdant meadows, suddenly disappears. The earth swallows it up. But though lost to view, its flow is not checked. It channels its way through the hidden rocks; it hollows out the vast halls and the glittering galleries of the Mammoth Cave. It springs the arches of that grandest of cathedrals, and inlays the rocky roof with stars, after the pattern of the heavens. The sculpture of the silent waters outstrips the skill of human artists. The weird and the beautiful, the quaint and the sublime are clustered in groupings, whose impressiveness is eloquent of the wonder-workings of the Divine hand. So Christ's religion has its epochs of disappearance from the surface of life. But it works nevertheless, works persistently, works mightily. Divine truth never comes to a standstill. In sight, or out of sight it is for ever busy. Standing at the casement of prospect, let us note some of the glories of the coming kingdom. 1. The acknowledged supremacy of the Christian Church (ver. 1). 2. A universal desire to know and obey the truth (vers. 1, 2). Till now, religious truth has had to be carried to men and pressed upon their attention. 3. An adjustment of international relations on the basis of righteousness (ver. 3). The two forces which men have always used for the regulation of international affairs, are diplomacy and war. The cunning of intrigue or the edge of the sword is employed to untangle or cut every knot of dispute. By and by righteousness shall be both the basis and substance of the international code. 4. Safety of life and property secured by individual piety (vers. 4, 5). One principal office of organised society is to surround with safeguards the individual man. Barbarism is every man for himself; communism is the rule of the caprice or frenzy of a mob; civilisation is the effort of all for the good of each; and yet the efficient agent in these widely diverse types of society is the same,—brute force. In the coming kingdom individual character is to be the security of society. 5. The elimination of the elements of weakness in society (vers. 6, 7). What is to be done with the dependent and dangerous classes? What society cannot do, God can, and by and by He will. The value of such an outlook as has been now attempted is incalculable. It gives men the inspiration of a great expectation; composure of mind in the midst of discouragements; and the true ideal of life. This blessed consummation, whether near or far off, is not so near but what it needs our help; it is not so far off but what we can make ourselves felt as a force in it. We need to clothe ourselves in workman's garments, not in the ascension robes of those who sit down and dream about the second advent. (*Monday Club Sermons.*) *The golden age*:—"But in the latter days it shall come to pass. . . ." The prophet lifts his eyes away to the latter days to gain refreshment in his present toil. He feasts his soul upon the golden age which is to be, in order that he may serve himself in his immediate service. Without the anticipation of a golden age he would

lose his buoyancy, and the spirit of endeavour would go out of his work. Our visions always determine the quality of our tasks. Our dominant thought regulates our activities. What pattern am I working by? What golden age have I in my mind? What do I see as the possible consummation of my labours? There is your child at home. You are ministering to him in your daily attention and service. What is your pattern in the mind? What sort of a man do you see in your boy? How would you fill up this imperfect phrase concerning him, "In the latter days it shall come to pass. . . ." Have you ever painted his possibilities? If you have no clear golden age for the boy your training will be uncertain, your discipline will be a guesswork and a chance. Our vision of possibilities helps to shape the actuality. There is the scholar in the school. When a teacher goes to his class, be it of boys or girls, what kind of men or women has he in his eye? Surely we do not go to work among our children in blind and good-humoured chance? We are the architects and builders of their characters, and we must have some completed conception even before we begin our work. I suppose the architect sees the finished building in his eye even before he takes a pencil in his hand, and certainly long before the pick and the spade touch the virgin soil. That boy who gives the teacher so much trouble, restless, indifferent, bursting with animal vitality, how is he depicted as man in your chamber of imagery? Do you only see him as he is? Little, then, will be your influence to make him what he might be. Let me assume that your work is among the outcasts. When you go to court and alley, or to the elegant house in the favoured suburb, and find men and women, sunk in animalism, trailing the robes of human dignity in unamiable mire, how do you see them with the eyes of the soul? "In the latter days it shall come to pass. . . ." What? To the eye of sense they are filthy, offensive, repellant. What like are their faces, and what sort of robes do they wear in the vision of the soul? Are we dealing with the "might-be" or only with the thing that is? Sir Titus Salt was pacing the docks at Liverpool and saw great quantities of dirty, waste material lying in unregarded heaps. He looked at the unpromising substance, and in the mind's eye saw finished fabrics and warm and welcome garments; and ere long the power of the imagination devised ministries for converting the outcast stuff into refined and finished robes. We must look at all our waste material in human life and see the vision of the "might-be." Surely this was the Master's way! He is always calling the thing that is by the name of its "might-be." "Thou art Simon," a mere hearer: "Thou shalt be called Peter," a rock. To the woman of sin, the outcast child of the city, He addressed the gracious word "daughter," and spoke to her as if she were already a child of the golden age; her weary heart leapt to the welcome speech. And so we have got to come to our work with visions of the latter days. I am not surprised, therefore, that all great reformers and all men and women who have profoundly influenced the life and thought of their day have been visionaries, having a clear sight of things as they might be, feeling the cheery glow of the light and heat of the golden age. In the latter days the spiritual is to have emphasis above pleasure, money, armaments. In whatever prominence these may be seen, they are all to be subordinate to the reverence and worship of God. Military prowess and money-making and pleasure-seeking are to be put in their own place, and not to be permitted to leave it. First things first! "In the beginning God." This is the first characteristic of the golden age. "And many nations shall come and say: Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord and to the house of the God of Jacob, and He will teach us His ways, and we will walk in His paths." Then the second characteristic of the golden age is that people are to find their confluence and unity in common worship. The brotherhood is to be discovered in spiritual communion. We are not to find profound community upon the river of pleasure or in the ways of business or in the armaments of the castle. These are never permanently cohesive. Pleasure is more frequently divisive than cohesive. No, it is in the mountain of the Lord's house the peoples will discover their unity and kinship. It is in the common worship of the one Lord. "And they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks." Then the third characteristic of the golden age is to be the conversion of merely destructive force into positive and constructive ministries. No energy is to be destroyed; it is all to be transfigured. The sword is to become a ploughshare; the weapon of destruction an implement of culture. After the Franco-German war many of the cannon balls were re-made into church bells. One of our manufacturers in Birmingham told me only a week

ago that he was busy turning the empty cases of the shells used in the recent war into dinner gongs! That is the suggestion we seek in the golden age: all destructive forces are to be changed into helpful ministries. Tongues that speak nothing but malice are to be turned into instructors of wisdom. All men's gifts and powers and all material forces are to be used in the employment of the kingdom of God. "They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree." There is to be a distribution of comforts. Life's monotony is to be broken up. Sweet and winsome things are to be brought into the common life. Dinginess and want are both to be banished. There is to be a little beauty for everybody, something of the vine and the fig-tree. There is to be a little ease for everybody, time to sit down and rest. To every mortal man there is to be given a little treasure, a little leisure, and a little pleasure. "And none shall make them afraid." And they are not only to have comfort, but the added glory of peace. The gift of the vine and fig-tree would be nothing if peace remained an exile. And now mark the beautiful final touches in this prophet's dream: "I will assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out and her that is afflicted." They are all to be found in God's family. "Her that halteth," the child of "ifs" and "buts" and fears and indecision, she shall lose her halting and obtain a firm and confident step. "And her that is driven out," the child of exile, the self-banished son or daughter, the outcast by reason of sin; they shall all be home again. "He gathereth together the outcasts." And along with these there is to come "her that is afflicted," the child of sorrows. The day of grief is to be ended, mourning shall be the thing of the preparatory day which is over; "He shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (J. H. Jowett, M.A.)

**He will teach us of His ways.**—*Gaining knowledge of God*.—They do not go to God because they know Him, but that they may know Him. They are drawn by a mighty impulse towards Him. Howsoever attracted, they come, not making bargains with God what they should be taught, that He should reveal to them nothing transcending reason, nothing exceeding or contradicting their notions of God; they do not come with reserves, that God should not take away this or that error, or should not disclose anything of His incomprehensibility. They come in holy simplicity, to learn whatever He will condescend to tell them; in holy confidence, that He, the infallible truth, will teach them infallibly. They say "of His ways," for all learning is by degrees, and all which all creatures could learn in all eternity falls infinitely short of His truth and holiness. Nay, in all eternity, the highest creature which He has made, and which He has admitted most deeply into the secrets of His wisdom will be as infinitely removed as ever from the full knowledge of His wisdom and His love. For what is finite, enlarged, expanded, accumulated to the utmost degree possible, remains finite still. It has no proportion to the infinite. But even here, all growth in grace implies growth in knowledge. The more we love God, the more we know of Him; and with increased knowledge of Him come higher perceptions of worship, praise, thanksgiving, of the character of faith, hope, charity, of our outward and inward acts and relations to God, the unboundedness of God's love to us, and the manifoldness of the ways of pleasing Him, which, in His love, He has given us. St. Paul was ever learning in intensity what he knew by revelation. "The way of life to Godwards is one, in that it looketh to one end, to please God: but there are many tracks along it, as there are many modes of life"; and each several grace is a part of the way to God. (E. B. Pusey, D.D.)

**The law shall go forth of Zion, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem.**—*Christianity—its nature, diffusion, and effects*.—Immortality, guilt, and danger, are intuitions of our common nature always felt to possess arresting attractive power. Unprepared to throw away the hope of immortality, the question arises: how can we forecast its issues, or determine its conditions? Whither shall we turn for light and guidance? The revelations of Christianity are alone able to solve the mystery. The Bible is the book and the gift of God. The Christian revelation was not intended merely or mainly to gratify the intellectual curiosity and enrich the mind of man, but so to change his nature and reverse his moral condition as to establish him in the final virtue and happiness of heaven. The portion of prophecy now claiming attention relates to the entire of the Christian dispensation. 1. Some of the more distinguishing elements and attributes of the Gospel denominated in our subject, with distinctive significance, the law and Word of Jehovah. (1) The source of its origination is Divine. (2) The great object of the bestowment of the Gospel was the happiness of mankind. (3) The excellence of its matter—

the subject-matter of its revelations—vindicates the conclusion to which we have arrived. (4) Christianity is a system exhibiting in its nature, evidence, and claims, not only an uncompounded oneness, but a most striking distinctive uniqueness of character. The Gospel appeals to the mind and heart with an illumination and efficacy unknown to any other system, or in any other department of inquiry. It exerts a remarkable influence on the character and destiny of man. It is not more Divine in theory than Godlike in issue. 2. The extent of the provisions of the Gospel, and its corresponding publication. Glance at a few of its provisional adaptations. (1) Christianity stands pledged for the destruction of the great primal curse. (2) Of ignorance and error. (3) Of violence and wrong in the structure and relations of government and society. (4) Of national war and bloodshed. (5) The conversion of the Gentiles ranks high among the provisions of the Gospel. (6) Universal and unmolested brotherhood between man and man, nation and nation, is equally a promise of the Gospel. 3. The agency and means by the operation and instrumentality of which the Gospel was to go forth from the place of its first publication, and, disdaining all locality, diffuse itself among the nations. Providence will prepare the way. Divine influence will prepare the heart. Divine truth—the Bible—shall be the grand exclusive instrument. The spread of the Gospel will receive its direction from the purposes, and its impulse from the energy of heaven, while the pulpit, press, social intercourse, and the force of example, shall secure its acceleration. 4. What will be the effect of the whole? An incalculable enlargement of the Church, both in extent and influence—a boundless multiplication of its numbers and blessings. Consider also its more distinctive influence upon—(1) The mind; (2) The morals; (3) The movements, of the world. Christianity is identified with the growth and the glory of the ages. Her work cannot be retarded. The indestructible elements of rejuvenescence and immortality found in the Gospel will secure the triumph and multiply the conquests of Christianity, until the empire of sin is destroyed, and death is swallowed up in victory. It is reserved for Christianity to realise the fable of the bird of Jove; grasping the thunder of heaven in her hand, and spreading her wings from sunrise to the oceans of the West, she throws her shadow over the world; and the laurels of peaceful triumph and imperishable glory shall encircle her brow when the wreath of the Cæsars shall only be remembered as the badge of crime. (*Bishop H. B. Bascom, D.D.*) And He shall judge among many people, &c.—*International Christianity*.—The time of which the prophet speaks has evidently not yet arrived. Let us assume that what the prophet saw was a real purpose of the Lord, a purpose which might be worked out gradually or suddenly, quickly or after a long interval, but distinct in its character and practical in its effects—that peace amongst the nations was, and therefore is, in the counsels of the eternal God. Looking at the prophecy in this light, we ought not to be slow to admit that a very real progress has been made towards the prophet's goal. Compare what the world is now with what it was before Christ came, and the difference as regards the peaceable enjoyment of life is immense; and the improvement is everywhere associated with Christian civilisation. History does not leave us without hope, or mock the encouragement to be drawn from such prophecies as those we are considering. In this prophecy the peace is set forth as a result produced by an antecedent cause. The nations are described as agreeing together to go up to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach them His ways, and that they may walk in His paths. In modern words, it is through an increasing prevalence of the authority of justice, through the growth of an international sentiment recognising Christian obligations that international peace is to be looked for. We need not wonder that the prospect of universal peace is still remote, when we consider how slow a progress has been made in international morality. There must be a morality between nations as well as a morality between persons. A biblical ideal of true concord amongst the nations has been beckoning on mankind through the ages, though men have been slow to pay it due homage. But it is probably in accordance with the laws of appointed development that the sentiment of international obligation should be of late growth. Family duty seems to come first. Some think that duty to the clan, or larger family, takes precedence even of that. Then follows duty to the chief, or sovereign, or nation, and to fellow-members of the same community. Personal duty towards persons of a different race and country and tongue is felt later and less strongly. But perhaps that which waits to the last to be felt is the duty of a nation as a body to other national

branches of the great family of man. The theory of international duty is not altogether a simple matter. A man is certainly not so free to give up the interests of his country as he is to give up his own private interests. Our country is a sacred name, including nearly all that is dear to us. Is patriotism selfish? No. But there may be a selfish taint in it. Experience and the common sense of mankind bear witness that it is not impossible to reconcile the due moral sentiment of the small circle with the due moral sentiment of the larger. A man may love his family, and yet feel that it would be a shame to him to push its interests to the detriment of other families of his people. A man may be ardently patriotic, and may not the less wish well to other countries. In all moral perplexities resulting from an apparent conflict of obligations, our wisdom is to go forward tentatively and in faith, following after the better ideal, yielding to the nobler instinct. Micah lifts us up to the higher international atmosphere towards which we ought to aspire. He shows us nations persuaded and constrained into mutual peace by a common reverence for the righteous and merciful God. These nations have been chastened by the judgments and rebukes of God, so that they have learnt not to abuse their strength for wrong-doing, but to use it rather for the righting of the injured and the help of the weak. (*J. Llewelyn Davies, M.A.*) *An emblem of peace*.—Upon the plains of Waterloo there stands a great bronze lion, forged from the captured guns of Britain's foes in 1815. The beast's mouth is open, and seems snarling through his teeth over the battlefield. When I saw it last, one spring noonday, a bird had built its nest right in the lion's mouth, twining the twigs of the downy bed where the fledglings nestled around the very teeth of the metal monster, and from the very jaws of the bronze beast the chirp of the swallows seemed to twitter forth timidly the tocsin of peace. It was the audacity of hope. May it be prophetic!

Ver. 5. For all people will walk every one in the name of his God, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.—*Every nation is God*.—That this chapter contains a prophecy of the glorious times of the Gospel is the general opinion of all Christian interpreters. Some things are foretold in it which have never been accomplished in the times of the Jewish Church. 1. That there shall be a general confluence to the true religion and worship of God. 2. That this great and conspicuous society of the Church shall enjoy peace and tranquillity. 3. That internal zeal and devotion shall accompany all this external glory and happiness. That all these would admirably become the Christian Church cannot be doubted. I. ALL NATIONS AND PEOPLE GENERALLY HAVE SOME GOD AND RELIGION OR OTHER. Atheism is contrary to the common sense of mankind. It will be very hard, if not impossible, to find any nation or people that have lived without a God. II. ALL THOSE NATIONS AND PEOPLE THAT HAVE ANY BELIEF OF A GOD, HAVE ALSO SOME DEVOTION, AND PAY SOME REMARKABLE REVERENCE TOWARDS THE DEITY. The nature and notion of God is so great that it cannot ordinarily miss of affecting men with the greatest seriousness. If any man acknowledges the true God, and has ripe notions of Him, he then apprehends a mighty majesty, invested with infinite power, wisdom, justice, and goodness. He that can think of such a God without a religious reverence must have either something below a human folly, or beyond a human hardness. III. THE GREATER THE GOD, AND THE TRUER THE RELIGION, THE MORE OUGHT TO BE THE DEVOTION. It is most genuine, natural, and reasonable, that the best religion should be attended with the greatest devotion, and the most holy lives. Show.—1. The excellency of our principles, and how much the religion which we profess is better than any other. Represent four things—(1) The antiquity of our religion. (2) The credibility and easiness of its belief. (3) The gravity and decency of its rituals. (4) Its efficaciousness to make men generously good and holy. IV. WITH THE MORE ARDENT ZEAL AND DEVOTION WE SHOULD TREAT THE TRUE GOD AND THE TRUE RELIGION. 1. We ought to be more steadfast and unmovable in our religion than other people are. 2. We ought to outstrip them in good life, in zeal and fervency, as much as we do in our principles and advantages. (*J. Goodman, D.D.*) *The great resolve*.—"The name of the Lord is a strong tower." We invite you to "go about Zion, tell the towers thereof." The various towers of this great spiritual fortress are nothing else than the titles and attributes with which, in His own inspired volume, God has seen meet to make Himself known. I. JEHOVAH-TSIDKENU; THE TOWER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. Any shelter we can rear is a tower of sand—a citadel of

bulrushes—that will leave us naked and defenceless in that solemn hour which is to try every man's work, and every man's righteousness, of what sort it is. Christ hath finished transgression, and made an end of sin, and made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness. To attempt aught of our own by way of supplement or addition to the merits of the Divine surety, would be to seek to gild refined gold, or holding up the taper to help the sunlight. II. JEHOVAH-SHALOM; THE LORD MY PEACE. This spiritual tower of peace stands side by side with the tower of righteousness. "The work of righteousness shall be peace." "Having made peace, through the blood of His Cross." What a repose this Gospel peace gives amid all the petty troubles of life! It "keeps the heart," as in a citadel or garrison. A calm elevation is imparted to the present, and the future can be contemplated undismayed. All that belongs to the Christian; his duties; his engagements; his very cares and difficulties are softened and mellowed with this calm tranquillity; just as in nature the setting sun transforms and metamorphoses the whole landscape into gold. III. JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH; THE TOWER OF THE DIVINE PRESENCE. God is everywhere. It is a blessed thing for the believer to bear constantly about with him the realised sense of the Divine nearness, and it is his peculiar privilege and prerogative to do so. He is the living God in nature and in providence, guiding and supervising all. But there is a nobler and pre-eminent sense in which His covenant people can flee into this strong tower. Walking in the name of their God, they can say, "The Lord of hosts is with us." "Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." IV. JEHOVAH-NISSI; THE TOWER OF DEFENCE. We are still in an enemy's country. He that is for us is greater than all that can be against us. The Lord is our defence. V. JEHOVAH-JIREH; THE TOWER OF TRUST. A conquering army must keep near its supplies. And the Christian has His promises of assured help. Each apparently capricious turn in life's way, all its accidents and incidents are the appointments of infinite wisdom; and "they that know Thy name, shall put their trust in Thee." Trust is a staff not for level plains and smooth highways. It is the alpenstock, the pilgrim prop for the mountaineer, for the rugged ascent, for the slippery path, for the glacier crevasse. God is a rich, sure, willing, and wise Provider. VI. JEHOVAH-ROPHI; THE TOWER OF HEALING. He proclaims as His name, "I am the Lord that healeth thee." He is the true "healing-tree," which, cast into your bitterest Marah-pool, will make its waters sweet. (*J. R. Macduff, D.D.*) *Heathen zeal and Christian lukewarmness*.—The survey of missions under their most glorious aspects may keep men from considering them under less striking, but not less important points of view. Missions, whether successful or unsuccessful, so far as the conversion of pagans is concerned, return one hundredfold multiplied to the land whence they sprang,—return in demonstration of human corruption, and of the need of a Mediator; and of the truth and power of the Gospel,—return in a stimulus to self-examination, in incentive to prayer, and in warning against caring for others, and neglecting ourselves. It is a very peculiar use which may be said to be made of missions in our text. The heathen are surveyed not as abandoning their falsehood and superstition, but as adhering to them with the greatest earnestness and tenacity. From this steadfastness of the heathen the argument is drawn for making the resolve, "And we will walk in the name of our Lord God for ever and ever." If the pagan adheres to what is false, we will cleave to what is true. The tenacity with which false doctines are adhered to, does but set in stronger light the fickleness of the professed servants of the true. What the missionary ascertains is not that idolaters refuse to add to the number of their idols, but only that they will not exchange their idols. If they admit new, they nevertheless adhere to the old. Shall the pagan adhere to his idols, because they were the idols of his fathers; and shall we virtually revolt from that God whom our ancestors served, and whose truth, though at the cost of substance and life, they handed down to us as the most precious possession? We may change our gods, if we will, yielding to the opposition of science, falsely so called; we may burn incense before images, which the madness of speculation would set up, when reason is too proud to bow meekly to revelation. In either case we should be "changing our glory for that which cannot profit." Our God is the God of the Bible, a God who has revealed Himself through His Son, Jesus Christ, providing through His obedience and death for our pardon and life. We ask the missionaries this question, Has a people ceased to "walk in the name of its god"? They have as yet nothing

very encouraging to answer. There are cases of individual conversion. The missionary report is a report of adhering to error, and opposition to truth. What inferences are to be drawn from this report—inferences reproachful to ourselves, or containing lessons which it may become us to study and apply with the utmost diligence? The gist of the text is, that the tenacity with which the heathen adhere to their idols, helps to condemn, or display in its atrociousness, the conduct of the Jew, or the Christian, who shall renounce or be cold in the service of his Creator and Redeemer. (*Henry Melvill, B.D.*) *Man's religious nature*:—It is trite to say that man has a religious nature. This verse suggests the wrong and the right development of this nature. I. THE WRONG DEVELOPMENT. Idolatry. Polytheism proper is, and generally has been, the most popular religion in the world. Whence comes polytheism? The one great cause, which comprehends all others, is depravity. Which—1. Involves moral corruption. What are heathen gods, as a rule, but the deification of the lower passions and vices of mankind? 2. Involves carnality. Hence they want a god they can see and handle and touch. 3. Involves thoughtlessness. Polytheism cannot stand reasoning. II. THE RIGHT DEVELOPMENT. What is that? Practical monotheism. "We will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever." 1. This is rational. The one God is the sum-total of all moral properties, the Proprietor of all resources, and the Bestower of all existences and all the blessings therewith. What can be more rational than to walk in His way? 2. This is obligatory. No man is bound to walk in the name of an idol; nay, he is commanded not to. But every man is bound to walk in the name of the Lord—bound on the ground of His supreme excellence, His relations to man, and the obligation springing therefrom. 3. This is blessed. To walk in His name is to walk through sunny fields abounding with all beauty and fruitfulness. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 6-8. *The Lord shall reign over them in Mount Zion.*—*The blessing of the ingathered ones*:—I. THE CHARACTER OF THE ASSEMBLY. 1. The halt. 2. The banished. 3. The afflicted. From this gather the ruined condition of man. (1) The halt—incapable of any spiritual movement. Hence the corruption of the understanding, will, affections, memory; the whole man. (2) Driven out; banished; expelled from God. Condemned by the law. Subject to God's wrath. Allied to God's enemies. (3) Afflicted, that is, grievously distressed. Afflicted with blindness, lameness, deafness, dumbness, leprosy; and by sin, Satan, &c. II. THEIR GRACIOUS ADVANCEMENT AND HONOUR. "I will make her that halteth a remnant." A remnant is a small quantity or number. A definitive or proportioned remnant. An eternally saved remnant. A gathered or collected remnant. A prosperous or happy remnant. A holy and righteous remnant. An opposed remnant. Yet finally a successful remnant. "And her that was cast far off a strong nation." Strong by reason of its situation; its fortifications; its judicious and good laws; its military skill; its ruler's wisdom. Consequently a blessed nation. "And the Lord shall reign over them in Mount Zion from henceforth for ever." They are made submissive to Christ. Christ reigns in the Church generally. He reigns in the Church's officers. He reigns in the Church members. He reigns in the understandings of His people. He reigns in their will, subduing them. He reigns in their hearts. This reign is by the power of Divine grace. III. THEIR POSITIVE AND INFALLIBLE SECURITY (ver. 8). Represented by a flock of sheep, denotive of feebleness, and liability to danger. But Christ is their tower of defence. A high and lofty tower, and a strong and safe tower. "The stronghold of the daughter of Zion." By the word daughter is meant the Church. This stronghold denotes that we have enemies. It is a hiding-place for the Lord's prisoners. "Unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion." An eternally decreed dominion, over sin, Satan, the world, death. "The kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem." The kingdom of God's power; grace; glory. Improvement—1. This subject teaches us man's total depravity and utter helplessness. 2. It also further proves that our salvation is entirely of grace. 3. It evinces the final security of all true believers. (*T. B. Baker.*) *The moral monarchy of Christ in the world*:—Whether the subject of these verses is the restoration of the Jews after the Babylonish Captivity or the gathering of men by Christ into a grand spiritual community, is a question on which there has been considerable discussion among biblical scholars, and, therefrom, should preclude anything like dogmatism on either side. I. IT EMBRACES AMONGST ITS SUBJECTS THE MOST WRETCHED

AND SCATTERED OF MEN. "In that day, saith the Lord, will I assemble [gather] her that halteth [that which limpeth], and I will gather her that is driven out [that which was thrust out], and her that [which] I have afflicted; and I will make her that [that which] halted [limps] a remnant, and her that [that which] was cast off a strong nation: and the Lord shall reign over them in Mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever." Christ was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. x. 6), and His invitation was to all that are "weary" and "heavy laden." The Church of Christ from the beginning has comprised those who were the most afflicted, the most scattered, and the most distressed of mankind. 1. Christ's moral monarchy knows nothing of favouritism. Every soul to Him is a matter of profound practical interest. 2. Christ's moral monarchy is remedial in its design. It brings all the miserable together in order to rid them of their sorrows. II. IT ESTABLISHES ITSELF AS THE GUARDIAN OF MEN FOR EVER. "And thou, O tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion," &c. The watch-tower spoken of by Isaiah is most likely the tower here referred to by Micah. Flock-tower is a good expression, inasmuch as it indicates the watchfulness of Christ as a moral Shepherd, the great Shepherd of souls. What a Guardian, what a "Bishop of souls" is Christ! 1. He knows all His sheep. 2. He has ample provision for all His sheep. 3. He has power to protect all His sheep. Thank God this moral kingdom is established on our earth. Because it is moral, men have the power of resisting it. (*Homilist.*) *Prophecies relative to the Jewish nation*:—The Jewish nation, when restored, will be the most glorious of the nations of the earth. There is, in this passage, a comparison instituted between the glory of other nations; and it is stated that her glory shall be superior to that of all others. I. REASONS DRAWN FROM THE NATURE OF NATIONAL GLORY. The glory of the Jewish nation cannot be what is generally considered as the glory of nations. 1. Because the glory of common nations is inseparable from unrighteousness. Self is the moving power of the machine, interest and vanity form its mainspring. 2. Because it leads to war and bloodshed, to wretchedness and misery. 3. Because it may consist with infidelity. II. REASONS DRAWN FROM WHAT IS REVEALED RESPECTING THE JEWS. 1. Because the Jews, when brought back to their own land, will be a righteous nation. 2. It will be a peaceful, happy nation. 3. A nation of faithful worshippers of the one only living and true God. What then will be her glory? It will consist in righteousness, penitence, godliness, purity, and devotion. Lessons—1. A political lesson. The duty of the Christian is submission to the powers that be, patiently waiting for the time when righteousness alone shall prevail. 2. A religious lesson. How should this subject enhance the importance of being snatched out of the vortex of this present state, and of becoming so established as to be able to sing, by anticipation, the songs of joy which are here set to be sung by the ransomed of the Lord in Zion. (*Hugh M'Neile.*)

Vers. 9-13. The Lord shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies.—*The moral regeneration of the world*:—I. THE STATE OF MANKIND REQUIRES IT. "Is there no king in thee? is thy counsellor perished?" It was more serious for the Jewish people to be deprived of a king than for any other people, for their king was theocratic, he was supposed to be the voice and vicegerent of God. The prophet means to say, that when the Chaldeans would come and carry them away, they would have no king and no counsellors. Now, men in an unregenerate state—1. Have no king. A political ruler is to man, as a spiritual existent, only a king in name. He does not command the moral affections, rule the conscience, or legislate for the inner and primal springs of all activity. Such a king is the deep want of man, he wants some one to be enthroned on his heart, to whom his conscience can render homage. No man in an unregenerate state has such a king; he has gods many and lords many, of a sort, but none to rule him, and to bring all the powers of his soul into one harmonious channel of obedience. 2. Have no counsellor. Society abounds with counsellors who proffer their advice; but some of them are wicked, most of them worthless, few, if any, satisfactory, that is, to conscience. What the soul wants, is not the mere book counsellor,—though it be the Bible itself,—but the spirit of that book, the spirit of reverence, love, Christlike trust. 3. Have no ease. "Pangs have taken thee as a woman in travail." The unregenerate soul is always liable to consternation, remorse, it often writhes in agony. "There is no peace, saith my God, for the

wicked." Now, moral regeneration brings the man a true King, a true Counsellor, a true Peace—a peace "that passeth all understanding." II. IT IS OPPOSED BY FORMIDABLE ANTAGONISTS. The nations referred to are those that composed the army of Nebuchadnezzar. What formidable opponents there are to the conversion of man! 1. The depraved elements of the soul. Unbelief, selfishness, carnality, &c. 2. The corrupt influence of society. Custom, fashion, amusements, pleasures! III. IT IS GUARANTEED BY THE WORD OF ALMIGHTY GOD. The enemies of the Jews were utterly ignorant of God's purpose to deliver His people from Babylonish Captivity. 1. Man in ignorance fights against God's purpose. 2. Man, in fighting against God's purpose, brings ruin on himself. The nations thought to ruin Christianity in its infancy, but it was victorious over them! (*Homilist.*)

## CHAPTER V.

VER. 1. Now gather thyself in troops, O daughter of troops.—*The Church of God*.—I. AS MILITANT IN ITS CHARACTER. Jerusalem is addressed as "daughter of troops." As Jerusalem was a military city containing a great body of soldiers within her walls, so is the Church on earth, it is military. The life of all true men here is that of a battle; all are soldiers, bound to be valiant for the truth. They are commanded to fight the good fight, to war the good warfare. The warfare is spiritual, righteous, indispensable, personal. No one can fight the battle by proxy. Look at the Church—II. AS PERILOUS IN ITS POSITION. "He hath laid siege against us." The dangerous condition of Jerusalem when the Chaldean army surrounded its walls in order to force an entrance, is only a faint shadow of the perilous position of the Church of God. It is besieged by mighty hosts of errors and evil passions, and mighty lusts that "war against the soul." The siege is planned with strategic skill, and with malignant determination. III. AS INSULTED BY ITS ENEMIES. "They shall smite the Judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek." Were the enemies of Christianity ever more insolent than in this age? IV. AS SUMMONED TO ACTION. "Now gather thyself in troops." The men of Jerusalem are here commanded by heaven to marshal their troops and to prepare for battle, since the enemies are outside their walls. Far more urgent is the duty of the Church to collect, arrange, and concentrate all its forces against the mighty hosts that encompass it. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 2. But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah.—*Bethlehem and its Babe*.—The Jews regarded this text as a prophecy of Messiah's birthplace. Micah, though a prophet of Divine wrath, is also a prophet of Divine promise. Next to Isaiah, he is richest in Messianic prediction. I. CONCERNING BETHLEHEM. Micah is noted for his "rapid transitions" from one topic to another—from threats to promises. The prophet addresses the village by both its names, Bethlehem Ephratah. The patriarchal name Ephratah means "fruitfulness." It was one of the most fertile parts of Palestine, and its natural fruitfulness was a prophecy of its spiritual fruitfulness. Bethlehem means the "house of bread," and points to its specific form of fertility, its rich corn-land. The prophet marks with wonder its insignificance. It was too remote ever to become a place of importance. II. CONCERNING CHRIST. We cannot select our birthplace and circumstances, but Christ could. The Saviour came to teach humility, and to reverse the maxims of the world. Bethlehem was the "city of David," and Christ was to be of the seed of David. We have also the description of Christ's office. "Ruler in Israel." He came to found a kingdom. The description of Christ's person, the eternity of God the Son, is also contained in the text. III. LESSONS. 1. We are taught the grace of lowliness. 2. The name "house of bread" reminds us of the great Sacrament. 3. The prophetic description helps us to realise the two natures in one Divine Person. 4. Obedience to our King is the way to reach up to the higher mystery of His timeless generation (John vii. 17). (*The Thinker.*) *The littleness of Bethlehem, and the greatness of Christ*.—Bethlehem cannot account for Jesus. Do manglers bring forth Messiahs? Things bring forth after their

kind. It is true that genius often arises from lowliest station, and the great human powers seem to make way for themselves through narrowest surroundings. 1. Consider the meaning of this fact, that from the lowliest of peasants sprang the soul that has swayed the mightiest intellects of the world. The moving powers of the eighteen centuries have been themselves moved by Jesus Christ. 2. That out of the most materialistic of religions came the most spiritual of teachers. Judaism clung with almost ferocious tenacity to external signs and symbols. 3. That out of the narrowest of races came the most universal of teachers. The characteristic of Judaism, ancient and modern, is its refusal to recognise the universal element in religion or in humanity. 4. That out of an age which exalted power as supreme, came One who exalted love as supreme in God and in man. The symbol of Rome was the rapacious, unwearied eagle. Military virtues were supreme. The Jews wanted a conquering general as Messiah. Out of such environment and atmosphere came One who exalted the feminine virtues, and proclaimed that the meek should inherit the earth. And as Bethlehem could not produce Christ, it could not confine Christ. (*W. H. P. Faunce.*) *Prophecy of the Nativity*:—One great use of prophecy is to give authority and weight to the doctrines delivered by the prophet. In order that the evidence arising from prophecy may be perfectly convincing, it seems necessary that the meaning of the prediction should be somewhat obscure at first; otherwise the friends and followers of the prophet might perhaps find means to bring about a fulfilment of it; or his opposers might, in some cases, prevent its accomplishment. It must, however, be sufficiently precise to verify the event when it comes to pass. However obscure and mysterious, a prophet's words could not fail to be striking and interesting. The text provides an excellent specimen of prophetic methods. Suppose you had never heard of any event which could be regarded as a fulfilment of Micah's prediction, in what light would it appear to you? However perplexing, there is one thing you would understand. A town is distinctly referred to. There the Person foretold by Micah was born seven hundred years later. I. THE HUMAN BIRTH OF JESUS. It is a human birth that is foretold. The place where David was born was to be the birthplace of a second David, the Saviour of the world. Observe how singularly the prediction was fulfilled, without the least suspicion of human contrivance, merely by God's secret overruling providence. II. THE ETERNAL GODHEAD OF CHRIST. "Whose goings forth have been from everlasting." To those who first heard this language, how strange it would appear! Something more than human is here described. Words like these are never applied to any creature; but to God the Creator they are frequently applied. The language of Micah gives the twofold character of the Messiah. III. HIS MEDIATORIAL DIGNITY. He is—1. Our Ruler. 2. Our Restorer. 3. Our Shepherd. His administration of all these offices shall one day be universal. (*J. Jowett.*) *Christ*:—I. HIS BIRTH AS THE SON OF MAN. 1. He was born in obscurity. As a protest to the ages against the popular and influential opinion that human dignity consists in birth and ancestral distinctions. 2. He was born according to Divine plan. "Out of thee shall He come forth unto Me." Who? Jehovah. The fact of His birth, the scene of His birth, the object of His birth, were all according to a Divine plan. "He shall come forth unto Me." (1) According to My will. (2) To do My will. 3. He was born to an empire. "To be Ruler in Israel." He is the Prince of Peace on whose shoulder the government is laid. He is a Ruler. Not a temporal ruler, temporal rule is but a shadow. He is to rule thought, intelligence, soul. He is the greatest king who governs mind; and no one has obtained such a government over mind as He who, eighteen centuries ago, "came forth out of Bethlehem Ephratah." His kingdom is increasing every day. II. HIS HISTORY AS THE SON OF GOD. "Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting," or, as Delitzsch says, "Whose goings forth are from olden time, from the days of eternity." (*Homilist.*) *Of the Nativity*:—There is no applying this verse to any but to Christ. I. THE PLACE OF HIS BIRTH. Bethlehem; spoken of as "little," and Ephrata "fruitful." There were two Bethlehems. One in the tribe of Zebulun. It was a sorry poor village. II. THE PERSON THAT COMETH FROM THIS PLACE. III. OF BOTH HIS NATURES. As Man from Bethlehem; as God from everlasting. IV. HIS OFFICE. Go before us, and be our Guide. He not only leads, He feeds. (*Launcelot Andrewes, D.D.*) *The King of Zion*:—I. THE PROMISED MESSIAH IN HIS TRUE NATURE. A Man. Come out of Bethlehem. He was born there.

More than man. The prophet speaks of a twofold going forth, of Bethlehem, and "from everlasting." True God as well as true Man. II. JESUS IN HIS CHARACTER AS RULER. What are regal acts? The exercise of legislative and judicial authority. The legislative consists in making and repealing laws. The judicial in executing or applying laws. III. JESUS IN HIS CHARACTER AS SHEPHERD. Who are His sheep? First the Jews, then the Gentiles. As a shepherd His care is constant—He changes not. It is tender and discriminating care. It is effectual. He gives us life. (*J. Summerfield, A.M.*) *Christ's birthplace*:—This passage has always been regarded as one of the clearest and most striking of the ancient prophecies of the Messiah. The gradations in the revelations of Christ have always awakened the attention of Bible readers. First, we have the old word in Eden from the lips of the Lord God to the serpent about his seed and the seed of Eve: "It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Out of which dim Messianic germ grows the whole wonderful mediatorial history, its conflicts, its alterations, its reversals, and its eternal triumph in the endless overthrow of its great adversary. Then, about 1600 years later, the Semitic division of the human race is indicated as the favoured one, rather than Japhet or Ham. By and by Abraham was selected from the sons of Shem to be the head of the Hebrew race, from whom the Redeemer should come. Two hundred years later Jacob, on his dying bed, points out the particular tribe of Israel from whom the Shiloh or Prince of Peace shall be born. No further revelation was then made for about seven hundred years, when the house of David, of the tribe of Judah, was declared to be the favoured family, and about three hundred years after that, in the days of Hezekiah, the prophet Micah reveals the place where Messiah shall be born. This was all that was known for the next seven hundred years, but every intelligent Jew knew that the coming Messiah was to be the Son of David, and was to be born in Bethlehem of Judah. "Thou Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah." So unimportant was Bethlehem in the old times, that Joshua in his enumeration of the cities and villages of Judah gives it no mention: Rehoboam made it a sort of outlying fortress to Jerusalem, and the Philistines at one time had a garrison there, the place being a strong natural position. But it never grew to size, or became of any national importance, except for its associations. Although the birthplace of David, the great king, yet it never rose above the grade of an obscure Jewish village. In the list of Judean villages which Nehemiah gives after the Captivity it is not named, and in the New Testament, after the birth of Jesus and in that connection, its name never once occurs. So little was Bethlehem Ephrathah. And it did not seem destined to any more commanding place in history when, in later times, a plain-looking couple drew near the village, a young wife and her husband, travelling on foot, because very poor, although both of the lineage of David. For not only was Bethlehem little, but the exceeding low condition to which the family of the great king had sunk appears from the fact that Joseph and Mary, who could trace their pedigree up to David through a long line of kings, were thus poor, and received no sort of recognition in the crowded village. But Bethlehem Ephrathah was now to be immortalised indeed. Athens, Ephesus, Alexandria, Rome, all were extant, some of them at the very pinnacle of their glory, but the glory of Bethlehem was henceforth to surpass them all. You will mark here the words "*unto Me.*" The birth of Christ was an event whose relations were chiefly Godward. Christ's coming to the earth is inconceivably the greatest of all events to us; but, after all, God the Father, and the eternal glory of the Godhead, are concerned in it in a way we cannot now fully understand, but of which the Scriptures give us distinct intimations. It would be quite in accordance with the choice of little Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Divine Lord, and the passing by of the great places of the world, if God should have chosen our small earth, this little globe, to be the scene of the wondrous Incarnation, passing by those far mightier worlds in space whose magnitude dwarfs into insignificance this minute planet; here, in a world whose absence would hardly be missed from the vast system, to enact scenes of unparalleled importance to all worlds, illustrating all the principles of the Divine government and the most precious attributes of the Divine Nature. The word "Ruler" is suggestive. The usual Old Testament idea of Christ is that of the head of a kingdom or dynasty. The representations of Isaiah, chapter liii., and of the prophet Zechariah, are exceptions to the general Old Testament thought of the Messiah. Elsewhere it is the Shiloh or Prince, the King in Zion, the son of David enthroned—He upon

whose shoulders has been laid the government, who is to reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and to whose kingdom there is to be no end. The connection of these last words with the former words of the prophecy are wonderfully instructive: "He shall come forth out of thee, little Bethlehem," and the words, "He whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Have they not great suggestions of the nature of the coming Messiah? Does the Old Testament know nothing of the mystery and the miracle of the Saviour's birth, of the human and the divine, of the advent in time and the glory with the Father before the world was? The phrase "goings forth" is used sometimes of the sun, of whose progress in the sky it is said, "his going forth is from the end of heaven." "Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice." It is used to denote that which proceeds out from any one, as speech or language. Deuteronomy viii. 3, "By every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God doth man live." Thus it comes to have the meaning of origin, descent, an outgoing of existence, which is its import in our text. The old divines declare it to be a proof text of the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Second Person of the Trinity. Without feeling called on to adopt that phrase, yet I fully agree with one of them who says, "We have here Christ's existence from eternity; the phrase, 'His goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting,' is so signal a description of Christ's eternal generation, or His going forth as the Son of God begotten of the Father before all worlds, that this prophecy must belong only to Him, and could never be verified of any other." We embrace the mysterious truth of Christ's humanity and divinity as herein declared; one of the clearest prophecies of this sublime foundation doctrine of the Scriptures which they anywhere contain. With what greatness does this invest the birth of the Babe of Bethlehem! If He had indeed come to little Bethlehem, whose goings forth were from everlasting, then all the miracles He performed were the simplest outstretching of His hand; the obedience to Him of demons, of nature, of death, were mere matters of course; the attendant angels, the awaiting legions ready at His call, were but the renewed services of cherubim and seraphim who had of old listened to His commands standing round His heavenly throne. There is not time even to glance at the triumphs which this birth in Bethlehem has already won. How it has given the era to all human history, guided the life of nations, subjected the intellects of the greatest of men, moulded the sentiments of civilised society, yea, made true society a possibility; rescued women and the family from degradation, uplifted the poor, guarded the rights of the weak; won the deep, unquenchable love of millions upon millions of true human hearts; stood by the martyr's rack, walked with him in the furnace; put the arms of support beneath dying pillows, and uplifted to the eternal hills the successive generations of the believing children of God. All these things have been done through that birth in Bethlehem Ephrathah. There can be no greater things in kind, but there are yet to be greater in the extent of the victory. (*R. Aikman, D.D.*) *Advent*:—The thought of the prophet is, that God is about to restore the monarchy in Israel by a return to its original starting-point, the ancestral house and home of David, and to restore it in surpassing greatness and power. As in the days of Saul's apostasy and the kingdom's peril, He had taken from thence a man to sit upon the throne, so again when wickedness with its long train of miseries had brought the nation low, a Deliverer was to come forth from the place that had given David to Israel. The prophet had asked (chap. iv. 9) as he beheld the desolation of his country, "Is there no king in thee?" And here the answer is given. Isaiah and Micah were contemporaries. The former was the prophet of the city, the latter of the country. The power and wealth of the kingdoms had become centralised in the two cities, Samaria and Jerusalem. The condition of the country was like France in the years before the Revolution, when Paris was France, and the provinces were despised and oppressed; pillaged to feed the luxuries and vices of the metropolis. It was joy to the rural prophet to know that God would pass by the pomp and pride of the city, and bring forth the king from a place that was "little among the thousands of Judah." A parallel is plainly instituted between what God had once done in Israel's history and what He is about to do. Bethlehem, that had already furnished one king, the typical king, should furnish yet another. The scene of Christ's advent, its significance concerning Himself. 1. It declared His advent to be the advent of a King. Bethlehem was identified in every mind with the throne of Israel, with the royal house of David. Insignificant in itself, it was famous through its association with Israel's great king. The kingly idea

was enshrined in Bethlehem. It is a prediction of His royalty. 2. It declared His advent to be not according to human ideas and expectations. It was a surprise to Samuel when he was sent to Bethlehem to anoint the son of Jesse, and his surprise deepened as the stalwart elder brethren were rejected. The wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, naturally expecting to find the new king in the great city. But they found him not at Jerusalem, but at Bethlehem. He is to be a King after God's mind, and not according to human thought. His royalty is to be the royalty of His own nature, and not of earthly circumstance and rank. 3. It declared the character of His kingly rule. "He chose David also His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds. He brought him to feed Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance." It intimated that his shepherd life was the preparation and the pattern of his kingly life, that as a shepherd with his flock so was the king over his people; ruling them for their good, defending them from their enemies, risking his life for them, carrying into the affairs of his kingdom the spirit of a shepherd with his sheep. In like manner when we hear that another King is to rise from Bethlehem we conclude that His rule will be of the same kind. He too will be a Shepherd King, ruling not by force but by gentleness, seeking not His own gain but the good of His people, caring for the weak, recovering the lost. 4. It declared that His advent was demanded by the condition of others, by the need, the misery of those to whom He came. Men have sought sovereignty at the bidding of their own ambition. The Bethlehem King was called to it by God Himself, called to it by the national crisis, by the misery of the people, the degradation of the land. The prophet sees everywhere anarchy and confusion, oppression and wrong, weakness and suffering. The advent of Christ is the advent of a King whose presence is demanded by the need and misery of men. He does not come to set up a kingdom for Himself, that is, for personal ends. He comes into the world because the world cannot do without Him. 5. The unprecedented greatness of the future King, "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Coming into the world centuries after David had fallen on sleep, He is yet before David. He is David's Lord as well as David's Son. His advent is the manifestation of One whose nature knows neither youth nor age, whose sovereignty has no beginning and no end. "From of old, from everlasting." The scene of His advent teaches chiefly the greatness of His condescension and humiliation. He "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting," links Himself with time, enters into human history, associates Himself with earthly places. (W. Perkins.)

**Ver. 4. He shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord.—The Mighty Shepherd.**—I. HIS ACTIVITY AND ZEAL. "He shall stand." We read of idle shepherds, who lie down and sleep and neglect their flock. This attitude of standing shows—1. Dignity. He is the Royal Shepherd. 2. Observation. He who stands can survey all around. 3. Attention. He does not withdraw His eyes. He that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. II. HIS REGARD. "He shall feed." The term feed is not confined to providing food. It applies to all the duties of a shepherd. And this office consists of unwearied care, such as—1. Causing them to rest. The weary child of God must pause, and the wise Shepherd selects the time and place. 2. Leading them. The Eastern shepherd treads the ground before his flock. 3. Restoring the wanderers. There are always the erring and wandering—headstrong, foolish, daring. 4. Healing the wounded. 5. Defending the weak and securing the flock. III. HIS ABILITY. "In the strength of the Lord." This does not mean "borrowed" strength; the strength of the Lord is His own. And power is needed. Who can realise the danger and difficulties of the Church on earth, or the trials of a struggling soul? IV. HIS DIGNITY. "In the majesty of His God." Majesty combined with strength. How majestic was Christ, even in His humiliation! Majesty combined with simplicity; majesty and gentleness. But Christ is terrible in majesty, terrible to His foes. Who shall abide His day? Yea, He is terrible to the foes of His flock. (Homilist.) *The Shepherd and His mission*:—"The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Many other things were predicted in the Scriptures; but incidentally, relatively, subordinated; this testimony was the fixed subject and steady aim of the whole. All the prophets testified of Jesus, though not all in the same way or in the same degree. They did not always understand their own predictions. From this prediction consider—1. HIS IMPLIED CHARACTER. It is that of a shepherd. The character of a shepherd

now is far less respectable than it was in early ages, and especially in the East. The character of a good shepherd has been applied to a good ruler. Christ is called the Good Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd, the Great Shepherd, and God's Shepherd. And we are told that both His kindness and His love are unexampled.

**II. ONSERVE HIS WORK.** "Stand and feed." The pastures in which He feeds His people are His Word and ordinances. We are not to restrain the work of this Divine Shepherd to feeding only. He affords repose; for His flock need rest as well as provision. A shepherd also guides them. Christ guides His people by His Word, by His Spirit, and by His providence. By His Word He shows them the way in which they should go. By His Spirit He gives them the inclination, and works in them to walk in the way of His pleasure. By His providence He arranges all, and fixes all their circumstances in life for the advancement of His own glory and their real welfare. As a shepherd He restores; for they sometimes, nay often, go astray. As a shepherd He heals their sicknesses. He renders all His ordinances and all His dispensations salutary. As a shepherd He defends them all, else they would be destroyed.

**III. HOW HE IS TO PERFORM HIS WORK.** 1. He will do this attentively. "Stand and feed." 2. Powerfully. "In the strength of the Lord." 3. Nobly or gracefully. "In the majesty of the name of the Lord His God." Power is not always dignity; authority, when it is not softened by condescension, has in it something harsh and repelling. Some who feel their strength, think of nothing else. Christ is mild and gentle. He exerted His power mildly, kindly, if you will, majestically.

**IV. THE SAFETY OF THE FLOCK.** "And they shall abide." To abide is to continue, to endure, to be able to withstand any foe, and to go forth against it. There is, however, a difference between the fact and the comfort of it. The believer is often filled with fear, and is ready to suppose that God is going to destroy us. At other times Christians are able to realise this fact by faith.

**V. THE EXTENSION OF HIS OWN RENOWN.** "Now shall He be great unto the ends of the earth." In order to this He must be known, and to make Himself known is all that is necessary to this. The more He is known, the more will He be loved and adored. And does He not deserve to be known? The Christians' grief is that Christ is so little known and adored. There are, however, two things to console them. 1. That it is not so in the other world. 2. They know that it will not be so always, nor long, even in this world. They know that He shall have "the heathen for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession." (*William Jay.*)

**Ver. 5. And this Man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land.—Peace in Christ amid invading foes :—**This is an announcement of the mission of our Saviour. He is to be peace. Two facts in the text. 1. A special danger is apprehended. 2. A provision is made to meet the danger.

**I. THE CRISIS OF DANGER.** Two great nations invaded the Holy Land, the Assyrian and the Babylonian. These differed. The former was heathen, the latter idolatrous. The one sought to destroy all worship; the other to establish the worship of its own gods. These two nations represent the different forces that battle against Christianity to the present time. In the philosophy of the infidel we see the one; in the superstition of Rome we see the other.

**II. THE PROVISION TO MEET THE DANGER.** This Man, Christ, is our peace. Christ meets the infidel successfully at every turn. Human unbelief directs its whole power to break down the truth of God in Christ, and to destroy the hope of man. Sometimes by outward, open, organised attack, at other times by private, insidious attacks on the heart of man. In the midst of all this hostility the advent of our Saviour is our peace.

**III. SOME OF THE WEAPONS OF THIS ASSYRIAN ENEMY.** 1. It contested the authenticity of the Scriptures. This was the method of attack, from Porphyry and Celsus down to Hume and Gibbon. This mode of attack is ended. 2. The impossibility, the absurdity of the incarnation of Christ is urged. The Assyrian rejects the personality of God, the immortality of man. He seeks the enthronement of matter. 3. There is a private, a personal hostility. Many a man retains his peace amid all the outward conflict, but when assailed by doubt and fear the citadel of the soul is carried. But this Man—this Saviour—is the strength of the soul for ever. (*Stephen H. Tyng, D.D.*)

*Christ our peace :—* The term "Assyrian" may be regarded as symbolically used, the great enemy of the Jews being made to represent generally the enemies of man, or particularly of the Church. One of the titles under which Isaiah announces the Child that

should be born is "Prince of Peace." The chorus of the angels mentions "peace." The angels associated the incarnation of the Saviour with the re-establishment of peace on the disquieted earth. In the apostolic writings peace is equally associated with Christ, and especially attributed to His death. Except through Him there could be no reconciliation of the human race to God. Christ Jesus, by His obedience and death, removed every obstacle to the free forgiveness of sinners, and thus in the largest sense reconciled the world unto God. There are other reasons why Christ may be affirmed to have accomplished our text. It is the tendency and property of the Christian religion to heal all differences between man and man, and to produce and preserve universal harmony. In the very degree in which the religion of Christ now gains a hold on individuals or families, it vindicates its character as a religion of peace. It cannot establish its dominion in the heart without producing a disposition towards goodwill to all men. Christianity, going straightway to the inner man, throws the salt, as it were, into the very fountains of the waters of strife, and by healing the springs, sweetens all their after-flowings. Who shall order the jarring elements of the world into harmony? Make true Christians of all men, and then, such will be the principles which are universally acted on, such the motives which will be universally at work, such the ends which will be universally proposed, that divisions must disappear, because every one will seek the good of others in seeking his own. In an individual and personal sense, too, Christ is our peace. (*Henry Melvill, B.D.*) *The peace from God*.—In some crystals that coat, as with shining frost work, the sides of a vessel, we have all the salts that give perpetual freshness to the ocean, their life to the weeds that clothe its rocks, and their energy to the fish that swim its depths and hollows. In some drops of oil distilled from rose leaves of Indian lands, and valued at many times their weight in gold, we have enclosed within one small phial the perfume of a whole field of roses, that which, diffused through ten thousand leaves, gave every flower its fragrance. Like these our text contains the essence of the Gospel; peace to a world at enmity against God; peace to a race of sinners at variance with God; peace and joy in believing. **PEACE. I. WHO IS HERE SPOKEN OF?** The Man; the Christ. He stands alone as the Man. This is His distinguishing feature. Micah has just uttered a prediction fixing the birthplace of the promised Messiah. He is called "the Man," because He is—1. The Divine Man. God manifest in the flesh. He is in the Father, and the Father is in Him. 2. As the sinless Man. "He knew no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth." A Lamb for sacrifice, "without blemish and without spot." **II. WHAT IS HE TO BE TO US?** Christ our peace. In Him God provides for the destruction of all causes of enmity and disorder. This work of destruction was to be the foundation for peace between God and man. For peace between God and man as a sinner, and as a saint. Peace He brings for the sinner. The true peace is in Christ, through His precious bloodshedding, and by His atoning death. Peace He brings for the believer. It is built upon His own promise and Word, and is compatible with the most calm and considerate view of all truth. God's peace is with one's self, with our conscience, with God, in fact, through the blood of Jesus. It is that we want. **III. HOW IS HE TO BE PEACE TO US?** 1. He satisfied Jehovah. By bearing our sins in His own body on the tree; by making peace through the blood of His Cross; by dying the just for the unjust to bring us to God; by making reconciliation for iniquity, and bringing in everlasting righteousness. 2. He overcame the enmity of the human heart. This peace is purchased for us by His Divinely efficacious bloodshedding, but it is bestowed upon us by the mysterious communication of His Spirit. The source of true peace is faith, realising and resting on the faithful and unchanging promises of God. **IV. WHEN MAY CHRIST BE SAID TO BE OUR PEACE?** "When the Assyrian cometh into our land." The allusion is to the invasion of Judæa by Sennacherib, in the reign of Hezekiah. Some think that Hezekiah is the man here referred to. But note that *this* Man was born at Bethlehem; and He was a Man whose goings forth have been of old from everlasting. This must be the Son of God. It is in the very presence of the Assyrian that the child of God has peace. We do not say that the consequences of our sins are taken away. And yet there is peace; Christ works it by destroying the painful sense of the corruption of the spirit's purity, and the deadly evil poisoning of all the springs of being. He is our peace, able and willing to hush every storm, and fill us with all peace and joy. Apply both to our corruption and to our affliction. Then, if there is no true peace in time

or eternity but what comes from God in Christ, then let the believer live near to God. Let him, through the aids of the Holy Spirit, maintain a conscience void of offence towards God and man. (*William Adamson.*) *An invasion*.—I. A TERRIBLE INVASION. The Assyrian, who may be regarded as the representative of all the enemies of Israel, enters the Holy Land, takes Jerusalem, and treads the "palaces" of the chosen people. A faint picture is the Assyrian of the hellish invader of human souls. He breaks his way through all bulwarks, enters the sacred territory, and treads even in the palaces of the intellect and heart. II. A TRIUMPHANT DEFENDER. There are "seven shepherds and eight principal men" who now hurled back the Assyrian invader, entered his own territory, and carried war into the midst. Who is the deliverer? "This Man shall be the peace." 1. He did it successfully. "Thus shall He deliver us from the Assyrian." Christ will one day ruin this moral Assyrian, as "lightning falleth from heaven he shall fall." He will hurl him from the habitation of men. 2. Christ, in doing this, uses human instrumentality. "Seven shepherds and eight principal men." Christ destroys the works of the devil by the instrumentality of men. (1) The instrumentality that He employs may seem to us very feeble. "Seven shepherds and eight principal men," against unnumbered hosts of enemies. "He chooseth the foolish things of the world to confound the wise," &c. (2) Though the instrumentality may seem feeble, it was sufficient. The work was done. "Not by might and not by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord." (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 7. And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord.—*Christian influence*.—This text may suggest the beneficial influence which God's people are intended and calculated to exert upon surrounding society, wherever their lot may be cast, and whatever may be the circumstances in which they are placed. God has never failed to preserve for Himself a people in the world. The principles of spiritual religion, embodied in living character, and manifested in suitable conduct, have had the effect of spreading an illumination which has operated beneficially upon the spiritual interests of mankind, and led many an ignorant wanderer to salvation and heaven. It is hardly possible to estimate too highly the beneficial influence of Christian character, when consistently and properly exemplified. It operates in a manner most beautiful and efficient. This character is composed of such elements that it cannot be successfully imitated. It is what no worldly system or agency is capable of producing. The influence which belongs legitimately to the character of God's people does not depend for its successful exertion upon associated numbers, or outward circumstances of wealth, respectability, and prosperity. More importance has been attached to these things than properly belongs to them. The potency of religious influence depends not upon mere accumulated numbers, but upon character. It will prove a fatal mistake, wherever the outward accessories of religion are allowed to supplant its spiritualities. The machinery of Christianity cannot be successfully worked, except by the hands of those who are under its sanctifying influence. This Christian influence is not something natural to a certain class of individuals, distinguished from the rest of their species by mysterious endowments. And the influence of Christian character must not be understood as superseding and disparaging the influence of those other agencies by which Christianity is to be spread and propagated in the world. We need not disparage the Christian ministry; or the doctrines of Christianity. The truth and grace in the Gospel are destined to issue in the formation of a holy character, and to display themselves in corresponding practical results. It is in vain to pretend to the possession of Christian character, where those appropriate practical results are not witnessed. On the exemplification of religion in its excellence and beauty, the usefulness of professing Christians very materially and essentially depends. Worldly observers will justly come to the conclusion that the religion is worthless, the offspring of hypocritical ostentation, of infatuated superstition, which does not ameliorate and elevate the character. These are just expectations, and ought to be realised. How great then ought to be the circumspection of those who bear the Christian name, that they may not dishonour it by any unbecoming conduct. It is a matter of great importance, that religious character should develop itself, free from all those blemishes which would have the effect of tarnishing its Divine lustre and impairing its reputation. Those who would

exemplify the legitimate influence of Christian character in its fullest efficiency, must live in close fellowship with the Divine throne. Nothing else can render us beneficially influential. The influence of genuine Christian character is always mild, and beneficent, and diffusive. Individual Christians should reflect much upon their responsibility. (*William Hurt.*) *The paucity, position, and power of the true:*—The truth in this verse may be said to have met with its partial fulfilment in the unique and marvellous experience of the Jews; for—(1) They are but a “remnant” of the human family, being but a fragment, a fraction of the whole human race. (2) They dwell in “remnants,” in detached, broken, and fragmentary portions, “here a little and there a little.” (3) They dwell “in the midst of many people,” so that there is hardly a single nation or people in which there is not at present some small remnant of the Abrahamic seed. (4) They exist, and are preserved as a witness on the behalf of heaven and its truth. (5) All this has been continued irrespective of, and, in many cases, in opposition to the most earnest human effort, “tarrying not for man,” &c. I. *THE PAUCITY OF THE TRUE.* God has ever had a people peculiarly His own; and who will dare dispute His right to have a more special regard to some, than He may have to others? Calvinian or Arminian, we all agree that “the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for Himself”; the true from among the false, and the pure from amongst the vile. From the dawn of human history these have been but a “remnant” of the human family. Look at the flood, and at Egypt. Thus the holy and the true are but a “remnant” in nations, in towns, and in families. II. *THE POSITION OF THE TRUE.* “In the midst,” &c. It might be more in harmony with our own natural tastes and preferences to be a separate people in one land swarming together, without any of the false about us, but such is not God’s arrangement. Shiploads of Christians may leave our shores for some Canterbury or other settlement, where they may hope to live and not see the face of an unbeliever, but sadly do such men err in expecting this. Should the whole Church but settle down in one land, it would be a most grievous curse and woe to the world. We are to settle down only in heaven. The distribution of the Church “in the midst,” &c., is necessary in order to promote the Divine purpose; for it exists not for itself alone, but as leaven in meal, as salt, as Divine seed, here a grain and there a grain. Learn this, that God hath placed you “in the midst” of your enemies, by contact to bless them, for each has his sphere. III. *THE PURPOSE OF THE TRUE.* The design of their dispersion has a vital relation to the people amongst whom they are placed, as the dew and showers to the grass. As the showers are of heavenly origin, so is Israel “born from above.” As the dew is a pure and crystal liquid, so the true Israel is composed of the choicest natures and sweetest spirits in the world. Dew is silently produced, and so the mightiest work may be accomplished in the human soul, “without observation.” As the dew and showers are entirely independent of the human, so the Church, like the truth, lives not upon human sufferance. This purpose will be fulfilled. Many weak and unbelieving minds have thought that the true, being but a “remnant,” their influence would waste and die, but thank God this cannot be, for the source is unfailing and Divine. (*E. D. Green.*) *God’s people, their tender and terrible aspect in the world:*—Two things are predicted concerning the Jews after their restoration from Babylon. 1. Their influence upon the nations would be as refreshing dew. 2. Their power on the nations would be as terrible as the lion’s on the herds, and on the flocks. It will not, I think, be unfair to use the passage to illustrate the twofold aspect of the people of God in this world—the tender and terrible, the restorative and the destructive. Like Israel of old, godly men in every age have only been a remnant, a very small minority of the generation in which they lived. It will not always be so. I. *THE TENDER aspect of God’s people in the world.* They are spoken of here as “dew.” Silent in its fall, beautiful in its appearance, refreshing in its influence. Three things are suggested concerning this “dew.” 1. It is Divine. It is “from the Lord.” All that is quickening and refreshing in the thoughts, spirits, character of good men on this earth descends from heaven. “Every good and perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights,” &c. 2. It is copious. “As the showers upon the grass.” There have been seasons when those spiritual influences have descended on men with plenitude and power, such as on the day of Pentecost. Would it were so now! 3. It is undeserved of men. “That tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men.” Good men on this earth are to their generation what the gentle dew and the fertilising

shower are to the thirsty earth. Their speech distils as dew, and their influence descends on the souls of men like rain upon the new-mown grass. II. The TERRIBLE aspect of God's people in the world. The same men as are represented under the metaphor of dew are here spoken of as a "lion." Bold, terrible, and destructive. Elijah was a lion in his age, so was John the Baptist, so was Luther, so was Latimer, &c. This subject suggests—1. A picture of the unregenerate world. There are some germs of goodness in its soil that require the fertilising influence of heaven to quicken and develop, and there are some things in it so pernicious and baneful that it requires all the courage, force, and passion of moral lions to destroy. 2. A picture of the completeness of moral character. Not all "dew," nor all "lion," but both combined. (*Homilist.*) *God's purposes of mercy*:—We are imperfect judges of moral power, both as to what really constitutes moral power and as to its extent and influence. We are very prone to transfer the idea of largeness, mass, weight from the physical to the moral world; to place our trust in numbers, in wealth, in outward visible power, and are disposed to despond even of the very best cause when it has not these upon its side. In the management of public affairs men come to have implicit faith in majorities, rather than in truth and in righteousness. We are apt to think the Church strong and prosperous when it is popular with the crowd; when its coffers are filled with wealth; when it is surrounded with the bulwarks and appliances of secular power and favour. There is forgetfulness of that which constitutes the real strength and power of a moral system; which is the goodness of the cause; and the faith, earnestness, and zeal of those who are its advocates and its professors. One man, with God's truth in him, which he thoroughly believes and which he has the courage to speak out, has more real weight in him than a whole community that are ignorant of that truth, or opposed to it. The strength of God's Church lies in the truth of her doctrines, in the purity of her morality, in the piety and zeal of her members. By means of these she is leaven in the mass. Thus she becomes a great blessing to the nation. The higher meaning of our text has reference to the Church as such, to the spiritual Church of God in all times and ages. 1. We need not be surprised to find the Church of God existing as a small remnant. It has, indeed, never yet been otherwise. At no period has the Church ever been in a majority. At times the spiritual body has seemed to be almost lost to the eye of sense. Seen ever at her best estate, she is but a remnant in the midst of many people. 2. The proper place of this remnant is in the midst of the community. God has so placed His Church. Sometimes the Church, or individual members of the Church, would have it otherwise. Secluding themselves in coteries or cloisters. Whilst Christians keep themselves sedulously pure from the contamination of evil example or corrupt conversation, they are not to go out of the world. They are to abide in the calling in which they were when God called them. They are to be friendly, social, courteous, benevolent towards all men. 3. The Church possesses a mighty power for benefiting a community. It is amongst them "as a dew from the Lord, and as showers that water the grass." Dew and rain came to be regarded as special gifts of God. And so they were taken in Scripture as symbols of what is directly and immediately God-produced. They are thus a fitting emblem of the Church, in its position and its working in the world. God has formed the Church as an instrument in His hands for the accomplishment of His immediate purpose of grace and mercy to the world. 4. This working does not depend upon man's will or permission. It is not by our favour that the Church of God is in the midst of the nations as a dew from the Lord, exerting a conservative, vivifying, renovating, ameliorating power upon the world. God has ever been with His own cause. Neither from fear nor favour must the Church wait upon man, nor lean upon an arm of flesh. It is when God is with His Church that she is strong and powerful and good. Learn, then—(1) The importance and the responsibility of the Church's position in the midst of the nations. (2) The condition on which the Church's usefulness depends. It is that it be as a dew from the Lord. He must be in the midst of His Church, and His Church must be prayerfully dependent on Him. (*W. L. Alexander, D.D.*) *The Church in the world*:—I. THE INFLUENCE WHICH THE CHURCH MAY EXERT IN THE WORLD. 1. Their influence is great. Dew and rain rank among the most powerful natural agencies. In the energy of these we have a fit image of the influence of the Church. The resources which the members of the Church may command, and the instrumentality which they can employ, are "mighty through God." This is evident from the purposes they are called

to fulfil; the field upon which they are to operate; the promises and provisions on which they may rely; the responsibility under which they are laid; the influence, limited indeed, but vast, which they have already exerted, and the prophecies which they must yet fulfil. What might not the Church accomplish did she put forth her strength? but at what a low standard have Christians commonly estimated their power. 2. This influence is beneficial. Who can adequately calculate the consequence of being deprived, but for a single season, of the rain and the dew from heaven! It is our peculiar prerogative and privilege to possess a power which can convert the sources of man's present evil into means and channels of permanent good; to render every society and institution and mind under heaven an unmixed blessing. 3. This influence is diffusive. It is delightful to consider it within a narrow circle and on a limited scale—in the family, neighbourhood, Sabbath school. But it is adapted and designed for all the nations and tribes and families of men, and for all the classes and individuals that compose them. This universal adaptation of the influence of the Church arises not merely from the nature of that influence, but also from the diversified gifts and circumstances of those who possess it. These are marked by an almost boundless variety. 4. This influence is Divine. It is not inherent in the Church nor independent of God. If the Church has power, it is endued from on high. She is mighty through God. II. THE POSITION WHICH THE CHURCH SHOULD OCCUPY. "In the midst of many people." Rain and dew are but images of the far more genial influences which the Church is able and destined to diffuse through the world. In what position, and by what process, can we best employ this power? "Teach all nations." How far has our Saviour's design been met? Much has been done; but the labours of the Church are but begun. Much remains to be done at home and abroad. Why is progress so slow? It cannot be traced to deficient power; to inadequate means, to want of opportunity, or to any inability in the Church to furnish the requisite agency. It is due to imperfectness of consecration, and the partial employment of the Church's resources. III. THE INDEPENDENCE WHICH THE CHURCH MAY CLAIM. "That tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men." The principal source of independence is the power and presence of Him from whom she has received her commission. Enjoying this, she need not, she dare not "wait for man." Shall we wait till civilisation and law have smoothed and opened our way? But while the Church must not tarry for man, God waits for His Church. Then listen not to the dictates of the selfish; follow not the course of the indolent; look not to others; let each in his sphere, and according to his ability, arise and be doing, and the Lord will be with thee. (*E. Prout.*) *The world's silent benefactor*:—It must be evident to every thoughtful man that we are all apt to judge unfairly of moral force. We are so much more familiar with the sphere of sense than with the sphere of spirit that we constantly transfer ideas gained from the former into the latter, although its nature is quite different. We judge of matter by its bulk, we judge of machinery by its clever adaptations, and we carry these criteria from the physical into the spiritual sphere. Because we see great effects produced by the movement of mighty bodies, we argue that it must be so everywhere, and that what the world requires is a Niagara-like Church, which will make itself felt by noise and impetus and quantity. Hence we get very depressed if, in connection with a religious society, we see small numbers and hear of diminished funds, while we congratulate ourselves all round if, in regard to these, we hear a good report. This false method of judgment asserts itself in various directions. Many of us trust to majorities, instead of to conscience. We are very respectable to public opinion, and wait cautiously to see which way the wind blows before we commit ourselves to a policy. Power and victory were our Lord's, not because He won the majority over to His way of thinking, not because He devised complex ecclesiastical machinery cleverly adapted to the times, not because He had on His side the weight of money-bags and the prestige of social respectability, but because His followers, though few and unlearned, were inspired by Him with an enthusiasm of faith which proved irresistible. I say, then, that the real strength of a moral system does not lie in its mass; but in its truth and goodness, and in the faith and zeal of its advocates. Even in the physical world there are not wanting examples of quality overmatching quantity. The heaviest sword made of poor material cannot do what even a light rapier would do, in attack and defence, if the rapier be of well-tempered steel. A handful of men, trained and brave, have often held out victoriously

against the impact of a vast horde of undisciplined savages. And this is equally true of a Church. Its fellowship may not be numerous, its members may not be individually influential, but if it be distinguished for piety and prayerfulness, it does more for the cause of Christ than far larger Churches not so rich in them. The influence which the world's wisemen condemn is mighty through God, to the pulling down of strongholds. Now, it is in the light of these truths you can most clearly see the meaning of our text. It compares God's people not to a mighty storm or to a resistless sea, but to the silent dew and the gentle showers, which are mighty, not because of the stir they make, but because of what they themselves are. And this analogy is accordant with all the parables of our Lord, on the nature of His kingdom, in which He likened it to the mustard-seed, and to the leaven hidden in three measures of meal. Every one knows that dew is absolutely essential to the continued life of nature in the lands to which this prophet referred. From the beginning of April to the end of October—in other words, from the close of the "latter" to the beginning of the "former rains"—during all the hot summer months, the life of herbage depends there on dew alone. That dew is transparent, beautiful, glistening with light, gentle and silent, weak in itself, yet mighty in its aggregate effect, refreshing and cooling beyond power of description, and preserving the life it touches, while it is itself consumed in giving the blessing. Then as for the "showers." Often, after a long period of drought, and of dry, searching winds, the face of the sky has been covered with clouds, and showers have fallen on every field and garden throughout the land, descending without effort, yet penetrating deeply to nourish forgotten seeds and parched roots, and though no one drop of rain was of any great value in itself yet the aggregate of drops which we call a "shower" has proved of Divine and incalculable worth. It is to these two means—showers and dew—which God employs to bless the natural world, that Micah likens "the remnant of Jacob," the handful of people which alone would represent God among the heathen; and the Christian Churches, who represent the same God, may fairly regard the description as applicable to themselves. 1. Our attention is called here first to the Church's insignificance. It is referred to as a "remnant." It has seldom been otherwise. Insignificance, in the scale of the world's judgment, is its normal condition. Earnest, religious men have never been a majority at any time in the world's history. Once the Church consisted of a single family called from idolatry in Ur of the Chaldees. Indeed, even now, what is the Christian Church but a "remnant"? Compare the number even of professing Christians—with the teeming millions of those who follow Mahomet, Confucius, or Buddha—and your heart will sink in hopelessness, if you do not believe that on your side is the living God—the Eternal Truth—the Almighty Saviour! God does His work by despised agencies, and this He does also in the moral enlightenment of the world and in its regeneration, choosing the weak things "and the things which are despised, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us." Do not suppose, then, that you are on the losing side because you hold a religious faith which as yet only the minority of the race accepts. 2. But we are also reminded by our text of the Church's association. It is in contact with the world. The remnant of Jacob is "in the midst of the people." The dew and the showers are blessings, because they actually touch the earth. There have been times when Christian people have sought to have it otherwise. They have retired to cells in the desert, and to monasteries and convents. We are followers of Jesus Christ, brethren, and He went to eat with publicans and sinners, and talked to folk the Pharisees would have had nothing to do with. Now, you perhaps are thrown by God's providence, as a Christian man, into business. You cannot help yourself. There you see people of all sorts—men sensual and men spiritual; men avaricious and men open-handed; men saint-like and men worldly; men who believe in Christ and men who scorn Him. Do not, I beseech you, resent that position; do not go about your daily work as if you were ashamed of it. Do not give the cold shoulder to everybody who differs from you. You are put there as God's representative to the worldly, as well as to the pious. 3. The Church's beneficence, *i.e.*, its capacity for doing good, is suggested in the figures of the dew and the showers. These powers in nature are the gifts of God. We cannot create them by any of our scientific appliances, nor can we foretell them with any approach to accuracy. Has not the apostle said, "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath ordained before that we should walk in them"? And Jehovah Himself declared, "This people

have I formed for Myself; they shall show forth My praise." In other words, God has given you such religious life as you have. You are a Christian because He has made you a new creature in Christ. And He has done this, not that you may complacently congratulate yourself on your own salvation, and contentedly but selfishly enjoy your religious privileges, but that you may bless others, and that you may serve Him. Do your own part faithfully and prayerfully, and you will do much more than you think, and perhaps the results you did not aim at will prove greater than those you did.

4. The fourth and final suggestion which this verse aroused in my mind was one respecting the Church's independence of mere human planning. Of the dew and of the showers, to which Micah likens the Church, he says, "They tarry not for man, nor wait for the sons of men." The Church of Jesus Christ did not depend for its existence on man's permission. It originated in God's free gift of His only Son. If you have some God-given indication of your work, do not hesitate for a moment to follow it up. Just throw yourself right into it at once, for you are amongst those who are not to tarry for man nor to wait for the sons of men. Do not give up the idea of it because your friends would dissuade you. Depend upon it, if we go out in God's strength and at His call; if, in the name of our God, we set up our banners, success is certain. If you would be a blessing to others you need yourself to receive a fuller blessing. The morning dew only appears when there is a certain relation between heaven and earth, and if there be not that, no power we know of can create the dew. The earth must give off its own heat, under an open heaven, when the air is still, and then the dew will be deposited abundantly. There is something you have to give forth—namely, your own love and longing; and if these rise heavenward in the stillness of thought and prayer, and there be no cloud of doubt between you and heaven, you, too, may become as the dew, pure in itself and as a means of blessing to others. Therefore, let us pray for the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. (*A. Rowland, D.D.*)

*A dew from the Lord*:—The simple natural science of the Hebrews saw a mystery in the production of the dew on a clear night, and the poetic imagination found in it a fit symbol for all silent and gentle influences from Heaven that refreshed and quickened parched and dusty souls. Where the dew fell the scorched vegetation lifted its drooping head. That is what Israel is to be in the world, says Micah. He saw very deep into God's mind, and into the function of the nation. It may be a question as to whether the text refers more especially to the place and office of Israel when planted in its own land, or when dispersed among the nations. For, as you see, he speaks of "the remnant of Jacob" as if he was thinking of the survivors of some great calamity which had swept away the greater portion of the nation. Both things are true.

**I. THE FUNCTION OF EACH CHRISTIAN IN HIS PLACE.** "The remnant of Jacob shall be as a dew from the Lord in the midst of many nations." What made Israel "as a dew"? One thing only: its religion, its knowledge of God, and its consequent purer morality. It could teach Greece no philosophy, no art, no refinement, no sensitiveness to the beautiful. It could teach Rome no lessons of policy or government. It could bring no wisdom to Egypt, no power or wealth to Assyria. The same thing is true about Christian people. We cannot teach the world science, we cannot teach it philosophy or art, but we can teach it God. Now, the possibility brings with it the obligation. The personal experience of Jesus Christ in our hearts, as the dew that brings to us life and fertility, carries with it a commission as distinct and imperative as if it had been pealed into each single ear by a voice from heaven. Remember, too, that, strange as it may seem, the only way by which that knowledge of God which was bestowed upon Israel could become the possession of the world was by its, first of all, being made the possession of a few. Art, literature, science, political wisdom, they are all entrusted to a few who are made their apostles; and the purpose is their universal diffusion from these human centres. So to us the message comes: "The Lord hath need of thee." Now, that diffusion from individual centres of the life that is in Jesus Christ is the chiefest reason—or, at all events, is one chief reason—for the strange and inextricable intertwining in modern society of saint and sinner, of Christian and non-Christian. The seed is sown among the thorns; the wheat springs up amongst the tares. The remnant of Jacob is in the *midst* of many peoples; and you and I are all encompassed by those who need our Christ, and who do not know Him or love Him; and one great reason for the close intertwining is that, scattered we may diffuse, and that at all points the world may be in contact with those who ought to be working to preserve it from putrefaction

and decay. Now, there are two ways by which this function may be discharged. The one is by direct efforts to impart to others the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ which we have, and which we profess to be the very root of our lives. We can do all that if we will, and we are here to do it. Every one of us has somebody or other close to us, bound to us, perhaps, by the tie of kindred and love, who will listen to us more than they will to anybody else. Christian men and women, have you utilised these channels which God Himself, by the arrangements of society, has dug for you, that through them you may pour upon some thirsty ground the water of life? But there is another way by which "the remnant of Jacob" is to be "a dew from the Lord," and that is by trying to bring to bear Christian thoughts and Christian principles upon all the relations of life in which we stand, and all the societies, be they greater or smaller—the family, the city, or the nation—of which we form parts. Have you ever lifted a finger to abate drunkenness? Have you ever done anything to help to make it possible that the masses of our town communities should live in places better than the pigstyes in which many of them have to wallow? Time was when a bastard piety shrank back from intermeddling with these affairs and gathered up its skirts about it in an ecstasy of unwholesome unworldliness. There is not much danger of that now, when Christian men are in the full swim of the currents of civic, professional, literary, national life. II. THE FUNCTION OF ENGLISH CHRISTIANS IN THE WORLD. I have suggested in an earlier part of this sermon that possibly the application of this text originally was to the scattered remnant. Be that as it may, wherever you go you find the Jew and the Englishman. I need not dwell upon the ubiquity of our race. But I do wish to remind you that that ubiquity has its obligation. We hear a great deal to-day about Imperialism, about "the Greater Britain," about "the expansion of England." And on one side all that new atmosphere of feeling is good, for it speaks of a vivid consciousness which is all to the good in the pulsations of the national life. But there is another side to it that is not so good. What is the expansion sought for? Trade? Yes! necessarily; and no man who lives in Lancashire will speak lightly of that necessity. My text tells us why expansion should be sought, and what are the obligations it brings with it. "The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord." "He that is greatest among you, let him be your servant"; and the dominion founded on unselfish surrender for others is the only dominion that will last. That is the spirit in which alone England will keep its empire over the world. I need not remind you that the gift which we have to carry to the heathen nations, the subject peoples who are under the ægis of our laws, is not merely our literature, our science, our Western civilisation, still less the products of our commerce, for all of which some of them are asking; but it is the gift that they do not ask for. III. THE FAILURE TO FULFIL THE FUNCTION. Israel failed. Pharisaism was the end of it. And so destruction came, and the fire on the hearth was scattered and died out, and the vineyard was taken from them and "given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." "A dew from the Lord!" Say rather a malaria from the devil! "By you," said the prophet, "is the name of God blasphemed among the Gentiles." And by Englishmen the missionary's efforts are, in a hundred cases, neutralised, or hampered if not neutralised. We have failed because, as Christian people, we have not been adequately in earnest. No man can say with truth that the churches of England are awake to the imperative obligation of this missionary enterprise. Israel's religion was not diffusive, therefore it corrupted; Israel's religion did not reach out a hand to the nations, therefore its heart was paralysed and stricken. They who bring the Gospel to others increase their own hold upon it. There is a joy of activity, there is a firmer faith, as new evidences of its power are presented before them. There is the blessing that comes down upon all faithful discharge of duty. If our fleece is wet and we leave the ground dry, our fleece will soon be dry, though the ground may be bedewed. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Vers. 10-14. **I will cut off thy horses out of the midst of thee.**—*God's depriving dispensation towards men*:—Here the Almighty is represented as taking away from Israel many things they greatly valued. God's providence deprives as well as bestows. Depriving dispensations are—I. **Very PAINFUL.** The things He takes away are—1. The temporally valuable. Whatever is dearest to the heart—property, friends, health, fame—is the most painful to lose. The other class of things He takes away are—2. The morally vile. Here are "witchcrafts,

soothsayers, graven images," &c. Whatever man indulges in that is wrong—false worship, all the sorceries of intellectual or physical pleasure—must go, the sooner the better. II. They are very USEFUL. God takes away temporal property from a man in order that he may get spiritual wealth; and often does a man's secular fall lead to his spiritual rise. He takes away physical health from a man in order that he may get spiritual; and often do the diseases of the body lead to the cure of the soul. (*Homilist.*)

## CHAPTER VI.

**VERS. 1-3. Arise, contend thou before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice.—God's controversy with Israel:**—In this text we have God offering to plead before the sinner. The parties, who are they? On the one part, the Lord of universal nature. On the other part, man, Israel, the Church. The manner of pleading this cause. Who can coolly hear this language? At the sound of these words conscience takes fright. The matter of controversy is, the whole conduct of man to God, and the whole conduct of God to man. I. **HEAR WHAT COMPLAINTS MAN HAS TO BRING AGAINST GOD, AND WHAT GOD HAS TO ANSWER.** That a creature should complain of his Creator should seem a paradox. We are apt to complain of God on three accounts: His law seems too severe, His temporal favours too small, and His judgments too rigorous. 1. Are not the laws of God just in themselves. What is the design of those laws? Is it not to make you as happy as possible? Are not those laws infinitely proper to make you happy in this world? And doth not God exemplify these laws Himself? What does God require of you, but to endeavour to please Him? 2. Complaints against God as the governor of the world. Man complains of providence; the economy of it is too narrow and confined, the temporal benefits bestowed are too few and partial. This complaint, we allow, has some colour. But from the mouth of a Christian it cannot come without extreme ignorance and ingratitude. If the morality of Jesus Christ be examined it will be found almost incompatible with worldly prosperity. Temporal prosperity is often hostile to our happiness. Had God given us a life full of charms we should have taken little thought about another. 3. Complaints against the rigour of His judgments. If we consider God as a Judge, what a number of reasons may be assigned to prove the equity of all the evils that He hath brought upon us. But if God be considered as a Father, all these chastisements, even the most rigorous of them, are perfectly consistent with His character. It was His love that engaged Him to employ such severe means for your benefit. II. **HEAR WHAT COMPLAINTS GOD HAS TO BRING AGAINST MAN.** Every one is acquainted with the irregularities of the Jews. They corrupted both natural and revealed religion. And their crimes were aggravated by the innumerable blessings which God bestowed on them. Apply to ourselves—1. When God distinguishes a people by signal favours, the people ought to distinguish themselves by gratitude to Him. When were ever any people so favoured as we are? 2. When men are under the hand of an angry God they are called to mourning and contrition. We are under the correcting hand of God. What are the signs of our right feeling and mood? 3. To attend public worship is not to obtain the end of the ministry. Not to become wise by attending it is to increase our miseries by aggravating our sins. 4. Slander is a dangerous vice. It is tolerated in society only because every one has an invincible inclination to commit it. 5. If the dangers that threaten us, and the blows that providence strikes, ought to affect us all, they ought those most of all who are most exposed to them. 6. If gaming be innocent in any circumstances, they are uncommon and rare. Such is the controversy of God with you. It is your part to reply. What have you to say in your own behalf? (*J. Sawrin.*) **God's appeal to His people:**—The prophet is directed to plead with Judah, and to expostulate with them for their rebellious backslidings. The prophet is directed to address himself to inanimate nature; to summons the very senseless earth itself, as it were, to be an auditor of his words, and an umpire between God and His people. There is something, indeed, very solemn and awful in this appeal. The prophet was directed to proclaim, in the face of all nature, the equity and justice of God's dealings; and to challenge, as it were, a scrutiny from His

people. He condescends to put Himself (so to speak) on trial, to demand an investigation into His dealings, and to plead His cause as man with his fellow-man. Having exhibited the claims which God had upon the grateful obedience of His people, and, by consequence, the inexcusableness of their revolt, the prophet next introduces, in His figurative description, the Israelites as being struck with alarm and consternation at the condition whereunto their transgression had brought them, and, in the excitement of their minds, as seeking to appease the anger of a justly offended God by the most costly and abundant sacrifices. May we not take up the words of the prophet, and, adapting them to our own times and circumstances, say, "The Lord hath a controversy with His people"? May we not, as Micah did, stand forth to challenge a hearing for the cause of the Lord, to show of His righteous dealings towards us, to plead for the equity and mercy of His government, and to leave the folly and ingratitude and rebellion of those whom He hath so signally favoured utterly and absolutely without excuse? We cannot plead ignorance, or that He is a rigid taskmaster whose service is hard and oppressive. Nor can a conscious sense of unfitness and depravity be pleaded as an excuse for not complying with the invitations of a gracious God to engage in His service. Why, then, is it that men refuse to listen to the gracious calls of God? There is but one plea that can be urged with any apparent reason; namely, the utter inability of fallen man, of himself, to turn unto God, or to make one movement toward that which is good. While it is acknowledged that the grace of God alone can change the carnal mind, and renew the corrupt heart, and incline the apostate will, yet we must ever bear in mind that God worketh not without means; He accomplisheth not without methods and instruments. In the work of grace it is precisely as in the works of nature, that God hath appointed certain steps to be followed, in the economy of His providence, on the part of man, which He doth cause to be successful to the production of their object. Then we must use the means of His special appointment; humbly come to Him in faith and prayer, to pray that we may have grace to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God. (*J. B. Smith, D.D.*) *Man in the moral court of history*:—I. Here is a call on man to GIVE AUDIENCE TO ALMIGHTY GOD. "Hear ye now what the Lord saith." 1. Natural. What is more natural than for a child to hang on the lips and attend to the words of his parent? How much more natural for the finite intelligence to open its ears to the words of the Infinite! 2. Binding. The great command of God to all is, "Hearken diligently to Me; hear, and your souls shall live." 3. Indispensable. It is only as men hear, interpret, digest, appropriate, incarnate God's Word that they can rise to a true, noble, and happy life. II. Here is a SUMMONS TO INANIMATE NATURE TO HEAR THE CONTROVERSY BETWEEN GOD AND MAN. "Arise, contend thou before the mountains." The appeal to inanimate nature—1. Indicates the earnestness of the prophet. Every minister should be earnest. "Passion is reason" here. 2. Suggests the stupidity of the people. Perhaps the prophet meant to compare them to the dead hills and mountains. As hard in heart as the rocks. 3. Hints the universality of his theme. His doctrine was no secret; it was as open and free as nature. III. A CHALLENGE TO MAN TO FIND FAULT WITH DIVINE DEALINGS. This implies—1. That they could bring nothing against Him. 2. It declares that He had done everything for them. (*Homilist.*) *Hear ye, O mountains, the Lord's controversy.*—*The influences of external nature*:—The striking feature of Micah's prophecy is the mode in which he appeals to the objects of nature. While Isaiah borrows his imagery from the sublime realms of the imagination; Jeremiah, from the scenes of human life; Ezekiel, from the realms of the dead; and Daniel, from allegories connected with history; Micah paints from the mountain, the tree, and the flood. In the text, and many other passages, we see the tendency of this prophet to associate with the external forms of nature the presence and the judgments of God. It is very natural that the objects of God's creation should speak to the human mind of Himself. The sublime silence of nature raises our mind far above the thoughts of this world, and fixes its gaze on the Eternal. 1. The objects of nature in their different ways speak of Him, and show in singular fashion how He is ever present at the events of mankind. 2. The objects of nature indirectly speak of religion and of heaven to the thoughtful mind. They embody and call out from us each elementary principle of religion. Majesty and sublimity are suggested by the mountain; repose by the evening sky; joy and gladness by that of the morning. &c. 3. The objects of nature become the home of association. This power of

association that connects us to the scenes of daily life is essentially religious; it appeals to all the higher and holier parts of our nature when severed from their earthly dross. 4. There is another way in which this appeal to nature becomes a very practical matter. Nature is monotonous; so is God. We find it where we left it. The scene of nature which witnessed our early devotion becomes in after years our accuser and condemnation. 5. And nature suggests the Divine cause, the intelligent mind, the adaptation of the physical world to the wants of His creatures. But while this observation of nature so elevates the mind to God, it has its faults and infirmities, which are its own. Without the Word of God the works of God may mislead us. There is a further infirmity; the tendency there is in the objects of nature to cast melancholy and despondency over the mind. There are two elements of our nature which produce conscious happiness—hope and practical energy. To make hope effective, there must be a certain amount of connection between our practical energy and itself. The essence and health of our being rests in overcoming difficulties. Where we find no opportunity of doing this we become conscious of feelings without their natural vent, and the result is melancholy and ennui. But when we come to gaze upon the sublime forms of nature, none of our practical energies being of necessity called out towards them, we turn away with impressions of disappointment and sadness: the objects are too much for us, because we are not necessarily practically concerned upon them. It is singular that few people are more negligent of the call to Divine worship, are more blunted in their appreciation of Christianity, than the farming and agricultural classes. Manufacturing populations are much more actively intelligent. (*E. Monro.*)

**O My people, what have I done unto thee?**—*The Lord's controversy with us:*—God offers Himself to be judged as to His dealings. 1. Is there nowhere a cry to provoke the Lord to ask, What have I done unto you? What should the heart reply? It concerns us to consider. When we fall short in putting to account the whole store of God's mercies we are sure to charge the deficiency upon God's niggardliness, and not upon our own unfaithfulness; for self-justification is always the immediate consequence of self-inflicted loss. It is the very extent of God's mercies which makes men murmurers and complainers; for by so much the more they have failed to take due advantage of them. What would one reasonably expect from those highly favoured of God? But what is the real state of things? Discontent, disobedience, unthankfulness, unwatchfulness, murmurings, rebellion, open violation of God's statutes, public profanation of His ordinances, common and declared neglect and contempt of His sacraments and means of grace, are the prevailing features of the picture. What a question to be put by a merciful God and a redeeming Saviour, to any one of us—"What have I done unto Thee?" Do we incur the rebuke? 2. The question goes further yet,—*"Wherein have I wearied thee?"* How cutting a question to the people that profess His name! (*R. W. Evans, B.D.*)

*The Lord's controversy:*—The history of Israel is a most humbling and affecting picture of the depravity of the human heart. The Sinai covenant, though it had much of Gospel in it, yet was essentially a covenant of works. The turning-point of its blessings was the nation's obedience. In the New Testament the legal dispensation is ever opposed to the Gospel covenant, in which the turning-point is not our obedience, but the obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ; yet are its blessings dispensed in such a way as infallibly secure the highest obedience of the renewed soul. The first covenant excited to holiness, and in those that were real saints, and lived above their covenant, it promoted it, but did not secure it; but the Gospel not only excites on higher grounds, not only promotes to the highest point, but infallibly secures sanctification in all that really receive it.

**II. GOD'S AFFECTING COMPLAINT OF HIS ANCIENT PEOPLE.** They were wearied of the Lord and His pleasant service. And as they sowed, they reaped. They reaped misery and destruction. But is this confined to them? How often even the true saints of God seem weary of their God! How soon we are weary of His services; of His rod; aye, even of God Himself.

**III. GOD'S MOST TENDER EXPOSTULATION.** Such an expostulation from a grieved fellow-creature would be wonderful, but consider the dignity of Him who speaketh. Let unwearied kindness, unbroken faithfulness, tender love, most unmerited and most sovereign grace all speak. Oh, that this view of the Divine character were laid on all our hearts and consciences! Oh, that our souls might be stirred up deeply to repent of past unwearinesses, to take them to the Fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, and there receiving fresh springs of life and love, consecrate

ourselves unweariedly to His glory. (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*) *What can man accuse God of?*—It is impossible to predict what impression the same truth will make upon the different minds of men. But surely, all the terrors of God could not more effectually overaw the heart of a sinner than the passage of Scripture which I have now read. It strikes my ear like the last sound of God's mercy. Instead of vindicating His authority, does He condescend to plead the reasonableness of His law? Then His forbearance is almost exhausted, and the day of grace is nearing its end. The supreme Lord of heaven and earth appeals to sinners themselves, for the mildness and equity of His government; and challenges them to produce one instance of undue severity towards them, or the least shadow of excuse for their undutiful behaviour towards Him. I. A DIRECT PROOF OF THE GOODNESS OF GOD, AND OF HIS TENDER CONCERN FOR THE WELFARE OF HIS CREATURES. This appears from—1. The unwearied patience which He exercises towards transgressors. 2. The sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. 3. The various means which God employs for reclaiming men from their ways of folly and vice. He is not only the gracious Author of the plan of redemption, but He has likewise set before us the most powerful motives to persuade us to embrace His proffered favour, and to comply with His designs of mercy. 4. The fact that He has selected some of the most notorious offenders in the different ages of the world to be monuments of the riches of His grace. II. OBJECTIONS URGED AGAINST THE MILDNESS AND EQUITY OF THE DIVINE ADMINISTRATION. 1. Is it the holiness and perfection of His law that is complained of? This complaint is both foolish and ungrateful. The law of God requires nothing but what tends to make us happy, nor doth it forbid anything which would not be productive of our misery. 2. Is it the threatening with which the law is enforced that is complained of? But shall God be reckoned an enemy to your happiness because He useth the most effectual means to promote it? There is a friendly design in all God's threatenings. 3. Perhaps the objection is to the final execution of the threatenings. But would the threatenings be of any use at all if the sinner knew that they would never be executed? 4. Do you blame God for the temptations you meet with in the world, and those circumstances of danger with which you are surrounded? But temptations have no compulsive efficacy; all they can do is solicit and entice. 5. Do you object that you cannot reclaim or convert yourselves? But you can use the means appointed. He who does not employ these faithfully, complains very unreasonably if the grace is withheld which is only promised with the use of the means. The truth of the matter is, that the sinner has no right to complain of God; he destroys himself by his own wilful and obstinate folly, and then he accuses God, as if He were the cause of his misery. Consider that to be your own destroyers is to counteract the very strongest principle of your natures, the principle of self-preservation. (*H. Blair, D.D.*)

Ver. 4. For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.—*Reasons for gratitude*:—Ingratitude often meets with, what it always deserves, the most grievous punishment. The highest aggravation of this ingratitude is, when the goodness of God is despised, when His loving-kindness is disregarded, and the mercies the Supreme Being bestows on poor depending creatures are neglected, if not altogether forgotten, by those to whom they were graciously afforded. Then a grateful remembrance of any remarkable mercy, or signal deliverance, is a duty the most reasonable in itself, and well pleasing to God. This important duty is not confined to private persons; but if God bestows on a nation public mercies, all the members of the community should join together to express their gratitude and thankfulness. 1. Consider the great reason the children of Israel had thankfully to remember the mercy in the text mentioned. (1) The miserable condition they were delivered from with regard to their bodies and souls. (2) Their wonderful deliverance from this unhappy state. (3) The state they were brought into. 2. Show how applicable this is to our present circumstances. (Reference is to the reformation of the Church of England from popery, in the time of Queen Elizabeth.) (*Richard Mayo, M.A.*)

Ver. 5. O My people, remember now.—*A Divine reading*:—This chapter is a pathetic expostulation of God with His chosen people, the Jews, for their ungracious demeanour and miscarriage towards Him. This expostulation is carried in a gracious manner. God pleads the justice and equity of His cause

by a threefold argument. 1. By an attestation of the dumb and senseless creatures (ver. 1). 2. An appeal and reference to themselves. 3. A commemoration of many blessings bestowed upon them. He insists upon three fundamental blessings, by all which He manifests His favour towards them, and aggravates their impiety and ingratitude against Him. 1. A redemption from a long and tedious bondage; from a grievous and miserable bondage, and from a vile and base bondage. 2. The placing of a gracious administration over them. 3. He watches over them, against all attempts of their malicious enemies. He defeated Balak and Balaam's conspiracy. And this makes up the full sum and measure of God's goodness to His people. I. THE COMMEMORATION ITSELF. Here is a gracious compellation. "O My people." It imports three things. It is a speech of claim and possession. It is a speech of love and affection. It is a speech of recall and invitation. Here is a forcible quickening of memory. "Remember now." God appeals to His ancient mercies. He kept them upon record; registered them up in His holy Book; framed them into songs of commemoration; put them into the form of an oath; founded the sacrament of the passover as a commemoration. These remembrances are provocations of thankfulness, and obligations to obedience, and encouragements to faith. II. THE BENEFIT OR BLESSING TO BE COMMEMORATED. 1. Of the danger that beset them. Notice the ground of it; the manner of it; the matter of the conspiracy. 2. The issue out of this danger. The answer to Balak contains God's gracious deliverance of His people from Balak's malicious and wicked intentment. In it there is a strict prohibition, a gracious inversion, a just retorsion. III. THE END AND PURPOSE OF THIS GRACIOUS DELIVERANCE. That ye may understand the righteousness of the Lord. (*George Stradling, S.T.P.*) That ye may know the righteousness of the Lord.—*The importance of just ideas of God*:—If idolaters are zealous in the service of imaginary deities, we ought much more to be engaged in the service of the one living and true God for ever. The ideas which people entertain of their God do actually exert great influence, and produce interesting effects upon their disposition and conduct. It has been observed by men of the best information, that idolatrous nations have cherished the dispositions and indulged the vices which they have attributed to their deities. Virtue and vice are measured by the supposed disposition and character of their idols. The descendants of Abraham imagined that God was partial to them and vindictive to other nations. Hence they despised and hated the nations around them, and looked upon them as dogs and outcasts from God. Then it is easy to see the high importance of entertaining just notions of the Lord our God. If we believe that God is partial, arbitrary, and vindictive we shall cherish a similar disposition and practice, as far as we make any sober pretensions to religion. And we ought to imitate the moral character of God. See what results if we think God arbitrary, hard and revengeful, or passionate and wrathful. Our relations with our fellows will match our thoughts of our God. The same applies to better thoughts of God. It would be difficult to set in a just light the moral purity, excellence, and happiness of a character formed by such a glorious and perfect model as that of the infinite God, who is emphatically love. But most persons arrive at mature years without acquiring just, enlarged, and honorary notions of God, especially on some important points and traits of character. How shall this evil be remedied? By a careful attention to the Bible, where the character of God is fully revealed. By excluding from the character of God everything that appears to be hard and unreasonable, partial and vindictive—everything that would be thought unreasonable and unworthy in a good man, a wise and affectionate parent, or an upright and compassionate judge. (*Ezra Ripley, D.D.*)

Vers. 6-8. *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord.—Pleasing God*:—This is a momentous question, which the world has ever been asking—"How shall we approach God?" For men feel that they are separated from Him,—that there is something which prevents access, and they have sought how to remove the obstacles which intervene. I. THREE METHODS LIKELY TO EFFECT THE DESIRED PURPOSE. They are—1. Outward acts. What must I do? This is to a certain extent natural, for we cannot obtain any substantial good in the world without work, or its equivalent, money. Some attempt one particular deed, such as self-denial, others a notably moral life; others, again, obsequious religious observances. 2. Pious gifts. "With burnt offerings." This shows the innate idea of atonement or propitiation. There is a universal consciousness

of innate guilt and sinfulness, and there is a universal feeling that it must be punished. There is also in the text the idea of purchase. "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams?" It is not uncommon for men to think that they can bribe God by outward acts of philanthropy, by building churches or hospitals. 3. Personal suffering and self-denial. "Should I give my first-born," &c. How terrible the consequences of such an act! Yet men have thought that mortifying the natural sentiments of humanity would gratify God. Many have voluntarily submitted to mutilation, to pilgrimages; they have even sacrificed their children in the hope of obtaining eternal life. II. THE TEXT POINTS OUT THE ONLY TRUE METHOD OF ACCEPTANCE WITH GOD. The prophet rebukes these popular ideas in a quiet manner. He says,—There is no excuse for your ignorance. Then why do men ask? It is because of their want of faith, for "seeing they see not." He hath showed this in His Word, in His precepts, in His examples of life. We have here as components of that way—1. Holiness. God hath required of thee to do justly. We must not forget that justice is due to God as well as to man. Just dealing demands reverence, faith, trust towards God in Christ, as much as honesty towards our fellow-creatures. 2. Mercy. This means tenderness of disposition, and an ability to receive God's message as well as to show our mercy to others. 3. Humility. Accepting God's method of salvation, leaving our hopes and destiny with Him, receiving the sacrifice wrought out for us at Calvary; not to think higher of himself than a man ought to think. To live justly is to live in Christ, for in Him all justice is fulfilled. To love mercy is to imbibe Christ's spirit, for He is the manifestation of Divine mercy. To walk humbly is to follow Christ's teaching, for He inculcates humility, self-denial, and trust. (*J. J. S. Bird, B.A.*) *The world's cry concerning the method of being brought into fellowship with God*:—It is not that God has withdrawn from us; it is that we are alienated from Him by wicked works. Here is one of the world's cries. Where can we get a satisfying response? There are only three answers—1. That which has reference to the presentation of sacrifices. This is the way in which the heathen have sought to bridge the gulf between themselves and their Maker. Yes, and the old Hebrew too. Millions of victims have been slain, and oceans of blood have been shed. But is this satisfactory? To say that we are to return to God through sacrifices, however costly and abundant, is not quite sufficient. In the first place, it is repugnant to our reason to suppose that such sacrifices can be acceptable to the God of love and mercy. In the second place, it is opposed to the declarations of the Bible. "For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: Thou delightest not in burnt-offering" (Psa. ii. 16). "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me? saith the Lord" (Isa. i. 11). "And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt-offering" (Isa. xl. 16). "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: for the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever" (Psa. xlix. 7, 8). And in the third place, such sacrifices, as a fact, have never removed from man this feeling of distance from his Maker. The gulf remains as deep and broad though the cattle upon a thousand hills were offered. 2. There is that which has reference to a right moral conduct. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" This is just what philosophy would say. Think the true, love the good, and do the right, and you will be accepted of your Maker—you will come back into a friendly state with Him. This is satisfactory so far as it goes; for to do the right thing is reconciliation with heaven. Those who live a holy life walk with God, and are happy in His fellowship. But the question is, How to come into this morally right state? And the philosophy which presents this method has no answer to this question. 3. There is that which has reference to the intervention of Christ. This is the answer of the Bible. It teaches that Christ is man's way back to fellowship with his Maker. "I am the way: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me." "Through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph. ii. 18). But, now, in order to see the satisfactoriness of this answer, it may be necessary to ask the question, In what way does Christ bring man into fellowship with God? Negatively—First: Not by repealing any of the laws of moral obligation binding on man. Christ's intervention did not render man in the slightest degree less bound to obey every precept in heaven's moral code. That code is as immutable as God Himself. Secondly: Not by dispensing with

any of the settled conditions of spiritual culture and improvement. Christ does not make men good in any miraculous way. Observation, reflection, study, resolution, faith, practice, these are the means by which souls must ever advance. Thirdly: Not by effecting any change in the Divine mind. The mission of Christ was the effect—not the cause—of God's love. Christ was its messenger and minister, not its creator. Nor did He change God's purpose. It was according to His eternal purpose that Christ came, and to work that purpose out was Christ's mission. What, then, does He do? He is the Reconciler. He reconciles not God to man, but man to God. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." In Christ, as the reconciler or remover of this felt distance between man and his Maker, we discover a twofold adaptation of the most perfect kind.

**I. IN HIM WE SEE A SPECIAL APPROACH OF GOD TO MAN.** In Christ there is a change in the Divine manifestation. He in Christ comes to man in man's own nature. "God is manifest in the flesh." In man He reveals the image of His invisible self. In this manifestation two great obstructions to man's union to God are removed. 1. The obstruction of inappreciability. God in nature is so vast as to be inappreciable by man, but in the Man Christ He comes within our horizon, and within the compass of our faculties. 2. The obstruction of guilty dread. Was there an obstruction to this union on God's part? If so, who shall describe its nature? Men, the world over, feel that they have sinned, and are liable to a terrible punishment. This sense of guilt hangs as a portentous cloud over the soul of the world. Men, by millions, often stagger with horror under its black shadow, and anxiously seek some shelter from the threatened storm. This guilty dread first drove man from his Maker. "I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid." The soul, from the laws of its nature, flees from the object of its dread. Fear is the centrifugal force of the spirit; it drives it from its Maker. This dread of God is as universal as sin, and as deep as the heart of humanity. It accounts for all the horrid views that men have of their Maker, and for all their hostility to Him in heart and life. Now, how does God in Christ remove this? He comes to man in just such a form as is adapted to expel fear, and inspire hope and trust. In what form could He come but in the form of a man to effect this? Would a revelation of Himself in all His absolute glory do it? No! this, if it could be borne by mortals, would only raise the terror to a more overwhelming degree. Would a revelation of Himself through angelic natures do it? The Eternal, to disarm man of this terrible fear, comes to him in man's own nature. Are you afraid of a Teacher, who, free from all assumption of superiority, scholastic stiffness, and pedantic utterance, mingles with the crowd, and utters truth the most lofty to the imagination, the most reasonable to the intellect, the most real to the conscience, the most inspiring and ennobling to the heart? Transport yourselves in thought to the mountains of Capernaum, and the shores of Galilee, and listen to Him who speaks as "never man spake." God is in that Teacher, and through Him He says, "It is I, be not afraid." Are you afraid of a Philanthropist, the most tender in heart, the most earnest in affection, the most race-wide in sympathy? Follow Jesus of Nazareth during the three years of His public life, as He goes "about doing good." Count the diseased that He heals, the hungry that He feeds, and the disconsolate that He comforts.

**II. IN HIM WE SEE A SPECIAL ATTRACTION OF MAN TO GOD.** This is another step. He not only comes to man, but He attracts man to Himself. He does this—1. By awakening the highest gratitude. Gratitude attracts, draws the soul into loving sympathy with its benefactor. Kindness is a magnet that draws the object to its author. God in Christ displays such infinite mercy as is adapted to inspire the soul with the strongest gratitude. Where is there mercy like this? He loved us and gave Himself for us. 2. He does this by awakening the highest love. Love attracts, love draws us into the presence of its object and makes us one with it, feel as it feels, and move as it moves. God in Christ is moral beauty in its sublimest form. All conceivable virtues centre there, and radiate thence, in infinite perfection. Holiness, as it streams directly from the Absolute One, would be too strong for our vision, would dazzle and confound us, but in Christ it comes mildly and fascinatingly, reflected through the humanities of our nature. 3. He does this by awakening the highest hope. Hope draws the heart to its object. Thus we are drawn to Him. We feel that "our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ." (*Homilist.*)

*The religion of man, and the religion of God:—***I. THE RELIGION OF MAN.** "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord?" &c. 1. This is simply the voice of man's religious

instinct seeking after God. In Pope's universal prayer, there is truth, as well as error. "There are," says the late Dr. Vaughan, "tendencies in man which make religion, in some form, a necessity of his nature; but it is no less certain that there are tendencies in him which ensure that the religion chosen by him will not be a spiritual one," &c. 2. Conscience, history, the Bible, prove that this inward light has become darkness. Man's religious faculty has become impaired, and reveals its degeneracy in superstition and cruelty. God must be propitiated, but by "thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil," and by the sacrifice of their own offspring. "Where there is no vision," &c. 3. The ignorance in which man has involved himself is rectified by God's revealed will. "He hath showed thee, O man," &c. Reason has failed to discover a resting-place for the soul. The course of ages witnessed the trial, and in the most favourable circumstances. II. GOD'S RELIGION. "He hath showed thee, O man." Notwithstanding their gorgeous economy of symbol and sacrifice, they were taught that the symbol could not save, that God "desired truth in the inward parts." The religion of God is summed up under three heads—1. "Do justly." Love to God ensures love and justice to man. 2. "Love mercy." This strikes at the selfishness of our nature. 3. "Walk humbly with thy God." The soul of religion is here; reconciliation—communion—reverent, constant converse with God. (*John Lewis.*) *The ancient question:*—A question which has troubled mankind in every age. For the religious feeling is natural to man. All nations have had some idea of God, and have worshipped Him according to their notion of His nature and attributes. Consequently, strange answers have been given to this inquiry, which have led to cruelty and human sacrifices. Men have mistaken the character of God. 1. The question which the heathen tried to answer is still waiting for our individual answer. In the minds of all thinking and earnest persons the question will sometimes arise, Am I living as God intended me to live? Am I at peace with God? There are times when we are brought face to face with the living realities of life, and of death, and of eternity. 2. To this question many and different answers have been given. The old Jews thought the best way to approach God was by the sacrifices of the Levitical law. Will God be pleased with outward observances and external show? Can we gain God's favour by bribing Him with flattery and gifts? Not Jews only, many Christians have had such fancies. What does Isaiah say to such religionists? God wants no gifts and offerings. Can God's favour be obtained by suffering? Shall I lacerate my tenderest affection? Shall I give up everything that is pleasant? Hundreds have asked themselves this question. But they have utterly mistaken the character of God. They thought He was pleased with torture and self-sacrifice. But He is a God of love, our Father, and not a hard taskmaster. 3. To this question the prophet gives us the true answer. God would have us live justly, and mercifully, and humbly before our God. Our Father's will is that we do our duty where He has placed us, to God, and to our fellows, and to ourselves; that we be just, with a justice that hates oppression, and will not tolerate wrong; that scorns petty vices and despicable meannesses; merciful, with a mercy that condescends to the helpless, the fallen, and the despised; and humble, with an honest reverence towards God, the Author and Giver of all good things. This is what God requires, goodness, and justice, and sincerity, and love. (*John Vaughan, M.A.*) *The awakened sinner:*—Here the purport, though not the express words, of a conversation between Balak and Balaam is introduced, in order strongly to describe the state of a mind harassed with guilt, and clearly to point out the only way in which relief can be obtained. I. SHOW WHAT IS IMPLIED IN THE ANXIOUS INQUIRIES OF THE AWAKENED SINNER. 1. Such inquiries imply the existence of a sense of sin. Sin is the transgression of the Divine law—an infraction of the immutable rule of righteousness which God hath given to His creatures—a state and course of rebellion against His rightful authority; and an opposition to His character, and the interests of His holy dominion. Every child of Adam is the subject of moral failure, chargeable with moral delinquency, and exposed to all the evils of moral ruin. The great bulk of mankind are totally insensible to their real condition. Sooner or later the spell on them will be broken. The idea of God presents itself. The character of God is seen as infinitely pure and inflexibly just. The sinner finds he has broken His law in innumerable instances, in thought, word, and deed. There is often some particular transgression to which the sinner is addicted. 2. The questions before us imply a conviction of the

indispensable necessity of expiation. The awakened sinner is convinced, not only that God has a right to demand satisfaction for the injury done to His moral character, in the view of intelligent beings, but that reparation of one kind or other must be made, else it is absolutely impossible for the offender to escape. Under the influence of such views, the sinner asks, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord," &c. His concern is, to get the obstacle removed which intervenes between him and the favour of the Almighty. Something, he conceives, must be done: some sacrifice must be presented; a suitable expiation must be made. 3. The words imply a willingness to go any length, and to be at any expense, if only expiation can thereby be made, and the desired pardon be obtained. It is to this natural principle of the carnal mind that we are to ascribe the numerous austerities and works of supererogation practised by the members of the Church of Rome. 4. All these anxious inquiries, with all the self-righteous efforts to which they give rise, discover an awful and lamentable ignorance of the only way of salvation. How can a creature that is bound by the laws of his moral constitution to yield a perfect, uninterrupted, and perpetual obedience to the reasonable demands of his Maker, throughout every period of his being, make compensation by any subsequent conduct for former omissions and transgressions?

II. THE CHEERING IMPORT OF THE PROPHET'S REPLY. Revelation alone solves the difficulty. In the Bible, and in the Bible alone. Of this Divinely authenticated communication the substance is this: that the whole human race, having, by transgression and rebellion, forfeited the Divine favour, and become obnoxious to the everlasting infliction of the Divine wrath, and being utterly destitute of all aid from themselves and from all creatures, the Infinite Jehovah, whose laws they had broken, and whose authority they had rejected and contemned, moved with amazing pity, sent His own equal Son into the world to suffer, the just for the unjust: that by the infliction of the punishment upon Him as the substitute of the guilty, a sufficient manifestation might be afforded of the Divine opposition to sin, while mercy is extended to every sinner that betakes himself by faith to the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour, his Righteousness, and his Strength. Whoever, of all the guilty sons or daughters of Adam, believes in the all-sufficiency of the atonement which the Son of God made with His infinitely precious blood upon the Cross, is freed from his obligation to punishment, and obtains a right to all the privileges and all the blessedness of the kingdom of heaven. The atonement is that good which we individually require. Nothing else can satisfy the mind, remove its fears, or inspire it with a good hope towards God. III. A DESCRIPTION IS HERE GIVEN OF EVANGELICAL HOLINESS. There are two rocks on which men are ever disposed to make shipwreck of their souls: the one is self-righteousness; the other is, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness. Multitudes go down to the grave with part of the concluding words of the text as a lie in their right hand. Piquing themselves on the probity of their character before men, the charity which they distribute to the poor, and their going regularly through the outward forms of religion, they imagine that they have Divine authority itself for believing that all will be well with them at last. But the words admit of no such construction. They do not, in fact, apply at all to unconverted and unbelieving sinners; but to such only as have found the *good* which the Lord "hath showed" them in the Gospel. Then there are others who talk loudly about the Gospel, and the righteousness of Christ, and the liberty of believers, but who cannot brook the idea of requirement and duty. It is, however, absolutely required of us, that we "do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God." Have ever such anxious inquiries as these of the text been put by you? Submit, I beseech you, to the righteousness of God. And let such as have, by the savingly illuminating influences of the Spirit, been shown "what is good," be careful to maintain good works. (*E. Henderson.*) *The good way of coming before the Lord:*—The question of an awakened soul. "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord?" An unawakened man never puts that question. He does not like to think of God, or the claims of God. I. THE PIERCING QUESTION OF EVERY AWAKENED SOUL. 1. An awakened soul feels that his chief happiness is in coming before God. This was unfallen Adam's happiness. This is the joy of holy angels. This is the true happiness of a believer. 2. An awakened soul feels difficulties in the way. Two great difficulties. The nature of the sinner. When God really awakens a soul, He shows him the vileness and hatefulness of himself. He directs the eye within. The nature of God. "The High God." When God really awakens a soul, He generally reveals to him something of His own holiness and

majesty. See the cases of Isaiah and Job. The anxiety of the awakened soul leads to the question, "Wherewith?" It is the question of one who has been made to feel that "one thing is needful." Anything he has he would give up to get peace with God. II. THE ANSWER OF PEACE TO THE AWAKENED SOUL. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good." Nothing that man can bring with him will justify him before God. There is nothing a man would not do—nothing he would not suffer—if he might only cover himself before God. Tears, prayers, duties, reformatorys, devotions—the heart will do anything to be righteous before God. But all this righteousness is filthy rags. For—1. The heart remains an awful depth of corruption. 2. Supposing the righteousness were perfect, it cannot cover the past. Old sins, and the sins of youth still remain uncovered. Christ is the good way. The good way to the Father—(1) Because He is so suitable. (2) Because He is so free. (3) Because He is so God-glorifying. All other ways of salvation are man-glorifying; but this way is God-glorifying. III. GOD'S REQUIREMENT OF THE JUSTIFIED. 1. God requires His redeemed ones to be holy. (1) He requires you to "do justly"; to be just in your dealings between man and man. (2) To "love mercy." This is the brightest feature in the character of Christ. If you are in Christ, drink deep of His Spirit. (3) To "walk humbly with your God." 2. Remember that this is God's end in justifying you. He loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it. If you are not made holy, Christ died for you in vain. 3. Whatever He requires, He gives grace to perform. Christ is not only good as our way to the Father, but He is our fountain of living waters. Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Look as much to Him for sanctification as for justification. (R. M. M'Cheyne.) *On the atonement*.—The first rites of all religions but one are rites of propitiation. Men everywhere, feeling themselves sinners, justly conceive it necessary that, in order to obey God acceptably, they must first be reconciled to Him, and obtain indemnity for past offences. Among the professors of idolatry, ancient and modern, the principle of self-atonement has taken up its residence. Even we may think that our sufferings ought to be accepted as a partial atonement for our offences. The mistake is not man's conviction of the necessity of an atonement, but the way in which that atonement is sought. The mistake is man's making his conviction a foundation for his pride to erect its fancied claims on the Divine justice, and his self-righteousness to flatter itself with the hopes of meritorious exertion. God has provided the necessary burnt-offering. He has provided it in a way at once the most suitable to His own glory, the most congenial to the harmony of the Divine attributes, and adapted, with unspeakable wisdom and felicity, to the lost and hopeless state of His guilty creatures. Being justified by His grace, through the atonement which He has accepted, we have a ground of confidence before God. And being reconciled to God through the death of His Son, we should walk acceptably before Him, in newness of life. (C. R. Maturin.) *How to come before God*.—Assuming the fall of our first parents, human reason brings us to the conclusion that we are all naturally the worthy objects of God's wrath and punishment. Scripture seems to teach this, and our experience confirms it. How then can we be delivered out of this state? Wherewith shall we come before the Lord? 1. Shall we come with repentance and amendment of life? No. These may be indispensable conditions of salvation, they can, in no sense, be its meritorious and procuring cause. 2. Shall we come before Him with burnt-offerings? &c. There is no virtue in animal sacrifices to wash out the guilty stain of our offences. 3. Shall we give our firstborn for our transgression? Would human sacrifices do, if animal sacrifices would not? No. They would be neither an adequate nor perfect sacrifice, such as God could accept. 4. Is there any created being that would suffice to redeem us? There is no creature that could meet the two required conditions, and be, at the same time, a perfect and an adequate sacrifice. 5. The apostle answers the question in Eph. ii. 13-18. Christ was the victim everyway adapted to the necessities of the case. He was a perfect sacrifice, and He was a sufficient sacrifice. (Ch. G. Lawson, M.A.) *The principles of the Reformation and of Protestantism*.—I propose to consider that peculiar element of Christianity which, though not exclusively held by the Churches of the Reformation, yet it was the glory of the Reformation to have brought fully out. The warning of the prophet Micah consists of three parts, which contain within themselves the doctrine and practice of all true Protestant religion. I. THE AUTHORITY TO WHICH ALL RELIGIOUS QUESTIONS MUST BE REFERRED. The

question of authority is one by which men in these days are often perplexed. It is said that our business is not to ask *what* is taught, but only to know *who* it is that teaches us. This is not the way in which the Bible speaks of authority. We are to heed what it is that is said, and what it is that commends itself to our own consciences. The person, the office, no doubt is something; but the message, and the substance of the message is much more. The real authority which guides and ought to guide us, is that which needs no external support or credentials. Everywhere the true voices of God make themselves heard and felt, if not immediately, yet at last, not by external weight, but by their own intrinsic force. The real teachers and oracles of mankind have been those who, in every age, and in every station, and in every race of men, have been raised up by God. The Bible is the great and supreme authority, because the Bible contains the greatest of all truths in the most enduring, persuasive, and exalted form. We do not believe the Bible to be true because it is inspired; but we believe the Bible to be inspired because and in proportion as it is true. There is, therefore, no need to go to any external official source for guidance. II. THE GREAT QUESTION WHICH HAS TO BE SETTLED. "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord?" That question is the root at once of all religion, and of all superstition. Man feels that there is a Being above him, whom he longs to propitiate and to approach. Between weak, frail, sinful man, and the great, supreme, holy God what is there in common? Many ways have been devised. In the early ages of the world it was by the offering of gifts—the gifts of the earth, the gifts of slain animals, the gift even of human life. In Christian times other modes have been adopted, also of the most various kinds. Even the wildest and the worst of them is instructive as expressive of the yearning of the human heart, even in its lowest condition, to bridge over the gulf, to express its reverence for the Most High, to be at peace with its Maker. The modes of approaching God might be wrong, but the question how we are to approach, and how we are to please the great Father of all human spirits, is the question which cannot be put aside. III. THE DIVINE ANSWER TO THAT QUESTION. This is the answer to the question how God is to be approached. There is no other answer—by justice, by mercy, by humility. Though this answer came from a heathen prophet, it was yet the Word of God, and commends itself at once to every enlightened heart and conscience. It needs no defence; it needs no explanation. It is the foundation of all true religion, because it rests on the only true idea of the character of God. This is true theology; this is a true account of what God is, and of what God requires. False religion imagines that God can be pleased by other means than by a good, merciful, and humble life. True religion teaches that whatever else may be pleasing to God, there is and there can be nothing so pleasing to Him as doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly. There are many other great truths in the Bible besides this; but this is the one master-truth which runs through from first to last, controls and covers all the rest. And this is the teaching of the New Testament. Through that ideal of human justice, mercy, and reverence, was the Divine nature manifested in Jesus of Nazareth. And it is the end and meaning of the death of Christ. Not by the blood of bulls and goats, but by the eternal spirit of holiness and truth, He offered Himself. It is the end and meaning also of His resurrection. He rose again that we might rise above the follies and sins of the world, that we might "die unto sin and live unto righteousness." (*Dean Stanley.*) *The true sacrifice for sin*:—Does any one ask, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord?" Then we have a cheering answer for him. No such way of acceptance as is suggested in this passage. It is a mistake to imagine that by an increased attention to outward services, and by a devotion to specified duties, he can compensate for the violations or omissions of days gone by. God requireth another sort of service than that of mere outward ceremony. He is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth: He requireth a new heart and a right spirit. Nor can the most painful efforts or arduous instances of self-punishment or self-denial avail. We are too apt to have a low estimate of the sinfulness of sin. It requires a deep sense of the holiness and majesty of God to estimate sin in some degree aright. When we do, we may comprehend more adequately the nature of that precious and costly atonement of God's own providing, set forth in Scripture as a sufficient sacrifice and oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. We are not competent, in the weakness of our present powers, to comprehend these matters fully. Should the newly awakened sinner ask what sacrifice he shall offer;

what self-infliction shall he undergo? we say, No such things are required of thee. Look to the Cross of Christ as the heaven-sent remedy for the disease of the soul, and as the Divinely appointed way of reconciliation with God. (*J. B. Smith, D.D.*) *Outward and inward religion*:—Does the prophet, in these words, really condemn all outward rites and sacrifices as such? All that the prophet seems to inveigh against was enjoined by the express commands of Almighty God. Neither Micah, nor Isaiah, nor any other prophet, had authority to dispense with the requirements of the Mosaic law. And our blessed Lord came “not to destroy the law.” The office of the prophets was clearly to prepare the way for a more spiritual religion than the law had given to Israel. Their mission was to perfect, or rather to prepare the way for perfection. And so they disparaged legal ordinances, not as useless or wrong, but because they were imperfect. The law was given for a particular use, to be a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ. But if men made it an end, instead of the way to an end, no wonder that the prophets lifted up their voices in warning against it. You are not necessarily arguing for the total disuse of a thing, because you maintain its proper use against its abuse. Christianity grafted a higher state of things upon what was already in existence. What the prophets say is, in effect, this,—“Your sacrifices are nothing in themselves, but connected with the truth they typify and shadow forth, they have a value and dignity. But while you practise injustice, cruelty, and pride, they are utterly valueless in the sight of God. You cannot please God with these alone, unless you are pleasing Him by the discharge of your social and moral duties.” The truth for us is, that no attention to the externals of religion can satisfy the demands of our Creator and Redeemer if it be not accompanied with a holy and virtuous life. (*J. C. Chambers, M.A.*) *God requires what He does*:—Taking the text as a revelation of the character of the Speaker Himself, we may say that God does in His own economy and sphere what He asks us to do in ours. What does this revelation do? 1. It does away with all ostentatious piety. Many of us would be glad to buy ourselves off from judgment. We may not put the question into words; it is not, therefore, less a question of the soul. What can I buy my liberty for? No amount of oil shall stand between me and release; no number of calves and rams shall for a moment deter me from paying the fine, if so be I can have the arrow drawn out of my heart, the poison withdrawn from my blood. But the Lord will not have all this. He does not want your gaiety but your simplicity; He does not want you to drive up to His door in chariot of gold and with steeds of fire, that He may receive your patronage; He sends word down to you by the first and humblest servant He lights upon,—Go and say all I want is that thou shalt do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God. This will take all the paint off our religion; this will deplete our decoration; this will leave us in ruins as to external appearance; but there are ruins that are true palaces. It will do away with all our ostentation of another kind than that which is merely physical, ornamental, or decorative; it will do away with all our intellectual contributions and displays of patronage in reference to the Cross. The Cross does not want your intellectual homage. 2. This revelation vindicates God from the charge of delighting in animal sacrifices. Does He love to see the smoking hecatomb? No; when He has required blood of the merely animal kind, it has always been symbolically, typically, or prefiguratively; it was a necessary part of the alphabet of spiritual lessons. He must begin His lessons where the scholar can begin. Everything the Lord did require of a physical and external kind was only in a temporary sense, the whole thought of God leading up to spirituality. “God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” 3. This revelation destroys the notion of piety by proxy. “My firstborn for my transgressions.” We are always willing to make away with other people; we are exceedingly liberal with the lives of others. We philosophise and theorise with admirable serenity, as if we had abundance of leisure in which to contemplate the tragedy of mankind, and we say, If a thousand perish, and ten thousand be saved, the gain is on the side of salvation. No! That is false; that is a misuse of the principle of majorities. There ought to be no man lost. And no man will be lost but the son of perdition. If after the Lord has dealt with a man by His providence and by His Spirit, and by all the mystery of the Cross, there is found in that man nothing but devil, he must go to his own place, and to his own company. But the Lord will do the handling upon a scale we cannot comprehend, and if the Lord gives up any human soul we may well say sadly, Amen. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 8. But He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good. — *Piety and true religion*. — I. WHAT IS GOOD? You may conceive of true piety as of a tree of life planted in the midst of Paradise, in the midst of the Church, spreading as it were its branches; whereof these three in the text are the fairest. Justice and uprightness of conversation; mercy and liberality; and humility. The sacrifices and ceremonious parts of God's worship were "good" but *ex instituto*, because God for some reason was pleased to institute and ordain them. In themselves they were neither good nor evil. When they were commanded, it was for the sake of that good effect which the wisdom of God could work out of them. That which is good in its own nature is always so. Piety and true religion are older than the world. Ceremonies are confined to time and place. The ceremonious part of religion was many times omitted, many times dispensed with, but this good which is here shown admitteth no dispensation. Mere outward performances of some parts of the law were not done out of any love to the law or the Lawgiver. Formal worshippers do not *love* the command; they obey for the sake of something else. Outward performances and formality in religion have the same spring and motive with our greatest and foulest sins. The same cause produceth them, the same considerations promote them, and they are carried to their end on the same wings of our carnal desires. This formality in religion standeth in no opposition with the devil and his designs, but rather advanceth his kingdom and enlargeth his dominion. This formality and insincerity is most opposite to God, who is a God of truth. Innocence, integrity, and mercifulness are the good man's sacrifice. They were from the beginning, and shall never be abolished. II. WHAT IS GOOD, AND ITS MANIFESTATIONS. View this good as it stands in opposition to the things of this world, which either our luxury or pride or covetousness has raised in their esteem and above their worth, and called good, as the heathen have done their vices. Good things are not in themselves, but only as they are subservient to the good in the text. Look at the good of the text. 1. As fitted and proportioned to our very nature. God built up man for this end alone, for this good;—to communicate His goodness to him, to make him "partaker of a Divine nature," to make him a kind of god upon the earth, to imprint His image upon him, by which according to his measure and capacity he might express and represent God. (1) By the knowledge not only of natural and transitory things, but also of those which pertain to everlasting life. (2) By the rectitude and sanctity of his will. (3) By the free and ready obedience of the outward parts and inward faculties to the beck and command of God. 2. As fitted to all sorts and conditions of men. Freedom and slavery, circumcision and uncircumcision, riches and poverty, quickness and slowness of understanding, in respect of this good, of piety and religion, are all alike. Religion is no peculiar, but the most common and the most communicative thing that is. This good is every man's good that will. 3. As lovely and amiable in the eyes of all. This is the glory of goodness and piety, that it striketh a reverence in those who neglect it, findeth a place in his breast whose hand is ready to suppress it, is magnified by those who revile it, and gaineth honour when it cannot win assent. 4. As filling and satisfying us. That which filleth a thing must be proportioned to it. "There is nothing in the whole universe that is taken for enough by any one particular man"; nothing in which the appetite of a single man can rest. Only this good here in the text can fit it, because it is fitted to it. 5. As giving a relish and sweet taste to the worst of evils which may befall us, whilst with love and admiration we look upon it. It maketh those things which are not good in themselves useful and advantageous to us. This good is open and manifest to all. It is published by open proclamation, as a law, which hath "a forcing and necessitating power." But if the object be so fair and visible, it may be asked, How cometh it to pass that it is hid from so many eyes, that there be so few that see it, or see it so as to fall in love with it and embrace it? Three hindrances are mentioned by Isidore of Pelusium. (1) Narrowness and defect of the understanding and judgment. (2) Sloth and neglect in the pursuit. (3) Improbability of men's manners, and a wicked and profane conversation. Then let us cleave fast to this good, and uphold it in its native and proper purity against all external rites and empty formalities; and, in the next place, against all the pomp of the world, against that which we call good when it maketh us evil. III. THE PROMULGATION OF THIS GOOD AS A LAW. "What doth the Lord require of thee?" This is as the publication of it, and making it a law. And His will is attended with power, wisdom, and love. 1. By

His power God created man, and "breathed into him a living soul." Made him as it were wax, to receive the impressions of a Deity, made him a subject capable of a law. As God createth, so He continues man and protects him. From this ocean of God's power naturally issueth forth His power of giving laws, of requiring what He may please from His creature. 2. As His absolute will is attended with power uncontrollable, so it is also with wisdom unquestionable. The "only wise God." His laws are like Himself, just and holy, pure and undefiled, unchangeable, immutable, and everlasting. As His wisdom is seen in giving laws, so it is in fitting the means to the end, in giving them virtue and force to draw us to a nearer vision and sight of God. 3. God's absolute will is attended with love. These are the glories of His will; He can do what He will; He will do it by the most proper and fitting means; and whatsoever He requireth is the dictate of His love. Consider the form in which God's requirements are presented, and the manner of proposing them. The prophet here does not "bid us do any great things." When men pretend they cannot do what God requires, they should change their language; for the truth is, they will not. It is not only easy, it is sweet and pleasant to do what God requireth. Obedience is the only spring from whence the waters of comfort flow, an everlasting foundation on which alone joy and peace will settle and rest. Take in view the substance of these words of the text. The word "Lord" is a word of force and efficacy; it striketh a reverence into us, and remembereth us of our duty and allegiance. As He is Lord paramount, and hath an absolute will, so His will is attended with power, with that power which made thee. I cannot name the several ways we stand obliged to this Lord. We may comprehend all in that axiom of the civilians, "We have as many engagements and obligations as there be instruments and writings betwixt us." IV. JUSTICE AND HONESTY. We are no sooner men, but we are debtors, under obligations to God, to men, to ourselves. To "do justly" is to give every man his own, not to lay hold on, or alienate or deceitfully withdraw, or violently force from any man that of which he is the lawful possessor. Private justice is of far larger extent than that which is public, which speaketh and acteth from the tribunal. Public justice steereth by no other compass but the laws of men; but this by the laws of nature and charity. Justice and honesty in its full shape and beauty is fastened upon its proper pillars, the law of nature, and the law of the God of nature. V. THE LOVE OF MERCY. Where there is no justice, there can be no mercy; and where there is no mercy, there justice is but gall and wormwood. Therefore in the Scripture they go hand in hand. Consider mercy—1. In the fruit it yieldeth. 2. In its root. VI. WALKING HUMBLY WITH GOD. Humility consisteth in placing us where we should be at the footstool of God. (*A. Farindon, B.D.*) *True religion a reasonable service*:—Virtue is essentially, and therefore inseparably connected with religion. It is not possible that a vitiated mind should have any proper relish for Divine truth. The animal man comprehendeth not the doctrines of the Divine Spirit. There is a strong and an insuperable reason in nature for this evident distinction between good and bad men in inquiries of religion, which is plainly this,—That every advance in celestial truth opens a prospect the most inviting to the virtuous, while the vicious man trembles at every ray of light which is let in on his disordered mind. It seems most natural to put the address of the text into the mouth of the king of Moab, in conversation with the prophet. Success against a numerous and victorious enemy engrossed the king's thoughts. For this purpose he had recourse to the God of Israel, whose aid he endeavours to engage by a profusion of offerings in every kind of his substance, or even, if all these should fail, with the life of his son. The answer is such as well suited a representative of the Creator of the universe. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good." Whatever answers entirely the end for which it was made is said, in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, particularly to be good. That must be good indeed which serves admirably the purpose for which it was designed by infinite wisdom. To man alone is reserved the happy privilege of dedicating voluntarily his powers to the ends for which they were at first bestowed. This is good for man. It is naturally to be expected of him, upon whom the dominion of this world and the reversion of the next is conferred, that he should regulate his conduct by the laws of nature and of God. This is his rational worship. Obedience, arising from any other cause than moral motives, would be the motion of a stone, not the duty of a man, and consequently incapable of being in any sense acceptable to God more than the rising vapour, or the falling dew. It is most reasonable to suppose, that

if ever the Creator of the world should vouchsafe to make any discovery of His intention relative to the conduct of man, the tables of revelation must contain a transcript of the laws of nature. "To do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God" is the sum and great outline of the whole duty of man. To preserve a solicitous attention to God's supreme direction, under a rational conviction of His paternal care; an equitable regard to the rights and interests of our brethren, His children; with a sensible concern for their infirmities and wants, a concern which must reach out its hand beyond the line of rigid justice. These offices are generally ranged by moralists under three different branches, as they relate to God, to mankind, and to the individual. However contracted or enlarged, this is the law of man; and this law is properly eternal and immutable, which is not so of any accidental or accessional appendages to religion. If this law were once as punctually observed as it is often plainly promulged, we should then have the same harmony in the moral as has always been in the natural world. (*T. Ashton, D.D.*) **What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?—Three things God wants of us:—**

**I. EXPLAIN THE WHOLE PASSAGE.** The prophet alludes to the story of Balak and Balaam. The lesson drawn from the story is this,—How unavailing are the most costly sacrifices, how far from being truly acceptable to God, when not attended with true piety, justice, mercy, and a good disposition of the heart in those that offer them. For this was the case of Balak in the history told us. We have in the text a sort of dialogue betwixt Balak and Balaam, represented to us in the prophetic way. It might seem that Balaam's advice was too good for him to give; but it is to be considered that Balaam's character was of a mixed nature, had something good and something bad in it. **II. RAISE OBSERVATIONS ON THE PASSAGE.** 1. This reference of one Scripture book to another is one of those internal marks of their truth and genuineness which, to men of true learning, gives great satisfaction in their study of the Sacred Scriptures. 2. How prone men must have been to rest in the mere outward performances of some acts of worship or devotion, to the neglect of those substantial duties of justice, mercy, and true piety; or that purity of heart and life which God more especially requires in those that worship Him. Learn here the harmony and agreement of God's dispensations to mankind from the beginning of the world. Resolve to learn and practise the good lesson of the text. (*C. Peters, M.A.*) **What God requires:—**God had shown by His law what is good; but the prophet adds that it is "to do justly, to love mercy (or kindness), and to be humbled before God." It is evident that, in the two first particulars, he refers to the second table of the law; that is, to "do justice, and to love mercy." Nor is it a matter of wonder that the prophet begins with the duties of love; for though in order the worship of God precedes these duties, and ought rightly to be so regarded, yet justice, which is to be exercised towards men, is the real evidence of true religion. The prophet therefore mentions justice and mercy, not that God casts aside that which is principal—the worship of His name; but he shows, by evidences or effects, what true religion is. Hypocrites place all holiness in external rites; but God requires what is very different; for His worship is spiritual. But as hypocrites can make a great show of zeal and solicitude in the outward worship of God, the prophets try the conduct of men in another way, by inquiring whether they act justly and kindly towards one another, whether they are free from all fraud and violence, whether they observe justice and show mercy. Micah adds, however, "And to be humble in walking with thy God." No doubt, as the name of God is more excellent than anything in the whole world, so the worship of Him ought to be regarded as of more importance than all those duties by which we prove our love towards men. The main object of the prophet was to show how men were to prove that they seriously feared God and His law: he afterwards speaks of God's worship. Condemned here is all pride, and also all confidence in the flesh: for whosoever arrogates to himself even the least thing, does in a manner contend with God as an opposing party. The true way then of walking with God is, when we thoroughly humble ourselves, yea, when we bring ourselves down to nothing: for it is the very beginning of worshipping and glorifying God when men entertain humble and low opinion of themselves. (*John Calvin.*) **God's requirements and God's gift:—**The prophet read off rightly God's requirements, but he had not anything to say about God's gifts. So his word is a half-truth. The great glory of Christianity is not that it reiterates or alters God's requirements, but that it

brings into view God's gifts. To "do justly," &c., is only possible through repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. I. GOD'S REQUIREMENTS. In the text are the plain, elementary duties of morality and religion. It covers substantially the same ground, in a condensed form, as does the Decalogue, only that Moses begins with the deepest thing and works outwards, as it were: Micah begins at the other end, and starting with the lesser, the more external, the purely human, works his way inwards to that which is the centre and the source of all. II. OUR FAILURE. There is not one of us that has come up to the standard. Micah's requirements come to every man that will honestly take stock of his life and his character, as the statement of an unreachd and unreachd ideal. If then it is true, that all have come short of the requirement, then there should follow a universal sense of guilt, for there is a universal fact of guilt, whether there be a sense of it or not. And there follows a hopelessness as to ever accomplishing that which is demanded of us. III. GOD'S GIFTS. The gift of God is Jesus Christ, and that meets all our failures. What a difference the conception of God as giving—rather than requiring—makes to the spirit in which we work! What a difference it brings into what we have to do. We have not to begin with effort, we have to begin with faith. First go to the giving God. Then accept His gift. And then say, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *On the extent of genuine religion*:—Most commonly the Scriptures press upon us, in the first instance, that supreme and affectionate faith towards God and Christ, which is the foundation of every Christian virtue. And then proceed to inculcate those pure principles, those holy tempers, and those good works which genuine faith in God and Christ will necessarily produce. Sometimes, however, solicitous to recommend the tree by a reference to the excellence of the fruit, they specify works in the outset; and then direct our views to that faith from which every acceptable work is to spring. Love to God and our Redeemer, whether mentioned first or last, must be the fountain from which every human duty is derived. Christ is the corner-stone of the belief and the practice of a Christian. Explain the different branches of human duty according to the order in which they are arranged by the prophet. I. "HE HATH SHOWED THEE, O MAN, WHAT IS GOOD." So clearly hath God made known whatever is necessary to salvation, that they who attain not salvation shall stand without excuse. In the breast of every man God hath implanted a natural conscience. And He has given us His written Word. On every man He bestows power to attain eternal life. He ensures to every faithful suppliant the all-sufficient influence of His Holy Spirit, not only that it may enlighten the mind to understand the Scriptures, but may also give grace to obey them. And He commands His ministers to preach the Gospel throughout the world to every creature. Then if you know not your duty, it is because you will not know it. If you perish through ignorance, it is because you prefer ignorance to understanding. II. WHAT THEN MUST WE DO TO BE SAVED? 1. You must do justly. You must be just in every part of every one of your proceedings. You must render to every man, cheerfully, and without delay, that which belongs to him. This rule obliges you—(1) On all occasions to speak the truth. For a lie is not only a breach of your duty to God, but is also a breach of your duty to your neighbour. (2) To be a faithful subject to the king: to submit to all who are entitled to authority over you. (3) To keep from injuring the person and restraining the liberty of your neighbour. (4) To avoid in any way injuring your neighbour's property. And the methods in which this may be done are numberless. 2. You are to "love mercy." Mercy signifies Christian charity in its largest sense. It includes everything which we mean by affection, benevolence, kindness, tenderness, mildness, meekness, patience, forgiveness; and by every other expression which implies goodwill to men. Observe the difference of the terms in which God requires of us first justice then mercy. We are to do justly; we are to love mercy. Justice admits of no degrees. If we are not perfectly just, we are unjust. But mercy is in its own nature capable of gradations. One person may be more merciful than another. Thou shalt love mercy then. Thy heart shall be constantly set on deeds of mercy, they shall be thy study; they shall be a delight unto thee. 3. You are to "walk humbly with God." To walk with God signifies to be a faithful and zealous servant of God. We are to bring our whole hearts, as well as our actions, into subjection to the Divine will. Are you in prosperity? Walk humbly with your God. Let the Giver be glorified in His gifts. Are you in distress? Walk humbly with your God.

Evidently then, to the Jew and to the Christian, the sum and substance of religion have ever been the same. (*Thomas Gisborne, M.A.*) *Root principles*:—I. THE ROOT PRINCIPLE OF ALL DUTY. "Do justly." It is said that in some parts of Africa and South America certain races of men have been found with apparently no sense of justice in them, and of course no religion. It would be interesting to know how far the one is the cause or the consequence of the other. It may be said they have lost their religion, and with it all sense of justice, or, having lost all sense of justice, there is no groundwork or foundation for any religious principle to operate upon. The question comes before us in a practical shape. How are the wild creatures of our streets to be caught and tamed and domesticated; how are the principles of justice and morality to be imparted to them—in other words, how are they to be taught to "do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God"? In the Hebrew law God laid a foundation, in justice and morality, for the Gospel; a foundation on which He afterwards reared the superstructure of a glorious Church, whose walls are salvation, and whose gates are praise. On this common platform of justice and morality we all meet, acknowledging the law of the God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all. II. THE ROOT PRINCIPLE OF ALL RELIGION. "Love mercy." We are not only to practise this virtue, and imitate this attribute of our Father in the heavens, but we are to "love mercy." To love it we must see it in all its beauty and Divine perfection, and this we can only do in Jesus Christ. He is the mercy of God to us. III. THE ROOT PRINCIPLE OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE. "Walk humbly with thy God." To walk with Him humbly and reverently, as He reveals Himself in the pages of His Word, and in the person and work of His Son, is the privilege of His believing children. This humble walk with God is one of light, and joy, and triumph. The entrance is pleasant, so is the road; the company; and the end. (*R. Balgarnie.*) *Of the great duties of natural religion, with the ways and means of knowing them*:—In these words you have—1. An inquiry which is the best way to appease God when He is offended. 2. The way that men are apt to take in this case. 3. The course which God Himself directs to, and which will effectually pacify Him. Dwell on this third point. I. THOSE SEVERAL DUTIES WHICH GOD HERE REQUIRES OF US. The Jews reduced all the duties of religion to these three heads, justice, mercy, and piety: under the first two, comprehending the duties which we owe to one another; and under the third, the duties which we owe to God. II. THE WAYS AND MEANS BY WHICH GOD HATH MADE KNOWN THESE DUTIES TO US, AND THE GOODNESS AND THE OBLIGATION OF THEM. 1. By a kind of natural instinct. 2. By natural reason. 3. By the general vote and consent of mankind. 4. By external revelation. 5. By the inward dictates and motions of God's Spirit upon the minds of men. (*J. Tillotson, D.D.*) *The Lord's requirements*:—I. THE DUTIES EXPRESSED BY THE PROPHET. They are most reasonable; there is nothing in them but what every enlightened mind will most cordially agree to. 1. To "do justly." Not only to think and speak justly, but to act so—to act with honesty, integrity, and fidelity, without injuring, defrauding, oppressing or tempting to evil any one. To "do justly" is in every way to befriend your neighbour. 2. To "love mercy." To take pleasure in acts of compassion, forgiveness, and kindness. The love of mercy is a very different thing from any act of professed mercy. Real mercy lies in the motive of kindness, and the love of it lies in the gratification felt in another's benefit. The love of mercy is a mighty impulse to its exercise. The love of mercy gives an intensity to it. 3. To "walk humbly with God." This indicates a teachable, submissive, thankful, patient, and dependent spirit; a close communion with God; and a progressive knowledge of the character and majesty of the Deity. As this knowledge dawns upon the soul, so does the soul sink into self-abasement. The great characteristic of walking with God on earth is trust in Christ. II. THE MOTIVES FURNISHED IN THE TEXT FOR THE DISCHARGE OF THESE DUTIES. 1. One motive is derived from the exhibition of the Lord's goodness. 2. Another from the authority of the requirement. 3. Another from the nature and reasonableness of the things required. (*W. D. Horwood.*) *God's requirements*:—The consummate result of all education consists in the power of applying a few scientific principles. Out of one clear rule or method spring all the products of the branching and luxuriant science of figures. So the highest art and achievement of man's life is but the flowering of one or two germinal truths. The requirements of the text are easy to understand—worth whole tons of sermons and dissertations. And yet these

are precepts which are not yet made practical in the hearts of men. It is the application of the theory that is requisite. These words of the text point out the entire essence of religion—vital, evangelical religion. Some people entertain a dread of plain propositions. They do not like to have religion put in simple words; they want it left with some vagueness and complexity mingled with it. In plain words, they suspect it is only good morality. They miss the vitality of religion, as they call it. There is nothing in these words concerning terms of salvation, or faith in the atonement. But we may be sure that all the essence and vitality of religion is here. Christ is here; because who can do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with his Maker, without that communion with Christ Jesus, and that inspiration of His Spirit, by which alone we are strengthened and guided to do these things? And what an advantage there is in having such a condensed statement of religion! It clears up things; it is like getting a glimpse of a star in heaven, and taking our latitude and longitude, when we have been drifting about on the dark waves of doubt. The words of the text set forth no light affair for our performance. The essence of all right doing, right feeling, and right living is here indicated. The text expresses nothing less than all morality, all philanthropy, all religion; the essence of all vital religion, and the highest spiritual life. 1. The foundation principle of morality is involved in the precept, "Do justly." It is a compact summary of all social duty. It abolishes all standards of mere selfish advantage and worldly policy, commanding us to do the just, the true, the righteous thing, whatever may come of it in the way of personal or temporal consequences. Be just, in thought, deed, word, hand, brain, heart. What, then, is the proper idea of justice? There is a vast difference between law and justice—between human enactments and God's everlasting requirements. Is your idea of justice that which is merely legal? Or is it to set up your individual will, your selfish standard, regulated only by parchment laws, no matter what the spirit of civilisation or the general good demands? With others justice only means the stern thing—eye for eye, &c. But in this way a man gets a good chance to deify his own passions, and think he is doing God service. Sometimes men reverse this a very little. They manage, by some sting of reproach, or some obnoxious word, to get their revenge. They are after their revenge all the while. But justice is a merciful thing. It may be severe, it is never merciless. True justice is the justice of charity. In order to do justly we should construe the conduct of others as we would have our own conduct construed by them. The text absorbs so much of our being as is occupied in doing. "Do justly." It is a lesson that God has set in two words, but it may take man all his life to learn it. All action should be just action. 2. A requisition which calls for all the life and power of the most genuine philanthropy "Love mercy." Here comes in the element of feeling coupled with doing. In all good and true performances there must be affection. Out of philanthropy springs justice, as, in its highest form, that springs out of the ocean-depths of God's love. The grandest justice in this world is that which is conceived by the spirit of an earnest, tolling humanity. For all good and noble ends we ought to love mercy. There can be no beneficent power in this world that does not spring from love. They who have the real love of mercy in them, rejoice when they can palliate. You never can lift men up, and bring them into God's kingdom, by any other way than loving them and implicating yourself with them. And mercy is the essence of all love. If you want to love your fellowmen, have mercy on them. Loving mercy is the spring of all right feeling, as doing justly is of all right being. 3. The final requirement is to be religious—to walk humbly with thy God. Neither to be just nor merciful is the primal thing, for we cannot do so unless we come into communion with the Spirit of Almighty God. We cannot do a right thing save as we are inspired to do it. This is the very essence of all true religion—to walk humbly with, or before God. The religion of the Bible makes us walk with God. It gives us a sense of a personal relation to Him. The Bible makes God a kindred personality. We become like Him, and we obtain therefore in ourselves the real springs and powers of all good feeling and all good action. Then learn that there is something required which is more than mere exercise of the intellect—it is the surrender and sanctification of the will and the affections. A surrendering, transfiguration, regeneration of the heart that brings men into a position in which they can walk humbly with God, do justly, and love mercy. God is the inspiration of all human excellence, the quickener of all human thought; and when we can walk with Him, we do not need anything else; we can walk with

Him everywhere. (*E. H. Chapin.*) *The last gospel of science* :—Prof. Huxley calls this verse “the perfect ideal of religion.” And he says that “the true function of science is not to set herself in antagonism to religion, but to deliver her from the heathen survivals, the bad philosophy, and the science falsely so called, which have obscured her lustre and impaired her vigour. Consider what this “perfect ideal” is, and what it involves. The prophet, whether Micah or Balaam, sums up the whole duty of man in doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. Can we accept this summary as setting forth the very substance of religion? Yes, if we are allowed to take the words of Micah in the sense in which he used them. Taken simply by themselves, indeed, and apart from their prophetic use, they postulate the existence of God, and of a God whose character is the standard and rule of the justice and mercy we are bound to show. A God, therefore, to whom we owe a constant obedience, with whom we are to walk in a living sympathy and communion, and toward whom our proper attitude is one of profound humility and devotion. What did a Hebrew prophet mean by a “just” man, if not a man who walked in all the commandments of the Hebrew law blameless? Whence did this man learn that justice must be tempered with mercy but from the self-same law? What was his standard of compassion and charity but the charity of God? Assuming the words of the text to mean only what a modern man of science would use them to mean, have you considered how much they involve; how difficult it is to apply them to the complex and often conflicting claims of human life; and how much more difficult it is to render them a living and constant obedience? Is it always easy to ascertain what “justice” demands? The fatal defect of all the ethical schemes put forward by those who reject revealed religion and yet are fain to find some substitute for it is that they take no account, or not sufficient account, of the fact and power of sin. We who believe in God and Christ contend that to men defiled and weakened by sin, only faith in God, revealed in Christ, will enable them to do their duty, and to embody the perfect ideal in their lives. (*Samuel Cox, D.D.*) *A great question answered* :—Without controversy the highest, noblest element in man is his moral nature, with all that the word involves. A man’s highest destiny can never be achieved if this element of his nature be neglected. To gain this end of conformity to our highest nature in moral and spiritual matters, we need to know the law of our being on this subject. The greatest practical question man can ask is, How shall I live? What shall I do to meet the highest destiny of which I am capable, both for time and eternity? This question the prophet answers. It can be answered in no other way. No man can answer it out of the depth of his own judgment. It cannot be answered by conscience, nor by expediency. The Church cannot answer it. Upon no human foundation can we build anything solid in ethics. See the completeness of the prophet’s answer. 1. The answer is practical. 2. It covers the whole ground. Two conclusions—(1) Let us as individuals take no man’s authority in matters of duty. (2) National security and prosperity depend upon the use and teaching of the Bible. (*C. V. Anthony, D.D.*) *The threefold law* :—This is the climax of an outburst of God’s rebuke and expostulation. He stoops to plead with His rebellious people. Here are two characteristics of the natural heart. 1. An insinuation that God is a hard, austere Master. 2. A readiness to yield all excepting the heart itself. Notice that these three commands are linked together. The triple command cannot be dismembered. Notice that the order is logical, not that of historical development. Justice is the root, mercy the foliage, and godliness the fruit. I. **DEAL JUSTLY.** There may be a noisy zeal in religion while the scant measure, the wicked balance, and the deceitful weight are used. II. **LOVE MERCY.** The whole New Testament unfolds this idea. This is to be not an occasional act, but a habit; not in exercise when under pressure, but growing from an inward impulse. III. **WALK HUMBLY WITH GOD.** Lit. it is “bow low.” Thus we feel an invisible presence and power, and have fellowship with the Unseen. Walking with God involves five particulars. 1. Choice of Him. 2. Sense of His actual presence. 3. Prayerfulness. 4. Sympathy. 5. Constant dependence. Two remarks—(1) This verse is commonly quoted by the enemies of Christ, mere moralists. But it is one of the most searching portions of the Word, and proves that by the law no flesh is justified, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. (2) Those who have fled to the Cross for refuge will find in this verse a new incentive to holiness. It is by a blameless life we are to illustrate to the world the genuineness of our faith and professions of godliness.

Let us not frustrate the grace of God, but lovingly heed this threefold law, that we may at once prove to ourselves, and to the world about us, that we are truly the children of God. (*J. H. Worcester, D.D.*) *The great question of humanity* :— Apart from revelation man can only know of God through man. And so the guess of man concerning God in any age reveals that age's heart. The answers given to the question, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord?" greatly differ. Through them all the desire is manifestly to atone for bygone sin. Yet when we examine the offerings of atonement which man has laid upon the seen and unseen altars of the world, we cannot help exclaiming: What were sin if gifts like these would purchase cleansing? What were man if gifts like these could give him peace? And what were God if gifts like these could call forth His forgiving love? God's answer to the deepest question of humanity reveals God's character. He does not behold our efforts, of atonement with complacency, as though we were climbing feebly up a righteous way. God regards our offerings of atonement with exalted scorn. We have in the text a great ethical doctrine to which the heart of universal man assents without reserve. All men feel, and ever will feel, that whosoever doeth these things shall doubtless live by means of them. If a man will "do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before his God," all heavens that are worthy of the name will open wide before him. We have here a scheme of holiness in three degrees. 1. If we would stand before the High God we must "act justly." Justly in every relation of life. And we must be just to God, "presenting our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service." 2. We must "love mercy." In heaven, maybe, only justice is required. On this sin-stained earth mere justice, if it stood alone, may emphasise the evils that are here. We must add mercy to our justice. A merciful man will be honoured by his fellows as long as aught of the Divine remains within humanity. Mercy is a tree whose root is pity, and its branches stretch with healing leaves and refreshing fruits above all the helpless, and suffering, and needy, of every grade and kind. Blessed are they who are merciful on earth, for they shall obtain mercy when they stand before God's throne. 3. We must "walk humbly with God." The more we understand the meaning of the two words "God" and "man," the more daring seems the affirmation that they may walk together. To say that God will walk with man is to clothe God with ineffable tenderness. And to say that man can walk with God is to clothe men with sublimity. Surely the great mystery of the religious life is this, that God can walk and talk with me as though He and I were the only beings in the universe. But we must walk humbly with our God, so humbly that we shall commit all our ways to Him; so humbly that we shall never murmur at distress, knowing that all things work together for good: so humbly that we shall never worry about the things to come, remembering that "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." All sorts and conditions of men have quoted this text approvingly. But all have not quoted it with equal fairness to themselves. The man whose inward piety has not as yet transformed his outward life, is apt to slur over the words, "do justly." The man who takes his stand upon his own integrity is apt to glide too swiftly over the words "love mercy." The man whose faith is limited to sensuous things is apt to read only in a poetic way the words "walk humbly with thy God." Refrain from doing justly, and the love of mercy soon will pass away. Refrain from doing justly, and from loving mercy, and the consciousness of the Omnipresent God will fade. And refrain from walking humbly with the Lord, and the love of mercy and desire for justice soon will disappear. All have not quoted this text with equal fairness to the evangelical faith. One can safely challenge the world to produce a single man who has fulfilled the whole of this counsel, apart from the shed blood and broken body of our Lord. (*J. Moffat Logan.*) *Religion and religionism* :— These words express the true object of all revelation, which is to make men good; they express the inmost meaning of all life, which is the attainment of holiness. Unmistakable in their plainness, these words sweep away the cobwebs of confusion of ages. Frankly accepted, they would be an eternal cure for all the maladies which in age after age have afflicted religion. They show that the aim of religion is to elevate character, to purify conduct, to promote goodness; they sum up the mighty spiritual teaching of the prophets; they herald the essential moral revelation of the Son of God. The word "religion" properly means certain opinions, and certain ordinances; a set of doctrines; or a mode of worship. Now, outward ordinances, when their importance is exaggerated, tend to become burdensome

and superstitious; and religious opinions, when maintained by ambition and self-interest, have deluged the world with crime. To avoid confusion, however, I will call this "religionism," not "religion." A stream of religionism flows through the Old Testament. The Judaic code has neither value nor significance in itself, but solely in so far as it may be a help or adjunct to higher things. Religionism, when it ends in opinions or observances, is worthless. All that was poorest and most pagan in Judaism eagerly seized on this element in the sacred books. Side by side with this stream of religious ordinance flows, through most of the Old Testament, and through all the New, the richer, purer, deeper stream of righteousness. And righteousness expresses, and alone expresses, the essence of true religion; for true religion is a good mind and a good life. Ask a dogmatist "What must I do to be saved?" and he will give you some elaborate metaphysical definition. Ask a party religionist, and he will say that you must hear the Church. Ask your Lord and Master, and He will say, "If thou wouldest enter into life, keep the commandments." See how the prophets spoke; the New Testament so completely endorses their spiritual ideal that, while every page and verse of it breathes of righteousness, you scarcely find any religionism at all, scarcely any organisation, ritual, or dogmatic creed. What is the sum total of the moral revelation of Christ? It goes into two words—Love: Serve. The teaching of every one of His apostles was the very antithesis of the spirit of externalism. According to them, "he that doeth righteousness is born of God." To preach these principles is to preach the very essential heart of the scriptural morality; but yet it is a preaching that invariably makes religionists very angry. For its importance lies in this, that it is the very touchstone which discriminates between true and false religion, and which sweeps away, at any rate, the exaggerated importance attached to the adjuncts, the scaffoldings, the traditions and ordinances of men, which to so many make up the whole of their religion. What God wants is not so-called orthodoxy, but "truth in the inward parts." What will avail you is not any amount of religiosity, but righteousness. The reason why it is necessary to insist on this is that eternal pharisaism of the human heart, which prefers formalism to spirituality, and which causes a constant recrudescence of Judaism in the heart of Christianity. The lesson for us is clear. Our religious opinions may be false; our party shibboleths may be but the blurred echoes of our ignorance or our incompetence; our private interpretations of Scripture may be no better than grotesque nonsense in their presumptuous falsity, and all this may not greatly matter, if by some Divine deliverance from our opinionated follies, we still do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. (Dean Farrar.) *The essentials of religion*:—It is a great thing to get down to simple principles. One of the hopeful signs of our times is a growing disposition to do this. In science and in theology alike, we are recognising simplicity where we once imagined that there was wonderful complexity. I rejoice that, in theology, we are getting down to fundamental Christian truths, which will ultimately make more clear man's duties and God's love. This was, in part, the mission of Christianity. God's Temple of Truth could hardly be seen for the human rubbish which had accumulated about it, and Jesus Christ came to sweep it away. You remember how He did so. His Sermon on the Mount must have amazed all His hearers. It went down to the very roots of human life and duty, and was a fresh revelation of truth. His disciples followed in His footsteps. Even St. Paul, who was by far the most subtle-minded of them, analysed Christianity, and showed that it consisted in three things—"faith, hope, love,"—and finally he reduced even these to one, saying, "Love is the fulfilling of the law." The fact is, that the nearer men are to God, the simpler becomes their religious life and their religious thought. Look at this text. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good." Micah could fairly say this to every one in Israel; but much more forcibly should the words come home to us, who have heard the teaching and known the life of Jesus, Son of God, and yet Son of Man. I. WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE OF THEE BUT TO "DO JUSTLY"? The reference of the prophet is to justice between man and man, which was but seldom seen in his day. Happily, our law courts are, on the whole, among our noblest institutions. But how about business affairs? What of the conflicts between capital and labour? Is all as it should be there? II. THE SECOND REQUIREMENT IS TO "LOVE MERCY." The philanthropist in the Church may be the screw in business. To do justly is to do what right requires, and to love mercy is to do what love requires. III. THE LAST REQUIREMENT IS WALK HUMBLY WITH THY GOD. This is not the top-stone of

the edifice, but its foundation. Walk humbly with God, and you will walk honestly and kindly among your neighbours. (*Alfred Rowland, LL.B., B.A.*) *The essentials of a religious life*:—They have always been the same. Our Lord has really added nothing to these words of Micah. What He has done has been to put these truths in a new setting, to read them with a wider and deeper application; to embody them in His own life, and thus to enforce them with greater authority; to give us a new motive for obedience, and greater power to obey. What does the Cross say to us but “do justly,” “love mercy,” and “walk humbly”? The essentials of a religious life are practical rather than theoretical. It appears that the Jews of Micah’s time were most anxious about the right form of worship. Yet, what does Micah declare to have been the common life of these people? He takes us into their houses, and shows them to be full of dishonest gains. He takes us into their shops, and shows us the scant measure, the short weights, the false balances. Into their law courts, and we find the judge selling his verdict for a bribe. Right through society there was the same hollow deception. “The inhabitants have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouths.” So the prophet has to tell them this,—It is not a question of right worship for you, but of right conduct. Not how you should sacrifice, but how you should live. There are certain duties necessary because God has commanded them, and there are other duties which God commands because they are necessary. There are two ways in which men, nowadays, make too much of the non-essentials of religion. There is the ritualist, who exaggerates the importance of ceremonial. We become ritualists of a sort when we think the claims of God are met by coming to services and meetings regularly. The essence of religion is not in those agreeable emotions you feel in listening to a stirring sermon. It lies in honest dealing, in kind actions, in that humble, obedient spirit which springs from a realisation of the presence of God. Its sphere is principally not in the Church, but outside—in the world and in the home. The time and place in which to show that you are religious men and women is when you start upon your work in the morning, when you buy and when you sell, when you spend an hour in recreation, quite as much as when you pray or when you teach. Another way in which some make too much of the non-essentials of religion is on the side of doctrine. Men speak as if they wanted all difficult questions settled out of hand before they will become the servants of God. There are difficulties in the Bible, but they belong to the intellect, and not to the practical life. We need not underestimate the importance of evangelical doctrine, but unless the doctrines of grace bear practical results, it is doubtful whether we are truly acquainted with them. These are the essential things—1. “Do justly.” (1) There is a justice of which the civil law is the guardian. (2) A justice of which custom is the guardian. (3) The only justice which will satisfy God is that of which conscience is the guardian. This will teach the thief to make restitution; this will not truckle to underhand tricks; this will respect the claims of others even when it is most seeking to advance its own. 2. “Love mercy.” Many fail here. They are as upright as a marble column, and as cold and hard. The instincts of our better nature should teach us to be merciful. God urges us to show mercy one to another on the ground that we are all debtors alike to Him. 3. “Walk humbly with thy God.” Many so-called moral men, and kind men, are nevertheless godless men. What is it to lead a godless life? It is to spend the life apart from God. This is the essence of all religious life, making God a reality, and acting as in His presence. (*Frank Hall.*) *The three great human duties*:—Misconceptions of the truth are as dangerous as the reception of falsehood. This text is one by which proud, self-sufficient, and ungodly mortals are accustomed to lull their consciences to sleep, and their guilty fears to rest, saying, “Peace, peace, when there is no peace.” They say, “that if a man do the best he can, God will require no more.” I. WHAT IS IT TO DO JUSTLY? 1. Is it not to keep a just weight, and a just measure; to be true and just in all your dealings? 2. To do justly, there must be no extortion, no speculation, no forestalling, no monopoly, no oppression. 3. The just man hates every false way; he keeps far from a false matter; he raises no false report; he is no false accuser, takes no false oath, bears no false report. 4. If you do justly, it will be by your God as well as by your neighbour. If just towards God, you will have “respect unto all His commandments.” You will justify all the gracious dispensations of heaven. Can you bless God for your creation so long as you make, not God, but self, the end of your creation? Can you say

that you justly bless God for your preservation so long as you do not bless Him for your salvation? It is impossible that you can justly bless God for the inestimable gift of His dear Son while you refuse to hear Him. If you are just with God, you will be constant in your attendance in His house—the place where His honour dwelleth. II. WHAT IS IT TO LOVE MERCY? 1. If you love mercy, you will “break off your sins by righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor.” 2. You will be merciful in all your intercourse with mankind. 3. If you love mercy, and show it to others, you will crave it for yourself. 4. If you love mercy, your walks will be walks of mercy, your visits will be visits of mercy, and your inquiries will be inquiries of mercy. III. WHAT IS IT TO WALK HUMBLY WITH GOD? 1. If you do, you will be of a teachable spirit. 2. You will have a mean opinion of yourself. 3. You will not be carried away with high-sounding words in sermons or in prayers: you will love the plain, homely, honest truth. 4. If you walk humbly with God, you will walk humbly before Him. 5. You will walk humbly with Him in secret; your humility will not be a mere show of humility. 6. If you walk with your God, you will walk much with His dear Son. 7. You will enjoy much of His presence, the lifting up of the light of His countenance. 8. You will neither hide the talents He has committed to your charge in a napkin, nor lock up His kindnesses in your bosom, but will make known His goodness to the sons of men. Thankfulness will ever dwell with humility. (*John Clementson.*) *God's great demonstrations and demands*:—“Do justly.” There is a justice of expiation, to break off our sins by repentance. A justice of compensation, by meet repairing our public injuries. A justice of vindication, to confirm our laws by inflicting such just penalties and restraints as some men's insolvencies have deserved. There is the alloy of mercy, or moderation, compassion, and tenderness, by way of pardon, indemnity and oblivion. There is added the root and crown of all virtues and graces, humility; which makes you surest of God's acceptance and benediction. Humility is the salt that must be mingled with every sacrifice; a sweet perfume that must attend every oblation. It is the glory of all human and Divine perfections; the security of justice, and the sanctuary of mercy. If you intend to walk with God, and hope that God will go along with you, you must not only deny, you must so far utterly renounce, and annihilate yourselves, as not to trust in or seek yourselves, but the living God. I. THE DEMONSTRATOR OR SHEWER. “The Lord.” 1. The rise or occasion of this demonstration. Find this in verses 6, 7. Observe the vaunting questions and presumptuous postulations of a company of formal hypocrites. 2. The credit and authority of this Demonstrator, which makes His words, both for the truth and goodness of them, most worthy to be believed, received, and obeyed. He is the great and inexhaustible fountain of all power and order, natural, civil, spiritual. He is not more able by His wisdom, than willing by His indulgence and love, to instruct mankind in the way that is best for him. He has showed us the most infallible and immutable rules of justice, mercy, and humility. II. THE THING DEMONSTRATED. Denoted under three grand heads—1. Consider justice, mercy, and humility together, and conjointly. Note the sanctity of these grand demands. The shortness of the discourse concerning them. Their perspicuity, though stated so briefly. The order and situation of the particulars. Justice comes first; then mercy; and then humility. The juncture of these three is inobservable, because they are inseparable where they are sincere. The common epithet, or predicate, to all of them. “The Lord hath showed thee what is good.” 2. Consider them separately. (1) In the subject or substance, spirit and quintessence, of each of them. What is justice? Some measure it by their power; others by their wills; yet others by their fancies and imaginations. Some measure justice by necessity; some measure justice by forcible power and possession; as if might were right. Justice must be considered, in its fountain and original, the wisdom and will of God; in the grand cistern and conservatory, which is the sovereign and legislative power in every society and polity. Justice is considerable in the pipes and conduits of all subordinate magistrates. There is a justice due to God, to ourselves, and to others. What is mercy? By mercy God is, as it were, greater than Himself: a denier of Himself, and a sider with our interests. All our hopes and happiness are founded upon, and bound up in, the mercy of God. Mercy in God is a perfection of goodness, by which He moderates the severity of His justice toward sinful mankind. Mercy in man is an affection by which he lays to heart the misery of another, and is disposed to relieve them. Mercy is an inseparable attendant to human justice; yea, and to the Divine. Peni-

tents are the proper objects of mercy. There are but few cases wherein the *summum jus* is required. In most cases there is possibility of remission, and moderation. What is humility? It is a most Christian grace, no less than a most manly virtue, becoming all men,—in the sense of their common infirmities, and mortal condition; in the conscience of their many sins and deserved miseries; in the reflection upon their best actions, full of failings and defects. Pride destroys and sours all the good, even of justice and mercy, that any man doth. Pride hath its reward only from itself, or the vain world. Consider the predicates or actions applied to each of these three terms. Consider justice—1. Materially, as to the merit of the cause or person. 2. Regularly, as to the law prescribed by God or man, not by private opinion. 3. Authoritatively, by due order and commission, derived to thee from the lawful supreme power. Do justice as to the inward form, principle, or conscience, for justice sake, not for ambition. Do justice in practice; impartially, speedily, in due measure and proportion, with humanity and compassion to the person. “Love mercy.” Observe the order; justice must be done before mercy. It is presumptuous to do unjustly under pretence of showing mercy. Observe the emphasis of the word “love” put to mercy. Justice must be done as a task enjoined. Mercy must be loved and delighted in. This love is conjoined to mercy as a thing in itself most desirable, as most beneficial to ourselves and others, as obedience to God’s commands, and in imitation of the Divine perfections. Love mercy for the advance of all graces; as the best sign of the best religion, remembering that sin exposeth thee to misery; in order to confirm thy hope, and increase thy reward in glory. “Walk humbly.” Be ready and prepared to go with God. The words imply a freedom and familiarity of conversation which cannot be without two are agreed; nor can there be agreement with God, except where the heart is humble. Walking is a social and friendly notion, and it is progressive and parallel, in a way of conformity, not contrariety. The more a man walks with God, the more he will grow in humility. 3. To whom God shows, and of whom He requires, these great lessons and duties. “Thee, O man.” (1) All mankind. (2) Those who enjoy the light of God’s Word. (3) Each in His particular station. 4. The manner of God’s showing and requiring these duties of all sorts of men, in all occasions, times, and dealings. God hath showed it to mankind in those inward principles of right reason, and that standard of justice which is set up in each man’s own heart. By the letters patent of the Holy Scriptures. By the greatest exemplars of holy men in all degrees. With frequent obtestation, threatening punishment. (*John Gauden, D.D.*) *God’s claims on man*.—1. Has God any claims upon you? Has He a right to require anything of you, if it should seem good to Him to do so? 2. Does He exercise this right? Has He actually required anything? In the Bible you find God everywhere speaking imperatively to His creatures, giving them not merely counsels, but authoritative counsels and commands. 3. What are the claims which God asserts? What doth the Lord require of thee? Thy supreme love, thy choicest affections, thy whole heart, and whatever else such a love disposes to and draws after it. God has given rules for the regulation not only of our external conduct, and all of it, but of our speech, our thoughts, our motives, our principles of action, and of all the various modifications of feeling. 4. What is the character of these claims of God? (1) They are reasonable. Their reasonableness may be inferred from their reality. God is incapable of making an unreasonable demand. (2) They are particular. They are made on you as an individual, and not in any social capacity. God addresses His commands singly to each one. (3) His claims are paramount. In every comparison they deserve to have the pre-eminence; in every competition the preference. (4) His claims are impartial. God asserts them with respect to every intelligent being, and with respect to each the same. (5) His claims are unalterable. We may change, but not they. Our duty is the same, whatever our character. God cannot lower His demands to adapt them to our inclinations or disabilities. Then how have we treated His claims? Have we done as He has required? Remember, there is a penalty threatened on him who disregards them. The claims of justice are prior to the claims of mercy. You ought to comply with His explicit and authoritative claims upon you. And you ought to comply at once, and fully. (*W. Nevins, D.D.*) *The requirements of the Gospel*.—There have been considerable disputes in those countries where the Scriptures were unknown with regard to man’s chief or sovereign good. Religion is man’s chief good. It is good in its origin; it cometh down from the Father of lights; it is good in its nature; it is

good in its tendency and in its end. It is man's chief good. There is nothing in it but what is most fit and proper and suitable to man, whether considered in himself, or in his relation to God or to His fellow-creatures. Religion is a satisfying good. It possesses the power of healing all the various disorders of the human mind and heart; the power to console, comfort, exhilarate, and delight the redeemed spirit of man, in all the circumstances through which, in the providence of God, he may be called to pass in this world. It is a universal good, not restricted to any class of persons, to the persons of any one age, or country, or locality. It is an everlasting good; as vast as the necessities and capacities of the human spirit. The table of the law which instructs us in our duty to God is generally the first presented to us in Scripture. In the text the order is reversed. It is required that every man do justly to his fellow-man. We are required to act with the exactest integrity and uprightness towards our fellow-creatures in all respects, and towards every one of our fellow-creatures. Keep the Golden Rule. But we are not to do justice strictly; we are also to love mercy. Mercy is ever ready to listen to complaints, to relieve wants, to pardon offences, to cover faults. Mercy delights to imitate the Father of mercies; to do good, according to its power, to all mankind, under all circumstances. There must not only be merciful conduct and language, but a merciful heart within us. "Walk humbly with thy God." This means at least three things—reconciliation, affection, and intercourse. 1. Reconciliation. Two cannot walk together except they be agreed. There are three classes of persons with whom God can never be agreed. The immoral, the unbeliever, and the worldly minded. 2. Affection. All God's people love Him. And we know that God loves His people. 3. Intercourse. The intercourse between God and His people is as real as any intercourse is which takes place between any spirits in heaven, or any interchange of thought and of kindness which takes place between men on earth. Humility is essential to walking with God. The margin reads, "and to humble thyself to walk with thy God." Before any of us can walk with God we must be humbled under His mighty hand; and the more deeply and thoroughly we humble ourselves, the more closely we shall walk with God. I speak not of that humility which is woven into the character by artifice and cunning; but of that humility which is wrought in the inmost soul by the finger of God. There are two doctrinal heresies against which our text is opposed. 1. The heresy of those who seek to be justified by works. 2. The heresy of those who think to be justified by a faith which is a mere sentiment, and never does any works. (V. Ward.) *The inner meaning of the Divine requirements:*—These words have often been quoted with respectful admiration by persons who look upon what they suppose to be the theology of the Bible with indifference or contempt. The philosopher and the philanthropist are to be invited to extricate these great maxims from the overlying mass, to give them the prominence which has been given to those dogmas which are so intricate, and which lead to evil results or to none. Most cheerfully do I take these words of the prophet as my guide; they are worthy of all the honour which has been paid them. To do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly,—does God indeed require all this of me? If I may not learn how I can be just and merciful and humble, to assure me that I am bound to be so is an intolerable oppression. Men have felt this at all times; they are feeling it now. And the feeling, though it is mixed with much contradiction, is not a false one. They would have a right to complain of us, and of the Bible, if we came and delivered to them a set of precepts—the best precepts in the world—and did not tell them whence they were to derive the strength for obeying the precepts. Our morality must have some deep underground basis to rest upon. What is that basis? I answer, you must seek it in that very theology of the Bible which you have supposed it so great a deliverance to cast aside. There, and there only, will you find the protection against the narrow, local, artificial dogmas of priests, and the dry, hard, scarcely less artificial, often even more heartless, dogmas of philosophers. There you will find the protection against the flimsy, conventional morality of classes and ages; there you will find a meaning for the words, "Do justly, love mercy, walk humbly," and a power to translate them from words into life. 1. The Lord requires thee to "do justly." The whole question of the ground of moral obligation is raised by this sentence. It seems to tell me that some One is commanding a certain course of action which I am bound to follow because He commands it. And this course of action is described by the phrase "doing justly." Is justice, then, nothing

in itself? Are actions made right because a certain power insists that they shall be performed? The main controversy between the mere priest and the mere philosopher, so far as it bears on human conduct, lies here. The one has always been tempted to maintain that an omnipotent decree makes that good which would not be good without it, makes that evil which would be otherwise indifferent: the other has been always seeking to find what constitutes an action or a habit just or unjust, true or untrue; whether something in its own nature, or in its effect upon the individual doer, or in its influence upon society. The conscience in men cries out for a ruler; therefore it gives heed to the priest. Conscience exists only in the affirmation that right and wrong are eternally opposed; therefore it gives heed to the philosophers. Experience shows that the priest is very prone to raise maxims of temporary expedience to the level of eternal laws; therefore the conscience protests against him. Experience shows that the philosopher can find no standing-ground from which he can act upon individuals or society, but is obliged to beg a standing-ground from their opinion, or to erect his own above both; therefore the conscience protests against him. Then comes the message: "He hath shown thee, O man, what is good." A message from whom? If He has not told me what He is, the tidings are worth nothing, the good has not been shown. If you desire a universal morality, there must be the revelation of a moral Being. If you would have the command "do justly," in place of a weight of rules, observances, and ceremonies, you must have justice set before you, not in words, formulas, decrees, but livingly, personally, historically. You must be taught what the just Being is by seeing what He does—what He does for you. He would have you like Him. He must tell you how He makes you like Him. The Bible is not a book of mere moralities. It would be if you took away its theology. Its theology is the unveiling of the righteous Being to the heart and conscience of the only creature that is capable of being righteous, because of the only creature that is capable of departing from righteousness. It is at last the manifestation to all nations of that original righteousness which had been the root of all righteousness in them; the manifestation of the Divine righteousness in a Man, who came into the world to reconcile men to His Father, that they might receive His Spirit, and be able to be just, as He is,—to do justly, as He does. 2. The Lord requires of men to "love mercy." This is a higher obligation still—harder to fulfil. I may do things, but against my whole nature. They will not be just or righteous acts, according to the scriptural idea of righteousness, which supposes the man to be good before he does good things. But they may be just according to some legal, philosophical, or sacerdotal rule. Can such a rule explain how I am to love because it is desirable that I should? Mercy is, no doubt, a beautiful quality. But there is a limit to men's admiration. If mercy meets an unmerciful habit of mind in us, its works will be explained away. Mercy is not necessarily loved when it is exhibited in its fullest, most perfect form, when it shows itself in the most gracious and serviceable acts. There may be a cry for it on another ground. Men may feel that they resisted the Divine righteousness, that they are at war with it. They may invoke mercy to avert the punishment which they believe that righteousness desires to inflict upon them. Turn to the theology of the Bible. There Christ is set forth as the image of the Father, not in one quality, but in His whole character. He is said to show forth the righteousness of God in the forgiveness of sins. Man wants mercy because he has sinned, but *this* mercy has in it a power of putting away sin, of covering it, extinguishing it,—of transforming the creature, who was the subject and slave of it, into a new creature who can love mercy and do justly. 3. The Lord requires man to "walk humbly with Him." About this virtue of humility there is as much strife as about justice and mercy. Can it be intended that the man should think meanly of the nature and the powers which God has given him? The more nobly he judges of his humanity, the more noble, says the philosopher, he himself will be. It is most true that, if we try by any artificial methods to cultivate what is called the grace of humility, it may become actually another name for meanness, for the abandonment of manliness and dignity, for a nominal self-denial which is compatible with much inward self-exaltation. What is the true humility? We are humble in ourselves only when we are walking with God. It is this which lays a man in the dust. It is this which raises him to a height he had never dreamt of. The theology of the Bible, then, explains its morality. It enables us to know what we ought to be, and to be what we would wish to be. (*F. D. Maurice, M.A.*) *What doth*

*the Lord require of thee?*—The text contains three points for our self-examination. The Lord requires, first, that we “do justly”; in other words, that all our conduct be upright and faithful, that we “defraud not any,” and that we always “do unto others as we would they should do unto us.” The second requirement is, “to love mercy.” To be just, strictly just, honest, upright, is indeed something, but it is not all. A man may be very honest, and yet very selfish; indeed, justice and mercy are somewhat antagonistic virtues, and are not often found existing together. The man who prides himself upon his integrity not unfrequently makes it an excuse for uncharitableness. The more highly, then, any one prides himself upon his justice, the more reason he has to examine himself on the point of mercy. Are you always tender-hearted,—ready to forgive,—treating others with due consideration and kindness, and putting the most charitable construction on all their actions? It is required of us not merely to show mercy, but to love mercy; to take positive delight in doing good. The third requirement is, to “walk humbly with thy God.” This implies something more than the absence of pride. What is it to “walk with God”? There is implied in the expression a unity of mind and will, a holy communion and fellowship with God, such as those are very far from even dreaming of, who content themselves with doing justly and loving mercy. Where shall we find this unity save in those who humbly inquire what God’s mind is, and who seek to know and do His will? The text is literally, as margin, “Humble thyself to walk with thy God.” Sinful man is naturally too proud to walk with God; he would rather be altogether independent and walk by himself. When by the grace of God he has been humbled and brought low, then he finds that to walk with God is his highest honour and present joy. Our text, which at first seemed but an epitome of the law, is seen to contain the Gospel. (*W. E. Light, M.A.*) *The requirements of God:*—**I. TO DO JUSTLY.** To act, speak, and to strive to think, fairly, honestly, towards all men. Not to suffer feelings, interest, passions, or prejudices to influence us. (See for Scripture counsels and commands, Deut. xvi. 19, 20; Ps. lxxxii. 3, 4; Exod. xxiii. 3, 8; Lev. xix. 33, 34, 35, 36; Prov. xx. 14; Lev. xix. 11; Exod. xxiii. 1.) Notice that we are bidden to do justly, but not commanded always to exact justice, or our strict rights from others. **II. LOVE MERCY.** The doing of strict justice is sometimes most painful, but the work of mercy is ever a labour of love. The Christian learns, more and more, how much he is indebted to mercy; and hence he loves mercy with thankful love, and the work of mercy is to him the work of gratitude. The Bible has beautiful precepts on this subject (Deut. xxi. 1-4; Exod. xxiii. 4, 5; Matt. v. 44; Rom. xii. 20, 21). The poor are especial objects of God’s mercy (Deut. xv. 11, xxiv. 10-13). The merciful will not be too sharp in gathering for himself all he can, nor in insisting on every right which man’s law gives him, if that right bear hardly on his neighbour (Deut. xxiv. 19-21; Jas. ii. 13). Mercy is to be shown in sympathy (Rom. xii. 15; Luke xxiii. 34). **III. WALK HUMBLY WITH THY GOD.** The humblest thing a man can do is to accept Christ. The next is to depend simply and entirely on God the Holy Ghost for strength to do just, grace to love mercy, and to walk humbly. To walk humbly is to have a constant sense of our sinfulness—God’s holiness; our weakness—God’s all might; our folly and ignorance—God’s wisdom, truth, and love. It is to acknowledge God in prosperity (Deut. viii. 12, &c.). It is to acknowledge God in adversity (1 Pet. v. 6; Isa. lvii. 15). (*F. J. Scott, M.A.*) *The sum of God’s requirements:*—These words are the answer of the Almighty, by the mouth of His prophet, to the cry of one of old, whose difficulties in his religious course appeared too great for him. God demands from him no impossible service—no countless sacrifices, no rivers of oil; He but bids him walk in the way in which all may walk who will—the paths of justice, mercy, and humility. The very terms in which the requirement is made imply that the work is far from an impracticable one. God speaks in mercy and tenderness. Upon the ease with which His precepts may be obeyed He founds a claim, surely a most touching and irresistible claim, to obedience. Was the doing justly, loving mercy, and walking with God a thing practicable for the few,—living in the dawn only of the day-spring; and can it be impossible for you, the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus—you, upon whom the Sun of Righteousness hath risen in all His glory? God never set a man any work which he could not perform. He never yet bade His servant to do His will, and withheld from him the power of doing it. If you ask how a man, awakened to a sense of religion, may set himself to do the will of God, you must bear in mind the twofold principle of

pure grace and free-will. You must never lose sight of your own utter inability to do anything of yourselves apart from the grace and power of God. If we would work the works of God it must be in the might of God. But you must not rest satisfied with praying for grace; you must not relax in your own exertions to serve and obey God. When we think how great a task is set before us we may well rejoice that we have many promises that it is not an impossible one. We should see that the seeming impossibilities had been all of our own imagining. Though we are never to remit our watchfulness, nor to forget our danger of again falling into sin, if we be true to God, we shall find each additional act of self-sacrifice made in obedience to His will a source of peace and comfort to us. (*G. W. Brameld.*)

**Do justly.**—Here is the summing up of the law; these are the things which, if a man do, he shall live by them. Seldom does a sinner come to Christ who has not first attempted to work out his own salvation by keeping the law, who has not resolved in his own strength not to sin again, but to walk blameless. If he strive honestly and deal faithfully with himself, it will not be long before he will despair of success in his undertaking. This is quite beyond us, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and mind, and soul, and strength." And yet no man can enter the pearly gates who does not thus love his God. Is God's, then, an unjust requirement? Surely it is the one object of all human law to compel man to do justly. Would society, culture, civilisation, anything that is worth living for, be possible if all men refused to be just? Is it, then, unreasonable for God to command us to do justly? Is it too hard to require us to love mercy? Is this not felt instinctively to be one of the noblest traits of character, and do we not admire the exercise of it? If all men were strictly just to each other, humanly speaking, there would be little need of mercy; but realising that we need mercy ourselves, is it too much that we should be required to grant it to others? And the third requirement is surely no heavy or excessive burden laid upon us. "Do justly." That is the foundation virtue, without which you can rear no superstructure of noble character. A man who has no sense of justice is utterly lost to all good influences, and, labour as you may, nothing can be made out of him. One's sense of justice may be perverted, and needs to be rightly educated; but it must be there, else there can be only vileness and corruption. Primarily, justice means erectness, uprightness, being swayed neither to the right nor to the left by all the influences that can be brought to bear upon the life.

1. We must be just to ourselves; and we can do this only by giving any faculty of our nature its due authority and influence in governing our conduct. There are three motors in us which govern the executive will—passion, self-love, and conscience, and these are far from agreeing with each other. Our entire lives are frequently one long battle between them. Justice requires that all passions and appetites should be subordinate to self-love, which bids us regard the consequences to ourselves of what we do. Not selfishness, but self-love, which, in its proper place, is a noble faculty. But above self-love sits the supreme ruler conscience, whose one great utterance, "Duty," is the grandest word in any language; which shows to passion the baseness of sacrificing all else to present gratification, as well as the injury that results; and which tells self-love of higher and grander aims than personal advantage. If you are just to all that is best and truest in your own characters you will not be unjust to others. If you have not been thus just to yourselves, there is no hope for you save in Christ.

2. We must be just to our fellow-men. Just before charitable and merciful. Men are ready to do anything, and to give liberally, if only they can avoid doing justly. There can be no mercy shown by one who is not just. A little more justice in the world would do away with the necessity for much almsgiving. Justice consists in giving to each action its proper reward, neither adding thereto from partiality, nor taking therefrom from envy and hatred. Then be perfectly upright, bending neither to the side of weak dislike to inflict suffering, nor to the side of angry desire for vengeance, and showing no respect of persons. And never ask more than justice from others. Do justly to those about you in estimating their conduct towards you, and especially in judging of their motives. You may be restfully sure that God will always—and in His gracious redemption most certainly of all—do justly. (*T. T. Eaton, D.D., LL.D.*)

*The justice of one man towards another*:—There are in religion things that are of a mutable and alterable nature, and things that are immutable and unchangeable. Whatsoever is by institution may, by the same authority that imposed it, be discharged and abated. The

things mentioned in this text continue to all perpetuity. About these things all persons agree, that are of any education and improvement. Single out for treatment this righteousness between man and man—to “do justly.” There is a difference between justice and equity. Equity takes into account the circumstances of a case, grants allowances, and can moderate the rigour of law. There is no one but expects this measure from God when he makes application to Him. God considers and deals with us in a way of mercy and compassion. And we should deal so with one another. This is true liberty and perfection for a man, to have power over his own right, so as to compassionate and commiserate in case of weakness and offence. It is greatness of power to be able to do this; and it is goodness of mind to perform it. Therefore let “just” and “equal” be so stated that that shall be just which appears to be either according to law or according to reason. Right is determined either by the proprietors, or by the magistrate, or by the voluntary agreement of persons that have power and interest. In commerce, custom and usage is to be heeded, for these began by consent. A man may be unjust from the nature of the thing, as well as by the breach of any law or constitution. He is equal—as differing from just—who considers all things that are reasonable, and makes allowance accordingly. There is a third thing beyond these, and that is to be gracious and merciful. God deals with us usually, but we deal thus with one another very rarely. The following are reasons why we should take this whole temper of mind into consideration, and put it into practice.

1. It is the temper of God.
2. It is everybody’s tenure and security. Where justice and equity do not get place there will be nothing but fraud, and everybody will be insecure.
3. These things do uphold the world, which otherwise would soon fall into confusion.
4. It is according to our principles; we are made to these things.
5. It is the right in every case. A man’s greatest wisdom is seen in finding that out, and his goodness in complying with it.
6. They are the rule and law of all action.
7. Everybody expects to be thus dealt with by others. That which is expected from another should be the measure of my dealing with him.
8. If we keep to the rule of right and fit we shall be justified whenever called to examination. Punishment is for the upholding of right, or it is exemplary that others, by a bad example, may learn not to offend. To live in the practice of justice and equity, will remove all suspicion of arbitrariness or self-will, will give a man heart’s ease and satisfaction, and will render a man acceptable to God. There are several things which every man must take care of that would be found in the practice of justice and equity.

1. Let a man be wary of self-interest.
2. Let no man allow himself to be arbitrary in a thing depending between himself and another.
3. Let not a man take upon him to be judge where he is a party.
4. Be always ready to any fair reference.
5. As thou art a Christian, yield more in fair consideration towards a friendly composure than absolute reason will oblige to and enjoin.
6. Let nothing rest upon secret and undeclared trust; leave nothing half done.
7. Make a simple reparation in case of wrong.
8. Be a plain and open dealer.
9. Make the same allowance for the infirmity and mistakes of others as thou dost desire for thyself.
10. In acknowledgment of what Christ hath done for thee, be thou equal, just, and righteous, beyond what absolute reason or strict right may enjoin. (*B. Whichcote, D.D.*)

*Justice and mercy*:—These words, written so many hundred years ago, come home to our hearts as freshly as if they had been spoken yesterday. We also have been shown what is good, and we also should admit that no better description could be given of the goodness which our hearts recognise than “to do justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God.” Of course, it is true that through the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ we have a clearer knowledge of God’s nature, and so a deeper insight into what He requires of us, than the people to whom Micah spoke. No modern equivalent of burnt-offering or calves of a year old, not thousands of rams or ten thousands of rivers of oil, no gift of churches, or communion-plate, or musical instruments, or stained-glass windows, no, not even subscription to charity—nothing is good in the sight of God unless it carries with it the good will, the will to do justice and mercy. For to-day I do not propose to consider with you the abstract question as to what justice is, a question first asked in one of the most fascinating books in the world, *The Republic of Plato*, and often enough asked since. I propose to follow the Jewish prophet in assuming that we have all been instructed in the Divine law, so that the great names of justice and mercy have a meaning to us, whether we can put that meaning into

words or not. Assuming that, I wish to call your attention briefly to the necessary moral qualities which underlie the practice of these Christian virtues. The moral qualities necessary for all who aim at being just and merciful are three—courage, patience, sympathy. 1. *Courage*. Courage is plainly necessary; for what can it profit us to see the right course to take, if, through faint-heartedness, we are unable to take it? No one can be just or merciful who cannot take his own line; who has not, as we say, "the courage of his opinions." 2. *And then, patience*—that is necessary. How much injustice in the world comes about because people will not take the trouble to investigate the case before them. In the abstract, in intention everybody is anxious to be just; everybody is eager to be merciful. But, unfortunately for us, the world is not an abstract world. It is very concrete, and it presents particular cases for the exercise of our virtue, and so our good intention counts for so little. If action on a great scale were required of us, we should all give a judgment that would be admirably just. But unfortunately, the decisions that are asked for from day to day are trifling decisions on everyday matters, and, in every instance, to come at the true facts of the case means spending time, means going into worrying details, and there is so much else to be done of so much importance. And so we become unjust, just for want of patience. 3. *And then the man who would be just or merciful must have the power of putting himself in the place of another, and seeing the matter in all its circumstances from another's point of view; and that means that he must have a real interest in other people for their own sakes, and be able to understand them, and be able to see why they did what they did.* Would it be too much to say that no one can be either just or merciful to those whom he does not love? I said that these three qualities of courage, patience, and sympathy are necessary, whether the work that we have to do is an act of justice or an act of mercy. And you will see that it is so when you recollect that that common distinction between justice and mercy is merely a practical distinction necessary for human infirmity, but not a distinction that goes down to the root of action. We might illustrate from any trial for murder. In a case of that sort we should consider that it was the province of justice to concern itself with the bare account of the crime alleged, and if that were proved sentence would be passed. And then it would be considered the part of mercy to come in and weigh the extenuating circumstances, and modify the sentence accordingly. But if justice means giving to every one his due, clearly mercy is still more due to the criminal than what we called first justice. The extenuating circumstances are a very real part of the action. Or again, suppose that some one in our employment has abused our confidence. A clerk has stolen money to pay his gambling debts. Well, his employer, if he were a just man, in deciding whether to prosecute his clerk or not to prosecute him, would decide on the whole circumstances, and he would do what he thought best in the interests of the clerk. If he thought imprisonment likely to have the most salutary effect on the man's character he would prosecute, and in that case prosecution would be mercy as well as justice. We can see this, of course, most plainly in God's dealings with us. We can see, I mean, that justice and mercy are only two sides of the same thing. We know God gives us in all the circumstances of life what He sees to be best for us. We may sometimes call what He sends us a judgment, and sometimes we may call it a mercy, and all the time we know that the judgment as much as the mercy proceeds from His love—proceeds from His knowledge of our real need; so that His justice is mercy in being what is best for us, and His mercy is justice, because that best is our due as being His children. Now, that is our ideal—a mercy that shall be justice, a justice that shall be mercy. Let us, then, do justice, let us love mercy, as becometh saints. And then for that third requirement. That, we know, is a pre-condition of the other two—"to walk humbly with God." If the other two give the substance of saintship, surely this gives the secret—"to walk humbly with God." It is a strange expression, and the rendering in the margin of the Bible is stranger still: "Humble thyself to walk with God." Surely, if we had a vision of God as Moses or Isaiah, we should veil our faces and fall in the dust. Why should we need humility to walk with God? Indeed, it is a question well worth asking. Why are we so often ashamed to obey the promptings of God's voice speaking in conscience? Why are we so often ashamed to be just, ashamed to be merciful, ashamed in society of defending an unpopular person, ashamed in politics of defending an unpopular cause, fearing to be righteous overmuch, to be merciful overmuch? May God give us enough humility to accept His Almighty guidance through this

world—humility enough to be on the look-out for the way that He has prepared for us to walk in; and may He give us all the courage and the patience and the sympathy necessary for our task whatever it may prove to be. (*H. C. Breching.*) **And to walk humbly with thy God.**—*Of walking humbly with God:*—The beginning of this chapter contains a most pathological expostulation of God by the prophet with His people about their sins, and unworthy walking before Him. Convictions, made effectual upon the soul, draw out its inward principles, which are not otherwise discovered. Men think they must do something whereby to appease the God whom they have provoked. They fix on two general heads. They propose things which God Himself had appointed, such as sacrifices and burnt offerings. Or they propose things of their own finding out, which they suppose may have a further and better efficacy to the end aimed at than anything appointed of God Himself. They have a better opinion of their own ways and endeavours, for the pleasing of God and quieting their consciences, than of anything of God's institution. There is nothing so desperate, irksome, or wicked that convinced persons will not engage to do under their pressure on the account of the guilt of sin. The prophet discovers to such persons their mistake. God prefers moral worship, in the way of obedience, to all sacrifice whatever. This moral obedience is referred to three heads—do justly; love mercy; walk humbly with God. The two first are comprehensive of our whole duty in respect of men. The third head regards the first table of the law. I. **WHAT IT IS TO WALK WITH GOD.** 1. Some things are required to it. (1) Peace and agreement. These have to be made, can only be made, through the blood of atonement. (2) Oneness of design. The aim of God, in general, is His own glory; in particular, it is “the praise of His glorious grace.” To exalt this glorious grace, two things are considerable. That all which is to be looked for at the hand of God is upon the account of mere grace and mercy. The enjoyment of Himself in this way of mercy and grace is that great reward of him that walks with Him. That a man may walk with another, it is required that he have a living principle in him to enable him thereunto. 2. What it is to walk with God. It consisteth in the performance of that obedience, for matter and manner, which God, in His covenant of grace, requires at our hands. (1) That our obedience be walking with God, it is required that we be in covenant with Him, and that the obedience be required in the tenour of that covenant. Things required if it is to answer the tenour of the covenant. It must proceed from faith in God, by Christ the Mediator. The person must be perfect or upright therein. (2) That our obedience may be walking with God, it is required that it be a constant progressive motion towards a mark before us. Walking is a constant progress. (3) Walking with God is to walk always as under the eye of God. By a general apprehension of God's omniscience and presence. Two things will follow being under the eye and control of God. Reverential thoughts of Him. Self-abasement under a sense of the imperfection of all our services. 3. Our walking with God in our obedience argues complacency and delight therein; and that we are bound unto God in His ways with the cords of love. II. **WHAT IT IS TO WALK HUMBLY WITH GOD.** The original words are, “To humble thyself in walking.” In our walking with God distinguish between the inward power of it and the outward privilege of it. What it is in reference whereunto we are to humble ourselves in walking with God. To the law of His grace, and to the law of His providence. We must humble ourselves to place our obedience on a new foot of account, and yet to pursue it with no less diligence than if it stood upon the old. We must address ourselves to the greatest duties, being fully persuaded that we have no strength for the least. We must see that in Christ is our supply. And we humble ourselves to be contented to have the sharpest afflictions accompanying the strictest obedience. Consider now what it is to humble ourselves to the law of His providence. There is much in God's providential administration beyond, and even apparently contradictory to, the reason of men. Four things require this humbling of ourselves. (1) Visible confusion. (2) Unspeakable variety. (3) Sudden alterations. (4) Deep distresses. We are to be humbled unto His sovereignty. His wisdom, His righteousness. How are we, by what means are we to humble ourselves to the law of God's grace and providence? (1) Let faith have its work. (2) Constant abiding reverence of God will help the soul in this universal resignation and humbling of itself. This reverence of God ariseth from the infinite excellency and majesty of God and His great name.

The infinite, inconceivable distance we stand from Him. This glorious God is pleased of His own grace to condescend to concern Himself in us and our services. III. HUMBLE WALKING WITH GOD IS THE GREAT DUTY AND MOST VALUABLE CONCERNMENT OF BELIEVERS. Sundry ways whereby glory redounds to God by believers humbly walking with Him. 1. It gives Him the glory of the doctrine of grace. 2. It gives Him the glory of the power of His grace. 3. It gives Him the glory of the law of His grace, that He is a King obeyed. 4. It gives Him the glory of His justice. 5. The glory of His kingdom; first, in its order and beauty; and secondly, in multiplying His subjects. This humble walking must certainly be the great and incomparable concernment of all those whose chief end is the advancement of the glory of God. In humble walking with God, we shall find peace in every condition. We shall find comfort. This will make us useful in our generation. (*John Owen, D.D.*) *Walk with God:—Why not joyfully?* There is a foundation laid for this. Joy is not, however, absolutely necessary. We have known much self-denial, and deadness to the world, and spirituality of devotion, and zeal for the glory of God and the welfare of others, in persons who may be said to be saved by hope, rather than confidence. But with regard to humbleness of mind, this is indispensable,—always, and in everything; and no progress can be made without it. How is our walking humbly with God to appear? I. IN CONNECTION WITH DIVINE TRUTH. Here, God is our teacher; and if, as learners, we walk humbly with Him, we shall cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of Christ; we shall sacrifice the pride of reason; and having ascertained that the Scriptures are the Word of God, and discovered what they really contain, we shall not speculate upon their principles, but admit them on their Divine authority. II. IN CONNECTION WITH DIVINE ORDINANCES. Here we walk with God as worshippers; and if we walk humbly with Him, we shall have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and with godly fear. III. IN CONNECTION WITH HIS MERCIES. Here we walk with God as our benefactor. If we walk humbly with Him, we shall own and feel that we have no claim upon God for anything we possess or enjoy. IV. WITH REGARD TO OUR TRIALS. Here we walk with God as our reprover and corrector; and if we walk humbly, we shall not charge Him foolishly; we shall not arraign His authority, or ask, What doest Thou? V. WITH REGARD TO OUR CONDITIONS. Here we walk with God as our disposer and governor; and if we walk humbly, we shall hold ourselves at His control; we shall be willing that He should choose our inheritance for us. We shall be satisfied with our own allotment, and learn, in whatsoever state we are, therewith to be content. VI. WITH REGARD TO OUR QUALIFICATION AND ABILITY FOR OUR WORK. Here we walk with God as our helper and strength; and if we walk humbly, we shall be sensible of our insufficiency for all the purposes of the Divine life. Here, humility is—to fear always; and to—pray. Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe. VII. WITH REGARD TO THE WHOLE OF OUR RECOVERY. Here we walk with God as a Saviour; and if we walk humbly, we shall not go about to establish our own righteousness, but submit ourselves unto the righteousness which is of God, and acknowledge that we have nothing to glory in before Him. Happy this humble walker with God! God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. (*William Jay.*) *God's requirements from His creatures:—I. A GREAT DEAL IS REQUIRED OF MAN WHEN HE IS TOLD TO "WALK HUMBLY WITH GOD."* 1. He who walks with God must be considered as living in the full consciousness that the eye of his Maker is ever upon him; that he cannot take a single unobserved step, nor do the least thing which escapes Divine notice. When you consider walking with God as implying an ever active consciousness of God's presence, it would not perhaps be easy to find words which should better express a pre-eminent holiness. If a man has a practical conviction that God is ever at his side, such a man will be the same in public and in private. 2. Walking with God denotes a complete fixing of the affections "on things that are above." He has both his head and his heart in heaven. High attainments in piety have been reached by the man to whom such a description applies. II. WHY, THOUGH A GREAT DEAL BE REQUIRED, IT MIGHT BE SPOKEN OF IN THAT ALMOST SLIGHTING MANNER WHICH IS SO OBSERVABLE IN THE TEXT. The form of expression seems to indicate that God might have required much more than He has required. God asks nothing which it is not for man's present as well as future advantage to yield. He hath so ordered His dealings with our race, that obedience is the parent of peace, and

disobedience of disquietude. The creature is advantaged by giving what the Creator demands. God might have instituted so different a mode of dealing with man, that what He now asks is as nothing compared with what He might have demanded. (*Henry Melvill, B.D.*) *Humility*.—A question to which the text is an answer. This question teacheth us that ceremonial observances will not compensate a neglect of substantial duties; that hypocrites will give anything rather than give up themselves to the Lord; that it is not the costliness of the sacrifice, but the godliness of the sacrifice which God looketh at. The answer is, "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good." Doctrine.—In revealing our duty to us, God exacteth nothing of man but what is good. God has revealed His mind by the light of nature, and by the light of His Word, which is more clear, full, and certain. The revelation of God's mind consists of two parts, the moral part, and the evangelical part. Whatever God has revealed is good. There is a moral and beneficial goodness. God exacteth nothing of us but what is good. This can be proved by the design of the Christian religion; and by the structure and frame of it. Doctrine.—Walking humbly with God is our great duty, which distinguisheth the sincere from the hypocrites. What is walking humbly with God? A ready submitting and subjecting of ourselves to all God's commands. This includes a fear to offend, and a care to please. A patient contentedness with every condition God bringeth us into. It implieth specially reverence in worship, and that we be deeply sensible of our unworthiness to approach His holy presence. A constant dependence on Him, and a looking for all from Him that we stand in need of in the course of our obedience. A modest sense of our own vileness and nothingness; humility being and involving a mean esteem of ourselves. What reasons may enforce this humility. It is God, on whom we continually depend, who requires it. It is *our* God, in whom we have direct interest. We are always with Him; in His eye and presence. Then if walking humbly with God distinguishes the sincere from the hypocrite, let us take care to walk humbly. (*T. Manton, D.D.*) *Humility before God*.—In the evening of the morning that Gordon, when in Palestine, received a telegram from England, asking him to undertake a mission which he had all his life longed to undertake, he was found by a friend outside the city wall, kneeling in prayer. When remonstrated with on account of the place being dangerous from Arabs, he replied, "The telegrams from England this morning filled me with such elation, I felt I might get into trouble by being proud, and I thought I would just get upon my horse and go away by myself and humble myself before God." *Peace on the path* (ver. 8, marg.):—This "walking with God" is the most expressive phrase in the Bible for the Divine life. God and the soul companion pedestrians on the path of life—what could be more forcible? Walking with God is the flood-tide of spirituality in our hearts, all the shoals and rocks and shallows covered by the bay-filled sea. I. MEETING MUST BE. Before we can walk with God, we must have met Him. Here is just the difficulty, this is the stumble at the start. There can be no walking with God, no communion with Him, till agreement be come to. There is a quarrel and controversy in the universe. By birth, man is God's enemy; by choice, he is; by will, he remains. Darkness and light cannot be together. How then can man walk with God? Agreement is found alone in the Lord Jesus. It is in the Cross of Christ. II. ACQUAINTANCE MUST BE. For walking together more is required than agreement. Agreement would not keep us together. This walking together is for the closest of friends alone. We must be friends with God. We must know one another, we must love one another. This acquaintance, this knowledge, this friendship is found also in the Lord Jesus. In Christ we know God, and thus we walk homeward together. Sin is that which brings distrust, and sin is done away in the Sin-Bearer. III. THE SAME PACE MUST BE. Walking with God implies that at the same pace the feet lift along the path. He knows what a slow, struggling pace ours is. He knows how our faltering feet drag along on the heavenly road. God will not let His feeble child walk cheerlessly alone, far behind Him. IV. GOING THE SAME WAY MUST BE. When two walk together, one face does not look one way, and the other face the other way. Both step onward side by side. Thus it is with us and the Lord, our Companion. (*J. Bailey, A.M.*)

Ver. 9. The Lord's voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see Thy name. Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.—*The voice*

of God in His judgments :—I. THIS TEXT ANNOUNCES THAT THERE IS A MESSAGE SENT FROM GOD. The voice of the Lord, as the written Word, is the ordinary, the appointed means of conveying His will to men. By that means God has in every age announced His purposes, and made known to us our duty. But there are occasions when God adopts another mode of communication, and speaks to us in a different manner. There are times when He speaks to us through His providence, and conveys a lesson by a language which ensures respect, if it does not compel obedience. He speaks to us as individuals by afflictions, by calamities, by losses, by bereavements, and this makes the careless sensible, by addressing them in a form which ensures attention. At other times He raises His voice and addresses cities or communities by judgments of a far more comprehensive kind—by war, famine, or pestilence. Thus God speaks to a disobedient and rebellious people. If His Word is despised, if His frown is neglected, He must adopt another mode of procedure, He must smite; a sort of necessity compels Him to make use of means which are foreign to His nature, and differ from His ordinary treatment. All that we know of God leads us to suppose that the mode of His address will be adapted to the state of His people. If they are like sheep, gentle, docile, and obedient, He will lead them forth like a shepherd. If they are rebellious and proud, if they show by their behaviour that they are not the sheep of His pasture, He must take up other instruments, and lead them in another way. In that case He must rebuke, He must chastise, He must subdue by affliction those whom He cannot draw by love, and must humble the pride which resists instruction. But though He speaks, we dare not say that all hear. There were those, of old time, who had eyes and could not see, and ears and could not hear. There are those, even now, who can read the written Word, and see nothing that applies to themselves; or can sit under the sound of the Gospel, and hear nothing that they understand. II. THE TEXT NAMES THE PERSONS BY WHOM THAT MESSAGE WILL BE UNDERSTOOD. The men of wisdom, the few, the very few, whose hearts the Lord has opened, see what others overlook. They see His name, the end and the object of His doings, and learn to glorify God by being made acquainted with His nature in contemplating His works. Others see the rod, but do not perceive the hand that wields it. They see the event, but do not mark the providence. They see the afflictions, but will not observe the judgments. But just these things the man of wisdom does see. Nothing excites his attention which does not carry him to God, and lead him to look to God as the author of all that happens, the Ruler, the intelligent, the merciful Ruler of the world. The man of wisdom sees, and marks, and notes, what the fool does not; and the affliction which confounds the one becomes the means of illumination and correction to the other, while God is seen and considered in what is done. III. THE TEXT DESCRIBES THE OBJECT AND PURPOSE OF THE MESSAGE. Consider the inference which is drawn by the man of wisdom, and how he applies it. "Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it." Convinced that the affliction which they undergo is a rod which God uses for the rebuke and chastisement of His people, they urge attention to what is passing. "Despise not the chastening of the Lord." "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due season." This is the language of wisdom, as well as of piety. Admit the existence of God, and belief in His providence follows. Admit His providence, and you must see that providence such as His can have no limits. It extends to everything: it includes everything, the greatest as well as the least. But if this necessarily follows from the mere belief in God, remember that it is the part of wisdom to draw the necessary deduction, and to explain the event which appears by referring to the cause which produces it, and what is known of the character and will of Him with whom the event originates. Illustrate by reference to the failure of the potato-crop during two succeeding seasons. We need not refer such calamities to any of the public or private iniquities which we have reason to lament. God deals with principles rather than with particulars. He corrects us by vindicating His own nature from our misconceptions; and a judgment which extends to all must be intended to convey to all a lesson which they need. We go to the root of all sins when we name the sinful heart of unbelief as the object of God's displeasure, and believe that God is reproving that evil heart by the judgments He sends. We do not mean that speculative unbelief which denies the existence of God, but that practical unbelief which forgets Him. But just in proportion as a man is endeavouring to forget God, it is necessary that he should be reminded of Him. Unless we are to be given up to our idols, and left

to work out our own destruction, we must be taught the secret of our dependence on God, and be led to seek Him in the way He has appointed. (*Henry Raikes, M.A.*)

*The Divine cry against iniquity* :—Micah tells us his vision concerned both Samaria and Jerusalem. Against these there is a cry both of sins and of punishments.

1. Of sins. These two cities had corrupted the two kingdoms of which they were the respective heads. Atheism and immorality are nowhere so predominant as in great cities. The transgressions of Samaria were Baal and the golden calves. The transgressions of Jerusalem were her high places, where idolatries were practised. The idolatrous worship of these cities did not mean only a multiplication of images, altars, &c.; it consisted much in the gratification of their carnal lusts and passions. God's voice also cries against their violence and oppression; their bribery and corruption; their witchcrafts and soothsayers; their frauds in commerce and dealing; the treachery of friends, and the want of mutual affection in the nearest relations.

2. Of punishments. The first woe denounced is the ruin of Samaria. The second is captivity. The third is the failure of the true prophecy and ministry of God's Word among them. They did not care to hear unpleasant truths. The fourth is a pining, wasting sickness which should seize upon them. The fifth is famine. The sixth is the scorn and contempt with which their enemies should treat them. In these charges and denunciations, it is said, that the "man of wisdom will see God's name," that is, will acknowledge His commission and authority in them as fully as if he had seen Him write them. Such a man will confess, when the judgments are inflicted, that they are not fortuitous, coming in the ordinary course of things, or owing to the mere will of man, or concurrence of second causes; but that they are a rod from heaven, which God hath appointed for the punishment of His sinful people. (*W. Reading, M.A.*)

*Man's blindness to his own evil* :—Nothing is more essential to the character of the Supreme Being than perfect holiness. He loves righteousness and hates iniquity. As every man's own conscience is a witness to the moral rectitude of the great Lawgiver, and leads to the expectation of His impartial judgment; so the remarkable interposition of Divine providence in the affairs of the world, by inflicting severe punishments for the obstinate wickedness of men, hath been universally acknowledged. Great and desolating strokes have been always attributed to the immediate avenging hand of God. Other catastrophes of nations and cities have been accounted for by the wisest of men as intended for examples of punishing obstinate wickedness and dissolute luxury. But the same uniformity is by no means observable in the effects of those judgments, as in their cause. We are not absolutely unconcerned at the strokes of providence which we see in the world. Stupidity cannot carry us quite so far; but we seldom consider them with such attention as we ought. In the afflictions which happen to mankind, every side deserves to be considered; and all is worthy of attention in these messages of Divine vengeance. It is a sad observation, that those men who above all boast of their reason, are least of all employed in such reflections. More occupied with nature than with the God of nature, they hold it weakness to discover the finger of the Almighty in the afflictions of men; they ascribe everything to second causes. But what is called nature, is either nothing, or it is an assemblage of beings created by God: either the effects of nature are nothing, or they are the consequences of the laws by which the Supreme Creator governs those beings; and consequently, whatever we call natural effects, or actions of second causes, are the works of God, and the effects of laws established by Him. This reasoning, apparently sound, is confirmed in the Scriptures, which clearly teach that the calamities of particular men are designed for the instruction of all. But, not infrequently, the Divine judgments are abused in another manner; when men of a proud and uncharitable spirit, instead of considering them as warnings to themselves, think and speak of them as direct punishments for the crimes of those who suffer them. No reasoning can be worse than to say, such a man is a grievous sinner, because he is unhappy here on earth; and another is a great saint, because he is surrounded with all manner of delights. To reason in this manner is to set bounds to the Most High, without considering the different views which an infinite Intelligence may have in those strokes which He inflicts on mortals. Sometimes He designs them for trials; sometimes to show forth His power and glory; sometimes to show the faith and fortitude of the sufferer. If any conclusion could be fairly drawn from the sufferings of men on earth, it ought rather to be of God's love than His anger. In place of saying that the man who suffers is more culpable than he who suffers not, we might often have

occasion to say, that he who suffers nothing at all is far more criminal than the man who suffers most. In general, there are very few sinners to whom any man hath a right to prefer himself. (*A. M'Donald.*) *Hear the rod* :—God conveys instruction to the children of men by His Word, and by His providences. These two methods of instruction mutually aid each other. When both His Word and His providence unite in addressing us, the criminality of inattention is carried to the very highest degree. Yet such inattention is common. I. IT BEHOVES US TO BE ATTENTIVE TO THE DISPENSATIONS OF PROVIDENCE WHICH NOW MAY BE TAKING PLACE. In them God is, as it were, shaking His rod over us. II. POINT OUT SOME LESSONS OF INSTRUCTION. 1. God is teaching us the very great evil and malignity of sin in general. 2. God is now calling upon us to examine ourselves, in order to ascertain whether we ourselves, as a nation, or as individuals, have in any measure contributed to bring on these calamities. 3. God is calling us to deep repentance; to examine into the state of our immortal souls, and to prove the genuineness and reality of our religion. It behoves us individually to examine our own hearts, and compare them with the mirror of God's most Holy Word. 4. God is calling upon us to pray for the commencement of that great and glorious day, when the Gospel shall be universally spread over the face of the whole globe, and the "kingdoms of this world shall have become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ." (*John Vaughan, LL.D.*) *God's voice to cities* :—I. GOD HAS A VOICE TO CITIES. The city meant here is Jerusalem. He speaks to a city through its—1. Commerce. 2. Mortality. 3. Churches. The sermons that are preached, the agents that are employed to enlighten the ignorant, to comfort the distressed, reclaim the lost. II. THE WISE IN CITIES RECOGNISE THE VOICE. "The man of wisdom shall see Thy name." "And wisdom has Thy name in its eye" (*Delitzsch*). "And he who is wise will regard Thy name" (*Henderson*). The idea seems to be this, that the wise man will recognise God's voice. Job says, "God speaks once, yea twice, and they perceive it not." The crowds that populate cities are deaf to the Divine "voice." The din of passion, the hum of commerce, the chimes of animal pleasures drown the voice of God. But the wise man has his soul ever in a listening attitude. Like young Samuel, he says, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." Abraham heard the voice of God concerning Sodom, Daniel concerning Babylon, Jonah concerning Nineveh, Jeremiah concerning Jerusalem. III. THE JUDGMENT OF CITIES IS IN THAT VOICE. "Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it." The rod is the symbol of judgment. "O Assyria, the rod of My anger, the staff in My hand is My indignation." 1. God warns cities. (1) He warns them of ultimate temporal ruin. All cities must go—go with Nineveh, Greece, Babylon, Rome, Jerusalem. (2) He warns them of spiritual danger. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." This is His voice to every citizen. 2. His warning should be attended to. "Hear ye the rod." The only way to escape, is attention. (*Homilist.*) *The voice of the rod* :—Our prophet is proclaiming God's controversy with Israel. He represents God as sitting in judgment on Israel. Appealing to them in proof of His former kindnesses to them. Specifying the crimes with which they were chargeable. Threatening to punish them with desolating judgments. Showing Israel how the impending destruction might be averted. He supposes a penitent Israelite manifesting concern for salvation by instituting the most important inquiries, and expressing his readiness to comply with whatsoever God might be pleased to demand. To obtain God's favour, Micah says, we must come to Him, not according to the devices of superstition, but as God prescribes in His Word. To please God we must live in the uniform practice of justice, mercy, and humble piety. I. THE ADVERSITIES OF MANKIND ARE APPOINTED BY GOD. 1. The afflictions of mankind are various. 2. They are all subject to the appointment of God. They could not exist without Him. He adjusts all their circumstances. 3. They are appointed for important purposes. They should not therefore be disregarded nor despised. II. ADVERSITY IS THE INSTRUMENT OF GOD'S FATHERLY CORRECTION. Like a rod—1. He employs it reluctantly: 2. Only for man's benefit: 3. Only when necessary. III. GOD SPEAKS BY THE ROD TO THOSE WHOM HE CHASTENS. He speaks with—1. A reproving, 2. A warning, 3. An encouraging voice. IV. THE INSTRUCTION CONVEYED BY THE ROD CLAIMS OUR ATTENTION. 1. With pious attention. 2. Inquisitive attention. 3. Candid attention. 4. Practical attention. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *Hearing the rod* (a funeral discourse):—Our Heavenly Father employs many instruments for the moral instruction of His children. To thoughtful and docile

minds He teaches many an important and useful lesson by means of His providence perpetually operating around us. It is not in times of trial and affliction alone that providence conveys lessons designed for our enlightenment and benefit. But the lessons we are very slow to learn and very ready to forget. When some sudden and saddening affliction befalls us, the mind is often aroused, the heart is softened, we are compelled to pause and reflect. A painful dispensation solemnly speaks to us. **I. OF THE BREVITY AND UNCERTAINTY OF HUMAN LIFE.** This is a lesson often sounded in our ears, and often addressed to our hearts. Early death is especially affecting. By it the young are urged so to live that death, whenever it may come, shall have no terror and no sting. **II. OF THE DISAPPOINTMENT OF THE BRIGHTEST HUMAN HOPES.** The vanity of human wishes, and the frequent blighting of human hopes, have been in every age the theme of the moralist, the poet, and the preacher. Ought we not all to ask ourselves whether our hopes are such as death cannot destroy? **III. OF THE MYSTERY OF PROVIDENCE.** When we remember that all things are under the government of God, the Only Wise, the Almighty, and the All-loving, we ought not to complain even if we cannot comprehend. God works on a scale, and for a period, so vast, that it would be both presumption and folly for short-sighted and short-lived creatures, such as we are, to expect to comprehend His plans. **IV. OF THE WORTH OF A CHRISTIAN FAITH.** It supports the dying, it comforts the bereaved. It enables the believer in the conflict with the last enemy to come off more than conqueror; it enables those who mourn departed friends to live in the certainty of a future and blessed reunion. (*G. D. Macgregor.*) *The voice of God to the careless city* (on a visitation of cholera):—1. This infliction is the “Lord’s voice,” as a rebuke and warning from Him. After every deduction and allowance for secondary causes, whether natural or artificial, we are compelled to return to the great first cause, and to acknowledge that this public calamity is indeed the voice of God. This voice of the Lord “crieth unto the city.” It is that of a watchman, or herald, proclaiming with loud and unmistakable voice, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” “Let the people turn every one from the evil of his way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will return and repent, and turn from His fierce anger, that we perish not?” 2. At such times “the man of wisdom shall see Thy name.” The name of the Lord in a special manner denotes His attributes—His justice, power, wisdom, goodness, love. 3. At such times, “hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.” Not “bear ye,” but “hear ye.” The rod of Divine justice and love has a voice, both for the sufferer and the beholder. Invite to personal prayer and self-examination. (1) As to your feelings in regard to sin in general. (2) There should be a renunciation of self. (3) But external reformation is not enough, nor will it ever be lasting unless the heart be touched within, and attracted by the loadstone of Divine grace. (*L. M. Humbert, M.A.*) *The voice of God to the nation*:—**I. PUBLIC CALAMITIES ARE THE VOICE OF GOD TO THE NATION.** The dispensations of God are particular or general. The particular affect individuals; the general affect a nation or a world. A nation is but a larger family, a more numerous and extensive household. “The voice of the Lord crieth unto the city”—against the city. Why? On account of our national sins. They are many and great. Have not profligate luxury on the one hand, and commercial covetousness on the other, marked the latter period of our history? Gross immorality, daring crime, heaven defying impiety and blasphemy raise their unveiled, unblushing fronts in the broad light of day. Lying, uncleanness, and fraud are to be reckoned among the crying sins of our country. The voice of the Lord crieth against us on account of the little improvement we have made of our religious advantages. How few are living under the vital influence of those doctrines and principles, which distinguish the Gospel of the grace of God from all other systems! The voice charges us, not only with a shameful neglect of the Gospel, as a matter of personal concern, but also with indifference respecting its diffusion through the earth. **II. IT IS WISDOM TO SEE AND ACKNOWLEDGE GOD IN PUBLIC CALAMITIES.** His great, and venerable, and inviting name of wisdom, power, and love is inscribed upon all His works, and there it is seen and read by the man of wisdom. But especially it is visible upon the gloomy clouds of affliction. Multitudes live, and act, and form their judgments as if there were no Divine government—as if chance were universal monarch. They look only to secondary causes. The text implies that it is the part of folly not to perceive and acknowledge the hand of the Lord in public calamities. Such insensibility

is an evidence of positive wickedness, approaching to athelism. III. IT IS OUR DUTY AND INTEREST TO IMPROVE PUBLIC CALAMITIES. Why does a father chastise his children? That they may be improved by his correction. He uses the rod, not to gratify his own temper, but to profit them. It becomes our duty to seek personal improvement from the dispensations of our Heavenly Father. It is not only our duty, it is our interest to improve public calamities. The first lesson to learn is to examine and abase ourselves before God. 1. To be cheerfully resigned to the Divine will. 2. To bear upon our minds the claims which our rulers have on our prayers. 3. To nourish solemn and practical reflections upon death. 4. To derive improvement from this public calamity—the death of the Princess Charlotte of Wales—by seeking deeper impressions of the truth, that all is vanity except the Gospel. (*John East, A.B.*) *God's threatening rod*:—It is a question hard to determine, whether the greatness of God, or the condescendency of God, be the greater mystery. The day may be approaching when ye shall meet with these six silent things from God. 1. Silent rods, when ye shall not know nor understand the language of them. 2. A silent God. When ye shall cry to Him, and He shall not hear you. 3. Silent and dumb ordinances, which shall not speak to you. 4. Silent mercies, so that all the good things He doth unto you, ye shall not know their language. 5. The sad lot of a silent conscience. 6. Silent commands, threatenings, and promises; that is, ye shall never know what the commands call for, or the threatenings or the promises. The prophet accuses the people of neglect of duties which were lying at their door. In this verse we have the scope of it, which is this,—showing the people that the Lord would send a more sharp message, if they will not obey. Three things from the scope, before we come to the first thing in the words—1. The slighting of known duties is the forerunner of some sad and lamentable stroke from the Lord. Note some aggravations of the sin of slighting known duties. (1) When a person slights duty, after the sinfulness of that sin hath been discovered to him. (2) When a person slights known duties, after God hath been discovering discontent with another person for that sin. (3) After God hath begun to contend with them for so doing. (4) Upon very small temptations. (5) When persons do not as much as set about the well-doing of them. (6) After God hath commended the beauty and excellency of such duties. (7) After they have been convinced of the advantage which waits upon the doing of them. (8) With very little resentment and grief of heart. 2. Some considerations to press you to the exercise of these duties. (1) It is the Christian who practiseth, not who knoweth, to whom the promises are made. (2) The Christian that is taken up in practising, and not the knowing Christian, is blessed. The blessed Christian is he who knoweth his duty, and doeth it. (3) The practising, not the knowing, Christian is approved and commended of God. (4) Not the knowledge, but the practice of Christian duties will give peace to the conscience. (5) It is by the practice, not the knowledge of your duty, that you rise up in conformity with God. 3. Six things concerning known duties. (1) Many persons are more desirous to know what they should do, than to do what they know. (2) The question which shall be proposed to you in the great and notable day of the Lord, will be, “O man, what didst thou?” (3) A grain weight of sincerity and practice is worth a talent of knowledge. (4) The slighting of known duties hath many sad disadvantages waiting upon it. It makes Christians weary of duties. It brings on much hardness and stupidity of heart. It either mars the peace of conscience, or it hardens the conscience, or it lulls the conscience asleep. And the Christian who slights duty is likely to become exceeding formal in the duty he does. (5) The slighting of known duty is the first step of the sin against the Holy Ghost. I. GOD HATH MANY WAYS IN PRESSING PEOPLE TO THEIR DUTIES. Voice. 1. The voice of threatenings. 2. Of sad afflicting dispensations. 3. Of the promises. 4. Of all the mercies that we meet with. 5. Of our consciences. 6. Of public ordinances. There are seven steps of judgment, which are likely to overtake us, if we hearken not to His voice. 1. God shall slight the voice of the disobeyers when they cry to Him. 2. At last God will speak no more to them. 3. God will draw His sword out of the sheath, and not replace it. 4. He will deliver us into the hand of the slayer. 5. He will cease to have correspondence with us any more. 6. He will purgo us no more. 7. We shall be let alone, left alone in our sin. II. GOD HATH MANY RODS TO USE IN PUNISHING THOSE WHO SLIGHT THEIR DUTIES. 1. The rod of His mouth. 2. The rod of His hand; or afflictions and crosses. 3. The iron rod of destruction, when God doth utterly destroy.

Some will not take and make use of these threatenings, because they mistake what is their meaning; or they are in ignorance of their own condition. (*A. Gray.*)

*Wisdom of hearing the voice of affliction.*—I. GOD APPOINTS EVERY AFFLICTION THAT MEN EXPERIENCE. He always acts agreeably to the counsel of His own will, in every evil He inflicts, and in every good He bestows. All the afflictions and sorrows and sufferings of Christ were brought upon Him according to the eternal appointment of God. II. EVERY AFFLICTION HAS AN INSTRUCTIVE VOICE. This is intimated by the figurative expression in the text. God would not call upon men to hear the voice of His rod, if His rod had no voice. Men often speak as plainly by what they do as by what they say. And God often speaks as plainly by His rod as by His Word. God means to teach, and does teach by His providence. Afflictions tend to teach the afflicted their entire dependence upon God. This they are naturally insensible of, and need to be taught by the voice of the rod. Men must learn their dependence on God, before they can be happy, either in this life or in that which is to come. The voice of affliction tends to teach mankind the vanity of all earthly enjoyments. The great inquiry is, who will show us any temporal good? And if God grants outward prosperity, and pours the blessings of His providence upon men, they are ready to think that their mountain stands strong, that their happiness is secure, and that they shall never see corruption. Their hearts become wedded to the world. When God chastens them with the rod of correction, and takes away one earthly blessing after another, by His bereaving hand, they are ready to adopt the language of Job, "Naked came I," &c. The voice of affliction naturally tends to turn the thoughts of the afflicted upon the most serious and solemn subjects. When the world appears vain, other things appear weighty and important. When temporal things lose their lustre, eternal things will assume their importance, and fix the whole soul in solemn reflections and anticipations. The day of adversity is the day to consider. This is one of the natural and salutary effects of Divine corrections. How often do afflictions prepare the way for awakenings, convictions, and conversions! Eliphaz very reasonably says, "Happy is the man whom God correcteth." III. IT IS ALWAYS A POINT OF WISDOM TO HEAR THE INSTRUCTIVE VOICE OF AFFLICTION. This will appear, if we consider—1. That the voice of affliction is the voice of God. The men of wisdom who see and know the name of God; that is, those who know and love the character, perfections, and government of God; will hear, understand, and obey the voice of the rod of His wrath, which is His most solemn, imperious, and impressive voice. 2. To refuse to hear the voice of affliction will be highly displeasing to God. 3. By refusing to hear it, men will expose themselves to still severer marks of the Divine displeasure. Afflictions, bereavements, and fiery trials often follow one another in quick succession. One affliction seems to be the presage of another. 4. The afflicted never know when God calls to them by the voice of His rod, but that it is the last call He will ever give them, before He calls them into eternity. Improve the subject—1. If God appoints every affliction for the purpose of instructing the afflicted, then He can instruct those who are the most unwilling to be instructed. 2. If the voice of affliction be instructive, then all persons must be beneficially instructed, unless they use great efforts to prevent it. 3. If God Himself instructs the afflicted by the voice of His rod, then they never can have any excuse for not hearing His instructions. 4. If it be a point of wisdom in the afflicted to hear the instructive voice of the rod, then it argues want of wisdom in them to refuse to hear it. 5. If afflictions are instructive, then the afflicted are always in a peculiarly trying and dangerous situation. They must receive, or refuse to receive instruction. 6. This subject calls upon all to hear the voice of providence, which crieth to the nations who are now groaning under the rod of affliction and calamity. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *God's threatening rod.*—There are three things which a Christian may meet with which are unspeakable. 1. An unspeakable sorrow, so that he cannot make language of it. 2. Unspeakable mercy. 3. Unspeakable joy. There is not a grain weight of affliction in the cup which infinite wisdom doth not think fit should be there. There are some Christians that are forced to bless God more for their crosses than for their mercies. The cross of a Christian has two faces—an outward and an inward face. From this exhortation to Israel notice—I. EVERY ROD WHICH A CHRISTIAN MEETS WITH HATH A VOICE IN IT. 1. It is a singular and remarkable step of the goodwill of God, when He doth manifest the meaning of a rod to a person or people. 2. The Christians of old have taken much pains to know the voice of the rods that they meet with. 3. It

is exceeding anxious for a Christian to be under a silent rod; to be under such a dispensation that he knows not the language of it. 4. It is exceeding hard for a Christian to profit by a rod till once he take up the meaning of it. 5. A Christian may be long under a rod before he know the voice and language of it. 6. When a Christian wins apprehension of the meaning of his rod he should at once go about to answer it. How may a Christian gain the meaning of his rod? By making serious application to the throne of grace, that God would give light concerning it. If the rod was timed to thee, when the heart was under much distance from God, that probably is the meaning of the rod—to draw thee nigh again. We may also know the rod by reflecting on the manner and circumstances of the rod, and by observing the mind of the Lord in Scriptures; and by studying the circumstances associated with the rod; and by considering what are the Divine designs in sending rods. It is easier to bear a rod patiently which is for the trial and exercise of our predominant grace, than to bear a rod patiently that is for the mortification of our predominant idols. There is ordinarily some analogy between our crosses and our sins. II. SOME MISTAKES WHICH CHRISTIANS HAVE CONCERNING THE MEANING OF THE ROD. 1. Many think the cross speaks wrath when it speaks love. Some think that love and the rod cannot be together at all. 2. Some think that God can never answer their prayers while He is afflicting them. 3. Some begin to dispute their interest when they meet with a rod or sad dispensation. 4. It is a great mistake of the voice and language of God's threatening rod for a person to think religion but vanity and an empty thing under the cross. 5. Another mistake is, to dispute the fellowship a Christian hath with God. III. HOW A CHRISTIAN MAY BE HELPED TO OBEY THE VOICE OF THE ROD. 1. If the rod call for the mortifying of a particular lust and idol, it is incumbent to sit down, and bring up your hearts to a spiritual detestation of such an idol. 2. If the voice of the rod be to stir up a grace, then study to know that there is as much spiritual advantage in the real and spiritual exercise of such a grace as ye can lose by all the rods ye can meet with. 3. If the voice of the rod be that thou shouldst set about the exercise of a duty, then endeavour seriously that all impediments and lets to that duty be laid aside. IV. WHAT OUGHT TO BE A CHRISTIAN'S DUTY WHILE HE IS WALKING UNDER A SILENT ROD. He should know God to be just, though he knoweth not for what He contends with him. He should be serious in making distinct supplications to God to know the meaning of such a rod. He should be serious to know the reason of God's keeping up His mind from him in such a rod. He should study to bring his heart into a tender and spiritual frame. Study to have thy heart most united to Christ when under a silent cross, for at that time thou art most ready to fall. Take notice of the following observations concerning the cross. If affliction be spun out to any length, the Christian may turn impatient. There are five sorts of blasphemy which one that is under a cross may fall into. It shows the want of a son-like frame if the cross hinders us in the exercise of our duties. Look upon your crosses as divine gifts. There are some peaceable fruits of righteousness that redound to a Christian who is rightly exercised under the cross. The most rare enjoyments of the Christian are trusted to the time of his being under a cross. (*A. Gray.*) *The voice of the rod:*—In the presence of calamities let us say, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servants hear." This, in substance, is—I. TO FEEL THE STROKES OF GOD'S HAND. If we feel the strokes of God's hand we shall shake off a certain state of indolence in which many of us are found, and be clothed with the sentiments of humiliation, and of terror and awe. We shall be softened with sentiments of sorrow and repentance if we examine their origin and cause. And if we discover the remedies and resources we shall be animated with the sentiments of genuine conversion. II. TO TRACE THE CAUSES AND THE ORIGIN OF OUR CALAMITIES. Micah wished the Jews to comprehend that the miseries under which they groaned were a consequence of their crimes. We would wish you to form the same judgment of yours. The subject has its difficulties. Under a pretence of entering into the spirit of humiliation, there is danger of our falling into the puerilities of superstition. Temporal prosperity and adversity are very equivocal marks of the favour or displeasure of God. By some, the slightest adversity is regarded as a stroke of God's angry arm. It is better to form the criterion of our guilt or innocence, not by the exterior prosperity or adversity sent of God, but by our obedience or disobedience to His Word. But adversity is sometimes occasioned by crimes. This is apparent—1. When there is a natural connection between the crimes we have committed and the calamities we suffer.

God has placed harmony between happiness and virtue. Trace this harmony in the circles of society and in private life. An enlightened mind can find no solid happiness but in the exercises of virtue. The happiness procured by the passions is founded on mistake. 2. When great calamities follow upon great crimes. III. TO EXAMINE THEIR CONSEQUENCES AND CONNECTIONS. Some calamities are less formidable in themselves than in the awful consequences they produce. There are calamities whose distinguished characteristic is to be the forerunners of calamities still more terrible. 1. One calamity is the forerunner of a greater when the people whom God afflicts have recourse to second causes instead of the first cause, and when they seek the redress of their calamities in political resources and not in religion. This is the portrait Isaiah gives of Sennacherib's first expedition against Judæa. 2. When, instead of humiliation on reception of the warnings God sends by His servants, we turn those warnings into contempt. Inquire how far you are affected by this doctrine. Do you discover a teachable disposition, or do you revolt against the Word of God's ministers? 3. When the anguish it excites proceeds more from the loss of our perishable riches than from sentiments of the insults offered to God. 4. When the plague fails in producing the reformation of those manners it was sent to chastise. IV. TO DISCOVER THEIR RESOURCES AND REMEDIES. We found our hopes on the abundant mercies with which God has loaded us during the time of visitation. With the one hand He abases, with the other He exalts. We found our hopes on the resources He has still left our state to recover, and to re-establish itself in all the extent of its glory and prosperity. Frustrate not these hopes by a superficial devotion, by forgetfulness of promises and violation of vows. (*James Saurin.*) *God's judgments:*—Do not be atheistical in the time of affliction. The "rod" means judgment. Sometimes judgment takes the form of chastening. We are not always to suppose that the rod means mere punishment,—an action of the strong upon the weak, or the righteous upon the wicked; the rod may be an instrument of education as well as of vengeance and of penalty. Do not suppose that the devil holds the rod. The devil is the weakest of all creatures; his is only the strength of boisterousness; there is nothing in it of abiding pith, stability, and power. Afflictions do not spring out of the dust. When the rod is lacerating your back, ask, What wilt Thou have me to do? When all things are dull and distressing and disappointing, say, This is the ministry of God; He is taking out of me some elements of vanity, which are always elements of weakness, and He is conducting me to the altar by a subterranean passage. We do not always go to the altar along a pathway of flowers; not always does God beckon us through a garden to follow Him to some chosen place of communion. Sometimes we are driven to the altar; often we do not want to pray; the soul will take no rest, and give none until a great, sweet, holy, burdened prayer has gone up to heaven by way of the cross. Is the rod lying heavy on your house now? Know ye the rod, and Him who hath appointed it; examine yourselves carefully and searchingly, and see if there be any wicked way in you, and drag it out: it will rot in the sunlight. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *Grace and love:*—Herein are three things. The people the Lord's voice crieth unto, and that is, unto the city. You have the exhortation to hear the voice of the rod. You have an argument to press you to do so. There is a rod of power and dignity, of discrimination, of direction, of government, of destruction. It is a rod of correction that we are to understand here. And we remark that when God visits the transgressions of His people with a rod, it is their best wisdom to hear the rod, and who hath appointed it. 1. God doth not steal upon a people with His judgments, but He first warns them before He smites them. He sometimes warns by His Word, and sometimes by His works and dispensations. By His judgments upon others, and by His afflictions upon themselves, He brings a lesser judgment to prevent a greater. 2. When God smites His own people He deals with them in the way of the rod. (1) Because they are His own children. (2) As they are children, He loves them, and He that spareth the rod hateth the child. (3) God doth sometimes correct His people because of their folly. It may be said, Doth not God use the rod with the wicked too? There is a whipping rod, and a breaking rod; a whipping rod for the saints, and a breaking rod for the wicked. God's rod for His people only chastises "in measure." And His visitations are always reasonable. 3. God's rod is a teaching rod. What lessons does it teach; and how does it teach them? 4. This message is sent especially to the great cities and towns of a nation or people. 5. When God visits with a rod, it is true wisdom to hear it and the Sender. You

must honour God in His dispensations. That is the way in which to get the best blessing out of the strokes, and to prevent further strokes. (*W. Bridge, M.A.*) *Fast-day service* :—The world is a place of punishment for sin, but it is not the place. Because God does not usually visit each particular offence in this life upon the transgressor, men are apt to deny altogether the doctrine of judgments. The Indian Mutiny was a *rod* of God for our nation, but it was an appointed *rod*. Hear this rod. 1. It would have been as well if we had heard this rod before it fell upon us. The wise man may hear God's rod before it smiteth. He that understandeth God's moral government knows that sin carries punishment in its bowels. 2. But the rod has fallen. What are the most glaring sins for which God is now visiting us? (1) There are sins in the community that never ought to have been allowed. Such as public immorality. (2) There are class sins. (3) There are sins of trade. (4) Sins in the relations between masters and workmen. (5) Sins of illiberality, deceit, bigotry, lasciviousness, carnality, pride, covetousness, and laziness. 3. Hear ye the rod when it shall again be still. (*Anon.*)

Vers. 10, 11. **The scant measure which is abomination.**—*Civic sins* :—In these verses we have a sample of the crimes which abound in the city, and which would bring on the threatened judgment. I. Their **VARIETY**. 1. Here is fraud. Fraud is one of the most prevalent crimes in all cities. 2. Here is violence. "The rich men thereof are full of violence." Wealth has a tendency to make men arrogant, haughty, heartless, often inhuman. 3. Here is falsehood. "The inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth." There is scarcely a trade or profession carried on without deception. Fortunes are made by lies. Such are samples of the crimes prevalent in Jerusalem. II. Their **RETRIBUTION**. All these crimes are offensive to the Ruler of the universe. 1. Disease. "Therefore also will I make thee sick in smiting thee." Crime is inimical to physical health and strength. 2. Desolation. "In making thee desolate because of thy sins." A desolate man is one who neither loves nor is loved; and sin produces this state. Few states of mind are more awful or more crushing than the sense of aloneness. 3. Dissatisfaction. "Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied." Sin and satisfaction can never co-exist. 4. Disappointment. "Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap; thou shalt tread the olives, but thou shalt not anoint thee with oil; and sweet wine, but shalt not drink wine." A sinful soul can never get out of its labour that which it expects. 5. Destruction. "Thy casting down shall be in the midst of thee." Conclusion. Mark the law of retribution. Not more certain is it that the rivers follow the ocean, the planets the sun, than that suffering follows sin. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 12. **For the rich men thereof are full of violence.**—*Trying the impossible* :—The folly of expecting real prosperity by committing acts of injustice, or pursuing courses of sin, is here forcibly represented by comparing it to the absurdity of attempting to run horses upon a rock, or to plough the rock with oxen. The strength of the representation is increased by its interrogative form. Our subject is, trying the impossible. Men are constantly doing this.—I. When they **ATTEMPT TO DESTROY AN ENEMY BY PHYSICAL FORCE**. II. When they attempt to **MAKE SOCIETY MORALLY GOOD BY MERE SECULAR INSTRUCTION**. Dishonesty, uneducated, may commit petty thefts; but educated, it will legally swindle a nation. Knowledge, alas! is all in vain. III. When they attempt to **GET HAPPINESS FROM WITHOUT**. True happiness springs from within, not from without; rises from holy loves, hopes, aspirations, and aims. In one word, love is the well of water that springs into everlasting life. IV. When they **ATTEMPT TO SAVE SOULS BY MINISTERING TO THEIR SELFISHNESS**. The man who tries to save souls by constant appeals to the selfishness of human nature acts more absurdly than he who attempts to gallop horses upon the sharp peaks of rugged rocks. V. When they **ATTEMPT TO CONVERT HEATHENS ABROAD BEFORE CONVERTING THE HEATHEN AT HOME**. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 14, 15. **Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap.**—*Useless labour* :—Mark the vexation of it—sowing and not reaping; sowing, and somebody else reaping. Here is the uncontrollable element in life. A man says, I certainly did tread out the olives, and I have not a small vessel full of oil with which to anoint myself; working for others, the slave of slaves. We see this every day. We need not

invoke the supernatural in any merely metaphysical sense in order to substantiate this as a fact. It is the common experience of life. Men put money into bags, and go for the money, and it is not there. Why is it not there? The prophet explains that there were holes in the bag, and the money went right through. You have heard of a man all day long trying to draw water with a sieve. How industrious he is! See, the sieve goes down, the wheel is turned, and the sieve is brought up, and there is no water in it. It is a mystery. Not at all. Why is there no water? Because the vessel is a sieve; the water runs out as quickly as it runs in. You have heard of one who was rolling a stone up the hill all day, and the more it was rolled up the more it rolled down, and at night it was exactly where it was before the process of rolling began. Worthless labour, useless labour, vexatious labour. Thus doth God puzzle and bewilder and perplex men. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 16. **And the statutes of Omri are kept.**—*Omri and Ahab: lessons worth study.*—On the long dark roll of human infamy there are but few darker names than those of Omri and Ahab. Learn—I. **THE RELIGIOUS SENTIMENT IN MAN IS OFTEN TERRIBLY PERVERTED.** Omri and Ahab were not idolaters themselves, but they established idolatry in their country. The religious sentiment in man is perhaps the substratum element of his nature. Man is made to worship, and to worship the one true and living God only. But so blinded is his intellect, so debased his nature, so utterly corrupt, that, instead of worshipping the infinitely great, he falls down before the infinitely contemptible. The perversity of the religious sentiment—1. Explains the errors, crimes, and miseries of the world. Man's strongest love is the spring of all his activities, the fountal source of all his influence. When this is directed to an idol, the whole of his life is corrupted. 2. Reveals man's absolute need of the Gospel. There is nothing but the Gospel of Christ that can give this sentiment a right direction. II. **THAT OBEDIENCE TO HUMAN SOVEREIGNS IS SOMETIMES A GREAT CRIME.** The worship of Baal was enacted by the "statutes" of Omri, and enforced by the practice of Ahab. A human law, enacted by the greatest sovereign in the world in connection with the most illustrious statesmen, if it is not in accord with the eternal principles of justice and truth, as revealed in God's Word, should be repudiated, renounced, and transgressed. "Whether it is right to obey God rather than men, judge ye." III. **THAT THE CRIMES OF EVEN TWO MEN MAY EXERT A CORRUPTING INFLUENCE UPON MILLIONS IN FUTURE GENERATIONS.** The reigns of Omri and Ahab were ages before the time when Micah lived. Notwithstanding, their enactments were still obeyed, their examples were still followed, and their practices were still pursued. The wickedness of these two men was now, ages after, perpetrated by a whole nation. How great the influence of man for good or evil! Verily, one sinner destroyeth much good. (*Homilist.*)

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## CHAPTER VII.

VER. 1. **There is no cluster to eat.**—*The unrevived church.*—The picture before the eye of the prophet is that of famine in the midst of plenty, want in time of harvest, sterility amid summer fruits, soul-fasting and wretchedness in a season of external prosperity and fulness. The time of ingathering is at hand. And yet Israel knew not the day of Divine visitation; she had no appreciation of the golden fruit, no heart or no capacity to pluck and eat the ripe clusters. This is a truthful representation of the experience of very many Christians and churches. There is no heartfelt appreciation of God's outward mercies, or of His gracious spiritual manifestations. He comes to them in the "summer fruits," and in the autumn "vintage"; but so dull are their spiritual perceptions, so vitiated are their tastes, so surfeited are they with the "apples of Sodom" and the wild grapes of sinful indulgence, that they know it not, and feel no hungering after righteousness; "there is no cluster" in all God's vintage which they can eat. So have we seen souls in times of glorious revival, when sinners were pressing into the kingdom, and many souls were refreshed and full of rejoicing, unrevived, unblest, crying, "Woe is me!" "There is no cluster to eat." So have

we seen whole churches and communities left to darkness and desolation and death, while the mighty God had bared His arm for salvation, and was deluging the land with a wave of regenerating and sanctifying power. (*Homiletic Monthly.*)

**My soul desired the first ripe fruit.**—*The joy of the harvest inaugural.*—The nation of Israel had fallen into so sad and backsliding a condition that it was not like a vine covered with fruit, but like a vineyard after the whole vintage has been gathered, so that there was not to be found a single cluster. The prophet, speaking in the name of Israel, desired the first fruit, but there was none to be had. The lesson of the text, as it stands, would be that good men are the best fruit of a nation; they make it worth while that the nation should exist; they are the salt which preserves it; they are the fruit which adorns it, and blesses it. But I take the text out of its connection, and use it as the heading of a discourse upon “ripeness in grace.” We can all say, “My soul desired the first ripe fruit.” We would go on to maturity, and bring forth fruit unto perfection, to the honour and praise of Jesus Christ.

**I. THE MARKS OF RIPENESS IN GRACE.**

**1. Beauty.** There is no more lovely object in all nature than the apple blossom. Much loveliness adorns youthful piety. Can anything be more delightful than our first graces? Autumn has a more sober aspect, but still it rivals the glory of spring. Ripe fruit has its own peculiar beauty. What a delicacy of bloom there is upon the grape, the peach, the plum, when they have attained perfection! Nature far excels art. The perfumed bloom yields in value to the golden apple, even as promise is surpassed by fulfilment. The blossom is painted by the pencil of hope, but the fruit is dyed in the hue of enjoyment. There is in ripe Christians the beauty of realised sanctification which the Word of God knows by the name of the “beauty of holiness.” This consecration to God, this setting apart for His service, this avoidance of evil, this careful walking in integrity, this dwelling near God, this being made like unto Christ,—in a word, this beauty of holiness, is one of the surest emblems of maturity in grace.

**2. Tenderness.** The young green fruit is hard and stone-like; but the ripe fruit is soft, yields to pressure, can almost be moulded, retains the mark of the finger. The mature Christian is noted for tenderness of spirit. I think I would give up many of the graces if I might possess very much tenderness of spirit. An extreme delicacy concerning sin should be cultivated by us all.

**3. Sweetness.** The unripe fruit is sour, and perhaps it ought to be, or else we should eat all the fruits while they were yet green. As we grow in grace we are sure to grow in charity, sympathy, and love. We shall have greater sweetness towards our fellow Christians.

**4. A loose hold of the earth.** Ripe fruit soon parts from the bough. You shake the tree and the ripest apples fall. You should measure your state of heart by your adhesiveness, or your resignation, in reference to the things of this world. The master will not let his ripe fruit hang long on the tree.

**II. THE CAUSES OF THIS RIPENESS.** So gracious a result must have a gracious cause.

**1. The inward working of the sap.** The fruit could never be ripe in its raw state were it taken away from the bough. Outward agencies alone may produce rottenness, but not ripeness; sun, shower, what not, all would fail,—it is the vital sap within the tree that perfects the fruit. It is especially so in grace. Everything between hell and heaven which denotes salvation is the work of the Spirit of God, and the work of the grace of Jesus. That blessed Spirit, flowing to us from Christ, as He is the former of the first blossom, so He is the producer of the fruit, and He is the ripener of it until it is gathered into the heavenly garner.

**2. The teaching of experience.** Some fruit, like the sycamore fig, never will ripen except it be bruised. Many of us seem as if we never would be sweet till first we have been dipped in bitterness; never would be perfected till we have been smitten. We may trace many of our sharp trials, our bereavements, and our bodily pains, to the fact that we are such sour fruit; nothing will ripen us but heavy blows. Ripeness in grace is not the necessary result of age. Little children have been ripe for glory. Many an aged Christian is not an experienced Christian. Time may be wasted as well as improved; we may be petrified rather than perfected by the flow of years.

**III. THE DESIRABILITY OF RIPENESS IN GRACE.** Many Christians appear to think that if they are just believers it is enough. To be just alive as a Christian is horrid work. The fruit which under proper circumstances does not ripen is not a good fruit; it must be an unwholesome production. Your soul can surely not be as it should be if it does not ripen under the influence of God's love and the work of His grace. It is the ripe fruit that proves the excellence of the tree. The Church wants mature Christians very greatly, and especially

when there are many fresh converts added to it. The Church wants, in these days of flimsiness and time-serving, more decided, thorough-going, well-instructed and confirmed believers. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 2-6. **The good man is perished out of the earth.**—*The wail of a true patriot over the moral corruption of his country:*—He bemoans—**I. THE DEPARTURE OF EXCELLENCE FROM HIS COUNTRY.** “The good man is perished out of the earth.” Probably they had emigrated to distant lands, perhaps they had gone into eternity. Good men are the “lights of the world.” Their influence penetrates the mass as salt, counteracts its tendency to corruption, removes its moral insipidity, gives it a new spirit—a spirit pungent and savoury.

**II. THE RAMPANCY OF AVARICE IN THIS COUNTRY.** 1. The working amongst the general community. To get wealth for themselves was with them such a furious passion that the rights and lives of others were disregarded. 2. Its working amongst the higher classes. “That they may do evil with both hands earnestly, the prince asketh, and the judge asketh for a reward; and the great man, he uttereth his mischievous desire: so they wrap it up.” The idea seems to be this: that the “great man,” the “prince,” for some corrupt motive, seeks the condemnation of some innocent person; and the “judge,” for a bribe, gratifies his wish. A judge from avarice will pronounce an innocent man guilty. All this is done very industriously, “with two hands.” Possible, lest some event should start up to thwart them; and when it is done “they wrap it up.” “So they wrap it up.” Avarice, like all sinful passions, seeks to wrap up its crimes.

**III. THE MISCHIEVOUSNESS OF THE BEST IN HIS COUNTRY.** “The best of them is as a briar; the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge.” There is a gradation of wickedness of the men in the country, but the best of them is like a prickly thorn, and worse than a thorn hedge. The prophet is so struck with this, that the thought of retribution takes hold of him, and he says, “The day of thy watchmen and thy visitation cometh: now shall be their visitation.” Another thing which the patriot here bemoans is—**IV. THE LACK OF TRUTHFULNESS IN THE COUNTRY.** “Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide,” &c. “Place no faith in a companion; trust not a familiar friend; from her that lieth in thy bosom guard the doors of thy mouth. For the son despiseth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, a man’s enemies are the members of his own family.”—Henderson. All social faith was gone; a man had lost all confidence in his brother. Social scepticism and suspicion prevailed in all circles. No faith was to be put in a friend. (*Homilist.*)

*The lack of good men:*—These words are the cause of the prophet’s sorrow. So deep a concern it was, that the words of verse 1 may signify not only mourning but howling. It arises from the scarcity of men truly good. Such a passion as this for the want of good men became the prophet in all capacities,—as a man, as a subject, and as a prophet. As a man, he could not but be concerned to see a nation of men so changed and degenerated by vice and luxury. As a subject, he could but consider what misery would suddenly betide the nation, for want of goodness and religion. As a prophet, he could but note how they slighted his errand, and were sturdy and resolute in their vices.

**I. WHEREIN THE GOODNESS OF THIS GOOD MAN, THE PROPHET MENTIONS, DID EXPRESS ITSELF.** The Christian Church, as well as the prophet, may justly bewail her barren Christians, and the scarcity of men truly good. We call ourselves saints and elect, but where is the patience, the temper, and the spirit of them? Let our religion be never so primitive and apostolical, except it makes us really good it is but wrangling hypocrisy and noise. 1. True goodness doth express itself in plainness and sincerity in all our respective dealings with men. 2. Goodness expresses itself in the exercise of good nature, and charitable allowances for the errors of others. 3. The good man is of a spirit truly public, whose care and attention looks abroad. 4. The good man takes up religion only to serve a spiritual purpose. Religion without this good purpose is only fashion or faction, hypocrisy and formality, superstition or interest.

**II. WHAT GREW UP AND PREVAILED IN THE PROPHET’S TIME IN THE PLACE OF TRUE RELIGION OR GOODNESS.** 1. Superstition and false religion, which naturally produce trouble and disquiet in all governments. 2. Wicked lives in the professors of the true religion, which will surely cause misery and ruin in a nation. 3. Atheistical persuasions prevailed, or there was no religion at all.

**III. WHAT PARTICULAR REASONS MAY MOVE US TO BEWAIL THE WANT OF REAL GOODNESS.** 1. The want of it is the principal cause of our

distractions about religion. 2. Real goodness is the best way to unite us among ourselves. Real goodness purges our judgment, removes our prejudices. (*Gregory Hascard, D.D.*) *Ancient and modern pessimism*.—When we ourselves are down it is hard to believe that anybody else is up; when our prayer is choked in our throat it is easy to believe that God hears no prayer at all, nor cares for petitioning and supplicating men. We interpret all things by ourselves. There is a curious self-projection of the soul upon the disc of history, and we read accordingly to the shadow which we throw upon that disc. This is what we call pessimism. We are always inventing strange words, and imagining that thereby we are making some kind of progress. Man has a fatal gift of giving names to things, and once give a name and it will be almost impossible to obliterate it. We call this pessimism,—that is, seeing all the wickedness, and none of the goodness; seeing all the darkness, and none of the light; seeing the utter desolation of all things, and not seeing in all the wilderness one green blade, one tiny flower, or hearing in the grim silence one trill of lark or soft note of thrush or nightingale. There are persons gifted with the genius of darkness. It may do us good to visit them occasionally; but on the whole it is better to live in the sunshine, and to hear the music, and to come under the influence of intelligent vivacity and cheerfulness. If people will shut themselves up in their own little houses—for the biggest house is little, the palace is a mere hut—and never keep any company but their own, they will go down. It is so ecclesiastically. There are persons who never see the universe except through their own church window, and as no window is as big as the horizon, there steals insidiously upon the mind a disposition to deny the existence of the horizon itself. It is so with reading. There are those who read only a certain set of books. They go down; there is no mental range, no scope, no variety, no mystery of colour, no hopefulness, no imagination. The very earth needs to have its crops changed. If you will go on growing the same crops you will cease to have any crop that is worth gathering. There is, on the other hand, what is termed optimism. That is the exact contrary of pessimism. Optimism sees the best of everything. There is a danger along that line also; the danger is that we may not be stern enough, real enough, penetrating enough, going into the heart and inmost fibre of things to find out reality and truth, how bad or good soever the case may be. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 3. That they may do evil with both hands earnestly, the prince asketh, and the judge asketh, for a reward.—*Success in sin: how it comes, and what it is*.—This is a picture, given at a stroke, of a proficient in sin in the highest state of sinful activity. He is doing evil “earnestly,” systematically, persistently, with a certain enthusiasm as if it were the very instinct of his being and the very business of his life. In order that he may be stimulated and kept at it, he asks a reward, a pecuniary consideration from those who are to profit by his villainy. The man stands at the uttermost point from duty, and is ready to perish in his own corruption. This is terrible as a moral phenomenon. Terrible as an illustration of the natural history of sin, and its tendency to run out to unspeakable issues. None of us have a proper and adequate idea of sin, either as in God’s sight or in its deadly influence on ourselves. There is no sin which has not its root in the human heart. And wherever there is the root there may be the fruit. Wherever there is the germ there may be the growth. Upon the development of this possibility God does not put any mechanical restraint. He tells us our duty; He plies us with motives; He presses us with arguments, with reasons, with threatenings, with promises. He does not override our nature, so as to destroy that free agency which makes us responsible, and without which we should belong to a totally different circle of life. Sometimes God does make His providence seem to stand in the way, as when He made the angel cross the path of Balaam. But it is to make a man pause and reflect before he goes further, not to compel him to desist. Is it not a strange thing that God should reward men with success who are breakers of His laws? But these men are not breaking those of His laws from which they receive their reward. Whichever of God’s laws you obey, that law will reward you according to its kind, just because it is a law. Why does God allow the ungodly man to attain wealth? Simply because that ungodly man has sought wealth with all his might. He has made it the one aim of his life, and in order to secure it he has scrupulously obeyed those laws with which the attainment of it stands connected. The man obeys the law of success in that department. But he also allows the law which he dis-

obeys to bring to him the natural result of that disobedience. And if the law which he disobeys be the higher law, the law of his spiritual life, then, whatever he may gain in the lower sphere, he is a loser in the higher, and therefore a loser in reality, a loser in the end, for he destroys his soul. As this success in sin is not prevented by providence, so neither is it prevented by the circumstance of possessing religious privileges. Privileges are a means of good; but the more good we resist the more hardened we become. Learn—it is not necessary that we should disobey the laws in the lower sphere; they can be obeyed in subordination to the higher. But if we practically make the lower the highest, then that which is really highest avenges itself by destroying the soul. The lesson of the text is just this—If we have not yet turned to good, the sooner we do so the better. There must be a great turning on the part of every one. (A. L. Simpson, D.D.) “*With both hands earnestly*”:—This is how bad men work. At least, it is how they wrought in the prophet's time. There is no excellence in mere earnestness. Earnestness may be as fiery as the flame, and at the same time as destructive to real life and goodness. Yet every man should be in earnest. We ought to live our life and do our work “with both hands earnestly.”

**I. WITHOUT HANDS.** There are some good men who seem to be without hands altogether. From dawn of life until dusk they do nothing expressly for Christ. They could work with hands, because they do, in other things, a song, a political struggle, or their business. I know the excuses that will be pleaded, and the bars that will be put in for arrest of judgment.

**II. WITH ONE HAND.** So, many of His servants serve Him. And this is well when it is just at the beginning of the service. A little is attempted at first. A little more is added, and so the service grows into some fulness, and the worker into some strength. You may be tender with the green blade if you see that it is green and therefore growing. A man may be touching Christian work only “with one hand,” but better so than not at all. More will come. He will be weary soon working with one hand. He will need the other for his own relief. He will take if he is not discouraged. Let all the one-handed men hear the “God-speed” of the older workers.

**III. WITH BOTH HANDS.** For, after all, there is no perfection, even of a relative kind, with one. And the continued use of one only is a shocking imperfection in the Christian service. For as both hands have been given for use, the other will not be idle. It will be working in forbidden ways. It will be undoing what is done by the other. “With both hands,” then, for very safety. When we think of it, how very few things there are in the house, or in labour, or in business that we can do with one hand. A man without an arm is considered disabled as a workman.

**IV. WITH BOTH HANDS EARNESTLY.** It is not enough that all the talents are laid out; they must all be laid out to the best advantage. It is not enough that every power and passion shall be enlisted in the Lord's service; they must all be baptized, inspired, and energised with a Christian earnestness. Thought must be suffused with feeling, and work must be filled and vitalised with love. There are those who work “with both hands,” who keep nothing back. There is no conflict of principles in their souls, and no visible flaw in their obedience. But the mechanism is mechanical, there is no vital action. The Christian earnestness is not mere vehemence and heat. It is essential that it be informed with full intelligence. The difference between fanaticism and zeal is chiefly a difference in knowledge. Christian earnestness is wise and thoughtful in the application of knowledge, in the judgment of persons, events, times, or seasons. Christian earnestness is very patient. Some reasons for an earnest life. 1. Self-preservation requires it. 2. Honesty requires it. 3. Benevolence requires it. 4. Gratitude requires it. 5. Time requires it. 6. The text requires it. This text is one taken from the enemy. We have seized it as from the devil. It describes *his* hosts. We thank them for the attitude. We accept the challenge. We are no soldiers unless we do. (A. Raleigh, D.D.)

**And so they wrap it up.**—*Sin wrappings*:—The author of this book, though a contemporary of Hezekiah, evidently sketches a period in Jewish history far more corrupt than his own day. The period he refers to in the context was a period when the good man had “perished out of the earth,” and when “upright men existed not”; a period when all were “lying in wait for blood,” and every man was “against his brother.” Yet though the people and the authorities of this period were so corrupt, they had not entirely lost all shame of the abominations, for the prophet says, “they wrap it up.” All were busy in artful endeavours to conceal from others the wickedness of their conduct. Now, the endeavour of

these people to wrap up their sin in concealment is worthy our attention, for several reasons—I. BECAUSE IT IS GENERAL. Sin seems to have in it an instinct of self-concealment; it cannot bear the light. Like the noxious reptiles of the earth, it shrinks from observation. Hence no sooner does a man commit a sin than he seeks "to wrap it up." 1. He seeks "to wrap it up" from society. In all grades of society, in all departments of action, men are active in wrapping up their sin. The dishonest tradesman wraps up the thousand sins of his daily avaricious life in the bland smile, the cringing bow, and the false statement which he makes to his customers. Every parcel he delivers to the purchaser is wrapped up in falsehood. In the professions you have the same wrapping. The lawyer, the physician, the priest, each has his sins, and each has his method of wrapping them up. Candidates for public offices will "wrap up" the sinful wishes that prompt them to seek the post, by many an avowal of patriotism and benevolence, as false as they are fair. This general "wrapping up" of our sins from the eyes of our fellow-men shows the essential hideousness of sin. The conscience of universal man feels that it is an execrable thing, therefore he seeks to conceal it. 2. He seeks to "wrap it up" from his own conscience. This the sinner does by specious excuses which he offers to himself for his wickedness. Sometimes he will seek to "wrap" his sin in the garb of custom, so as to hide its enormity from his conscience, and he hopes that the custom of his trade or his profession will justify his doings. Sometimes he will "wrap" his sin in the infirmities of men who have been regarded as good, and he will seek to satisfy conscience by reference to the imperfections of men whom the world, the Church, and even the Bible itself, canonise as saints. Sometimes he will endeavour to "wrap up" his sin of religious neglect by promises of improvement in a future time, as Felix did of old. The endeavour of this people to wrap up their sin is important to notice—II. BECAUSE IT IS WICKED. It is adding sin to sin; the concealment of a sin is a double sin. By wrapping a sin up, however strong may be your motives for doing so, you enhance the guilt, and make the matter worse. The serpent hatches its brood under the cover. 1. Concealing sin is a sin against our constitution. We are organised to be open and revealing; we have organs made to reveal fully and faithfully what is in us, and our natural instincts urge us to this revelation. 2. Concealing sin is a sin against society. We have no right to appear to others what we are not. The hypocrite is, of all forgers, the most wicked and dangerous. 3. Concealing sin is a sin against God. It is an insult to His omniscience. The endeavour of these people to wrap up their sins is important to notice—III. BECAUSE IT IS UNWISE. 1. The endeavour must inevitably prove fruitless. Even here, circumstances often occur in a man's history to bring out to the full view of his contemporaries his hidden sins. The wrappage gets rent, and the unswathed monster leaps into the light, and men shudder. "Murder will out"; and not only murder. Yes, and to a man's own conscience here, often by the force of moral conviction, all the monsters are unwrapped. But in the future there will be a full and complete unfoldment. Fold after fold, however intricately and numerously winded round the evil thing, will be unloosed and thrown away in the flames of the last day. "God will bring every work into judgment with every secret thing" (Eccles. xii. 14; Matt. x. 26; 1 Cor. iv. 5). 2. The endeavour is eternally inimical to happiness. The child who commits a crime against his parents will move in wretched gloom in the happy circle of love, so long as he seeks to wrap up his offence. Let him confess it in tears, and the dark cloud will break, and the sun will shine again into his heart. Thus David felt, "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long" (Psa. xxxii. 3). "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh shall have mercy." 3. The endeavour, if persisted in, will involve in unutterable ruin. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 7. I will look unto the Lord (taken with Isa. lxvi. 2).—*The two looks*:—Man is a creature requiring help. Where is he to look? I. MAN'S LOOK. 1. Personal—"I." Whatever it may cost, whoever else will not, I will. 2. Reliance—"unto." In weakness, confusion, difficulty I will look unto the Lord. 3. Object—"the Lord." Jehovah. He is able, willing, has promised to help. II. GOD'S LOOK. 1. God has promised to look *to*, i.e., after. "I will." His look is one of power, and it means help and protection. 2. Object—*poor*—needy. "Him that hath no helper" applies both to temporal and spiritual concerns of God's people. 3. Contrite—repentant. Applies to spiritual condition: one humbled

on account of sin; sorrowful, returning one. 4. Trembles at My Word. Not as Felix, but one who has reverence for it, tries to keep it, fears to break it. To Him will I look. Others may despise and disregard Him, but I will look to (after) Him. Let us look to God, and God will look to us (*John R. Taft, M.A.*) *The Church looking and waiting for the Lord*.—If you survey the human race you will find among them numberless differences. They differ in their condition, in their complexion, their stature, speech, apparel, manners. Yet there is a great resemblance among them too. The things in which they agree are far more important than those in which they differ. The resemblance regards what is essential in human nature; the variety is what is accidental only. This is an image of the Church of God. Differences in opinions, speculations, discipline, religious usages, forms and ceremonies, only concern the dress of religion; the body is essentially the same. In every age of the world, under every dispensation of society, God's people have been the same, their wants the same, their dependence the same, their tastes the same, their principles the same. Resolution rashly formed in our own strength not only fails, but often proves a snare to the soul. Resolution made in reliance on the power of Divine grace will be found serviceable to remind us, to humble us, to stimulate us, and to bind us. Thus resolution will resemble a hedge round a meadow, to keep the cattle from straying; and the hemming of a garment, to keep the threads from ravelling out. I. TO WHOM DOES THE RESOLUTION OF THIS TEXT REFER? The Lord. This term, Lord, is characterised by the Church in two ways. The one regards God's work for them; the other, His relation to them. The Church calls Him "the God of their salvation." And so He is, in every sense of the word. Every kind of deliverance is from Him. He is the preserver of men. But there is a deliverance that is emphatically called "salvation"; a deliverance from the wrath to come, from the powers of darkness, from the tyranny of the world, from the slavery of sin,—from all its remains and its consequences. Of this salvation, the purpose, the plan, the execution, the application, and the consummation are of God and of grace. The Church also calls Him her God. "My God will hear me." This is not too much for any Christian to utter. Every Christian has a much greater propriety in God than he has in anything else; indeed, there is nothing else that is his own. As He is really, so God is to us eternally and unchangeably. The relation between God and us, so as to authorise us to call Him ours, results from two things: donation on our side, and dedication on ours. II. BY WHAT IS THIS RESOLUTION EXCITED? "Therefore." Read the preceding verses. The prophet turned away from creatures, knowing that they were broken cisterns, cisterns that could hold no water. A designed experience this is, and not a casual one (so to speak) on God's side. God is concerned for our welfare, infinitely more than we are ourselves, and therefore He does not wait for our application, but He excites it. It is a necessary experience on our part. We have a strong propensity to make flesh our arm and earth our home. It is the privilege of the real Christian, that he knows to whom he can go in the hour of distress; that though all be rough under foot, all, when he looks up, is clear overhead. III. WHAT DOES THE RESOLUTION INCLUDE? Two things—prayer and patience. Looking to Him is seeking Him in prayer. You should look to Him—1. For explanation under your affliction. 2. For support in your trouble. 3. For sanctification. 4. For deliverance. And you are to "wait." Waiting supposes some delay in God's appearance on the behalf of His people. These delays have always been common. IV. WHAT IS IT THAT SUSTAINS THIS RELATION? It is confidence in God as the hearer and answerer of prayer. According to some, the success of prayer is confined entirely to its exercise and influence. But we can recognise actual interpositions and benedictions. If a man prays aright, he will believe that God does something in answer to his prayer. (*William Jay.*) *Faith and hope in God*.—The Lord Jehovah is a never-failing source of consolation to His believing people. In Him, therefore, they put their trust, and receive ample supplies of mercy and grace in every time of need. In the preceding verses Micah addresses the few who were pious among them by way of caution, against treacherous friendships and creature confidence, and by way of encouragement, to trust solely in the Saviour of Israel for preservation and deliverance. The words of the text announce—I. THE PROPHET'S RESOLUTION. "I will look unto the Lord," &c. This pious determination was evidently the result of eminent wisdom and prompt decision of character; it discovers a devout and gracious state of mind, and regards both the—1. Active character of faith.

Looking is a vigorous act of the mind. This vital principle includes a full renunciation of self-dependence; an implicit confidence in the Divine perfections and promises; and an entire devotion of the heart and life to His service. 2. The patient exercise of hope. "I will wait for the God of my salvation." Genuine faith is invariably productive of practical piety. If we believe in God we shall delight in waiting upon Him in fervent devotion, and waiting for Him in earnest expectation. Waiting for the Lord is not a suspension of mental activity, nor a cessation of personal exertion; it is a lively exercise of the mind, ardently desiring and diligently seeking the blessings of salvation in all the duties and ordinances of the Gospel. We must wait for God humbly, believingly, faithfully, patiently, and perseveringly, in all the means of His appointment. II. THE PROPHET'S CONFIDENCE. "My God, the God of my salvation." This is the language of humble assurance. Genuine religion is its own evidence. It is attended with an internal witness of its personal enjoyment. 1. The inestimable portion claimed—"My God." It is the distinguishing promise of the new covenant, "I will be your God, and ye shall be My people." This is happily realised in the experience of all the saints. God is not only theirs in the natural relations of creation and preservation; but He is also theirs by the special engagements of His covenant and the benefits of salvation. 2. The unspeakable privilege enjoyed. "The God of my salvation." The prophet had obtained mercy of the Lord, and was a partaker of His saving influence. But he still believingly waited for the progressive and perfect accomplishment of the work which He had already begun. Thus all the righteous are subjects of present salvation, and heirs of eternal life. III. THE PROPHET'S ENCOURAGEMENT. "My God will hear me." This persuasion afforded him inexpressible consolation. The rebellious Jews rejected his message; but he rejoiced to know that his God would propitiously hear and answer his pious devotions. He was encouraged by—1. His communion with God. Fellowship with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ, is the exalted privilege of all His people. They not only deem it their bounden duty, but they also esteem it their highest honour, to address the God of all grace. 2. His expectation from God. "My God will hear me." He was not presumptuous in his confidence, nor enthusiastic in his anticipation. He relied on Scripture promises. He had the evidence of experience. The promises and goodness of God should excite our confidence, and promote gratitude and praise. Let us, then, consider the folly of trusting in the world for happiness, and the necessity of looking to God for salvation. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *Looking unto God, and waiting for Him* :—Here is a general ground of encouragement. 1. The Lord makes use of troublesome and declining times to drive His people the more to their duty and thrift. 2. There is in God sufficient matter of encouragement to counter-balance any difficulty or discouragement that His people meet with in the world. Looking unto the Lord is an all-sufficient remedy to keep them from being carried away in a declining time, and from discouragement in a sad time. 3. In declining and sad times the people of God ought to be most earnest in dealing with Him, depending on Him, and expecting His help. Lukewarm dealing with God, however it may please fools in a calm day, yet will not bear out in a time of public defection. 4. In the reeling and turning upside down of things here below the people of God are not so much to look to these uncertainties as unto the immutability of God in what He is to His people. 5. With our faith and ardency in expecting God's help, patient waiting is also to be conjoined, by keeping His way, notwithstanding difficulties or delays of deliverance, and resolving to have faith exercised before it get the victory. 6. In all the waiting of the people of God upon Him there is still hope and confidence, though it be not always seen to the waiter; for the same word in the original signifies both waiting and hoping. (*George Hutcheson.*) *Pious resolves* :—1. These are the words of one who was saddened, and chafed, and perplexed. The depravities of society, its treacheries, its selfishness, and its furious lust overpowered all faith but faith in God, and compelled, through a terrible discipline, and yet a gracious one, to that Christlike attitude of perfect resignation and perfect devotion and perfect hope depicted by the text. The feeling expressed is one of personal devotion and social separation. 2. When the oppressions of sin bear down the soul, and the burden on the conscience is heavy; when convictions lacerate and fears overwhelm, and the heart is agonised with the apprehension of the wrath of an angry God; when man is wearied and distracted with the world and sin, wondrous is the change to purity, freedom,

and peace, when the vow of the prophet can formulate the soul's aspirations as in the text. 3. When man is converted and saved, the spiritual occupation of his new life is a looking, a waiting, and a praying; that occupation is permeated with hope and perpetuated by faith, and the certainties of a glorious issue illumine the path and lighten the soul. 4. No one can say "My God" who cannot also say "My God will hear me." Every saved soul prays. There is a necessary connection, in virtue of an essential law of the spiritual life, between the "receiving of the atonement" and the offering up of our desires unto God. 5. Those who are saved were, in the language of Scripture, "lost." Their salvation is the work of the Lord. Their Redeemer is the Deity. 6. The words, "God of my salvation," "My God," indicate the exercise of that appropriating faith by which we "lay hold on the hope set before us" in the everlasting Gospel. (T. Easton.) **My God will hear me.**—*Our assuring confidence.*—Faith is "the victory that overcometh the world." God is the object of that faith; His Word is the ground upon which it rests, and confidence and peace and assurance for ever are its invariable fruits. When confiding in God, the soul intrenches itself in God; it is unassailable from within or from without; it can triumph over the most adverse circumstances, and cling to the everlasting rock amidst the swellings of the angriest sea. Nothing ought at any time to shake our confidence in God. No ground for distrust in God can possibly exist. It is well, when faith's trial comes, to be prepared with some great standard truth to which we may hold fast under all circumstances. The whole teaching of Scripture assures us that confidence in God cannot be misplaced—cannot be disappointed. I. THE SOUL'S CONFIDENCE GROUNDED UPON DEITY—UPON WHAT GOD IS. This is the highest of all grounds for confidence,—what God is in Himself, irrespective of all other considerations whatsoever. There is no deficiency of resources in Him; God is all-sufficiency. No want of inclination in Him; He is all goodness. All His attributes attest Him to be altogether qualified for the supply of our need, and His promises absolutely pledge Him to supply the need of all those who seek unto Him. II. THE SOUL'S CONFIDENCE IS HERE GROUNDED ON RELATIONSHIP TO GOD. "My God will hear me." It is the province of faith to appropriate God, as much as it is the province of faith to believe in His existence. The only revelation God gives us of Himself in His Word has reference to the offices He sustains for His people, and the relation He bears to poor sinners. III. THE SOUL'S CONFIDENCE IS FOUNDED ALSO ON THE PROMISE, "My God will hear me." It is not a question, Will God hear me? "My God will hear me." The same word in the Hebrew that signifies God hears, signifies also God answers. Whensoever we call, God will hear. Howsoever we call, God will hear. A look is a prayer; a desire is a prayer. And there is the personal element in the assurance—"the Lord will hear me." (Marcus Rainsford.) *A sweet silver bell ringing in each believer's heart:*—"My God shall hear me." What a charming sentence! There is more eloquence in that sentence than in all the orations of Demosthenes. It is a choice song for a lone harp. I. THE TITLE. "My God." It is not God alone, but God in covenant with me, to whom I look for help. To call Him "My God" means election and selection. "My God" supposes an appropriation of faith. "My God" signifies knowledge and acquaintance. "My God" implies an embrace of love. "My God" implies that the obedience of your life is rendered to Him most cheerfully. A man cannot call God his God in truth unless he desires to obey Him. And the phrase "My God" hints at a joy and delight in Him. II. THE ARGUMENT. The title contains within itself a secret logical force. As surely as He is my God He will hear me. Why?—1. Because He is God, the living and true God. The oracles of the heathen are but liars. Those who sought unto the false gods did but dote upon falsehoods. You see in what a tone of confidence this prophet speaks; and why should not every child of God speak with the same confidence? There let it stand like a column of brass,—though all things else should fail, God must hear prayer. He may do this, and He may do that, but He must hear prayer. 2. Because He has made Himself my God He will hear me. He has given Himself to be my God. 3. Because my God has heard me so many times. Therefore, be it far from me to doubt His present and future favour. 4. Because in the covenant His hearing prayer is included. 5. Because if He did not hear prayer, He would Himself be a great loser. III. THE FAVOUR. "My God will hear me." It is better for us to have a promise that God will hear us, than a promise that God will always answer us. If it were a matter of absolute fact that God would

always answer the prayers of His people as they present them, it would be an awful truth. The text means that He will hear me—1. As a listener. 2. As a friend full of sympathy. 3. As a judge patiently hears a case. 4. As a helper. IV. THE PERSON. "My God will hear me." Will He hear you? Are you cast down under a sense of sin; persecuted; or disappointed? Be sure that God will hear you. If any man wills to have God to be his God, grace is given him so that He will. If you desire Christ, you may have Him. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Keep on the outlook*:—A beautiful little book, entitled "Expectation Corners," tells of a king who prepared a city for some of his poor subjects. Not far from them were large storehouses where everything they could need was supplied, if they but sent in their requests. But on one condition—they should be on the lookout for the answer, so that when the king's messengers came with the answer to their petitions they should always be found waiting and ready to receive them. The sad story is told of one desponding one who never expected to get what he asked, because he was too unworthy. One day he was taken to the king's storehouses, and there, to his amazement, he saw, with his address on them, all the packages that had been made up for him, and sent. There was the garment of praise and the oil of joy and the eye-salve, and so much more; they had been to his door, but found it closed; he was not on the outlook. From that time on he learnt the lesson Micah would teach us: "I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me." (*Andrew Murray.*)

Ver. 8. Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me.—*The rejoicing foe rebuked*:—I. THE REJOICING FOE. At the moment of conversion, the soul enters upon a conflict which continues until his dying day. The bugle that calls him to peace with God, calls him also to battle. Over and above the conflicts arising from his own evil heart, and the temptations of a godless world, the saint has in Satan a sworn foe. Let me beseech you to remember that in Satan you have a personal living foe. In order to form some idea of the foe we have to fight, look at the names given to him in Scripture. These best reveal his character. Apollyon, the destroyer. Satan, the accuser. The Devil, or murderer. He comes at unawares. He assaults our weakest part. II. THE REJOICING FOE REBUKED. In our text there is no attempt to deny the fact of the fall, or excuse its guilt. Whence does the fallen Christian obtain his comfort, if it be not in ignoring the past? He rejoices in the thought of restoration. The future is his reservoir of gladness. I shall arise, he says, a wiser man; a more watchful man; a humbler man. God's true saints shall be raised from the ground, however hard their fall. Next to the salvation of the sinner, the recovery of the saint brings glory to our Lord. (*A. G. Brown.*) *Chequered experience*:—I. THE CONFLICT SUPPOSED. The language is very strong; the figurative terms employed suggest their own images; it is a sad but not a desperate case; there is hope in the Lord concerning this thing; but, meanwhile, there is a conflict going on which puts to the proof the strength and courage of Micah. We are here meditating upon the mental warfare that went on in the battlefield of a prophet's heart. That which belonged to him is common to us all—not always, but at certain times. Some Christians make this mistake; they seem to expect that because they are Christians they shall be exempt from the temptations and evil inclinations of other men. II. THE SOURCES OF THIS SPIRITUAL CONFLICT. We want nothing but the history of our heart to explain this. The sources of this conflict of thought and feeling are threefold,—the world, the devil, and death. III. THE FREQUENT ANTICIPATION OF DEATH, WHICH IS A SOURCE OF PERPETUAL CONFLICT TO MANY. The fear of death is natural; it is probably a principle implanted from above, to prevent man from rushing unbidden into the presence of God. And to this fear the believer is liable, even as the unbeliever. (*W. G. Barrett.*)

Ver. 9. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him.—*The believer, conscious of God's displeasure, confessing his sin*:—This is the language of the Church of the living God. It is a sincere and upright acknowledgment of her own fault. She saw God in the dealing and conduct of her enemies. This led her to confession. This led her to holy determination; and also to patient waiting; and a believing confidence. I. THE SOLEMN PURPOSE OF THE SOUL. "I will bear the indignation of the Lord." She saw the Lord's hand in her afflictions. It is no small wisdom, when we are enabled to see clearly

the mind and the dealings of God with us in our afflictions. What was the "indignation" that the Church had to bear? Not that which God shows to those who despise Him and rebel against Him; but the eternal display of God's wrath against sin, a holy indignation against iniquity; the indignation of a Father's displeasure. It is not the less painful for that. It is the very love of the father that makes his displeasure so keen to the heart of the child. II. THE REASON THAT SHE GIVES FOR IT. "Because I have sinned against Him." Sin should be regarded in three different points of view. There is a course of sin. There are sins into which a child of God may be surprised. There is the missing of the aim of the child of God. There are two features in her confession. She acknowledged the sin to have been against God. And she threw the blame upon herself. Excuse mars confession. She did not throw the blame on inward corruption. Some confess sin, but they only confess it in the general. If a man truly confesses, he searches sin to the root. Nothing more humbles the spirit than such thorough and sincere confession. (J. H. Evans, M.A.) *The child of God under chastisement*.—The consequences of national backsliding could only be national judgments. This the prophet foresees; and in the name of the pious remnant, he turns to God for that hope and consolation which nothing on earth can yield. As for the chastisement which the Jewish Church was about to suffer, she is taught, in our text, to use the language of submission and of hope. Learn from the text, what are the feelings, what is the behaviour of a child of God under affliction. I. HE SUBMITS HIMSELF TO GOD. Various are the trials which the people of God are called to endure. There is no promise that they shall be exempt from distressing circumstances. Each one shares the common sorrows of humanity. Each one has also sorrows peculiar to himself, arising from his disposition and circumstances. Yet, in all, the real child of God beholds God's hand. He knows that, whatever he may have to suffer, it is from the Lord. Knowing, then, whence his troubles come, the child of God bows beneath the chastisement, it may be with a keen feeling of their loss, or woe, but with a patient submission to God's will. II. HE JUSTIFIES GOD. Pride may sometimes enable a man resolutely to bear evils which cannot be avoided. A naturally cheerful temper, also, will not feel the burden of sorrow so heavy as it is felt by a mind naturally anxious and desponding. But Christian submission is accompanied by a feeling which mere cheerfulness cannot produce, and which pride steadily opposes—a feeling of conscious guilt. Every grief is the offspring of sin. The Lord afflicts us, either that we may not forget our original deserts, as children of wrath; or, because we have committed some new transgression; or, as a means of correcting and renewing our naturally corrupt hearts. The child of God, therefore, while he smarts beneath the stroke of chastisement, acknowledges the propriety of it. He submits, for he knows that he has deserved it. This is the state of mind which God desires to behold in every sinner. This is the very end for which earthly trials are sent. III. HOPES IN GOD. "Until He plead my cause." Trust in the mercy of God is no less the duty of a true Christian, than submission to the will of God, and an acknowledgment of His justice in afflicting us. The child of God puts his trust in that very hand which smiteth him. Faith enables him to see, that chastisement, when patiently endured, is a sign of his adoption. Being assured of this, he can trust his Father's kind affection for removing the trial in due time. Thus doth the afflicted child of God "lean only upon the hope of His heavenly grace." Worldly sorrows thus become light and tolerable, even when they are manifestly the consequences of sin. As I have cautioned you against a merely proud submission to God, and against an impenitent confession of your sinfulness, let me also warn you against a presumptuous hope of God's mercy. God is a "jealous" God. There is a hope which will prove at last no better than a vain presumption; and the Bible does not leave us in doubt as to what that hope is. It is the hope of the hypocrite. It is the hope of the careless, thoughtless sinner, who talks loudly about God's mercy. There is but one way in which you are authorised to hope in God. Approach Him with deep and heartfelt penitence; abhor and forsake every sin; and then your confidence in Him will stand on a secure foundation. (J. Jowett, M.A.) *Culture under trial*.—Transfer this language from the lips of the Church to the lips of the individual Christian, and consider it as an indication of a spirit which needs to be more largely cultivated. I. DETERMINATION TO BE CULTURED UNDER TRIAL. "I will bear, &c. . . against Him." Two kinds of indignation spoken of in Scripture. Of one it is said, "Who can stand before His indignation?" Of the

other the Church says, "I will bear it." The one, fiery wrath of an offended King; the other, chastening displeasure of a loving Father. The one, hot anger, which utterly consumes; the other, loving correction, which melts, refines, and purifies. While before one none can stand, before the other, that we may be partakers of His holiness, God yearns that we may bow. When the Christian sees chastening displeasure issuing from a Father's wounded love, he says, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord." But something more. "Because I have sinned." I will bear it, because it is less than I deserve; because I know who sends it, and the object He has in view. Illustrate Shimei's conduct, and David's treatment of him (2 Sam. xvi. 5-14). Recollect that God's indignation may fall on us through others, or may come direct from Him. II. LIMIT OF ENDURANCE TO BE PROPOSED. "Until He plead my cause, and execute judgment for me." In the trials which the Church had schooled herself to bear, there had been much of harshness, injustice, and wrong. God permits others to afflict us, whose purpose may be different to His own. Though the wrath of man is hateful, God makes it subservient to His wise purposes, and restrains its exercise. In every case of this kind, we should distinguish between man's purpose and God's purpose, or patience is beyond our reach. Illustrate Joseph in Egypt; and Israel in Egypt. If then, besides looking at man's purpose, we will train ourselves to look at God's purpose, and also for God's limit, we shall be able to appropriate the language of the text, and so follow the example of Christ, who, under trial, committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously. III. EXPRESSION OF CONFIDENCE TO BE MAINTAINED. "He will bring me forth . . . light . . . righteousness." Observe the meaning of the language. Obviously figurative: sorrow, trouble, desolation (whether the temporal or spiritual) continually spoken of as "darkness," and the reverse as "light." But, when the proper season comes, God fulfils His promise to make darkness light before His servants, by turning doubt into confidence, affliction into prosperity, sorrow into joy; and He brings them forth into the light by removing their burdens, making clear their way, vindicating them from false charges, and revealing, at least in some measure, the reason and benefit of their grief. (*W. D. J. Straton, M.A.*)

Vers. 11, 12. In the day that thy walls are to be built.—*The good time coming*:—I. It will be a time for REBUILDING THE RUINED. "In the day that thy walls are to be built." The walls of Jerusalem are referred to—the walls of fortification, protection, these are to be rebuilt. There is, however, a more important rebuilding than this—a rebuilding that is going on, and will go on, until the great moral city shall be complete. 1. The human soul is a building; it is a temple, a "spiritual house" reared as a residence for the Eternal. It is "a city whose builder and maker is God." 2. The human soul is a building in ruins. The walls are broken down; its columns, arches, roof, rooms, all in ruins. 3. The human soul is a building to be rebuilt. Christ is to be the foundation stone, &c. This rebuilding is going on according to a plan of the Great Moral Architect; is being worked out by agents that know nothing of the plan. II. It will be a time for REGATHERING THE SCATTERED. "In that day also He shall come even to thee from Assyria, and from the fortified cities, and from the fortresses even to the river, and from sea to sea, and from mountain to mountain." The human family, which heaven intended to live as one grand brotherhood, has been riven into moral sections, antagonistic to each other, and scattered all over the world. The time will come when they shall be gathered together, not, of course, in a local sense, but in a spiritual—in unity of sentiment, sympathy, aim, soul. All shall be one in Christ. They will be gathered in spirit together from the four winds of heaven. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 13. For the fruit of their doings.—*Man's ruin the fruit of his own conduct*:—Assuming it to be a fact that man's ruin is evermore the fruit of his own conduct, three things must follow—I. THAT HIS MISERY WILL BE IDENTIFIED WITH REMORSE. Morally it is impossible for a man to ascribe his ruin to his organisation, to circumstances, or to any force over which he has no control. He must feel that he has brought it on himself. II. THAT IN HIS SUFFERINGS HE MUST VINDICATE THE DIVINE CHARACTER. "Just and right art Thou," &c. As fruit answers to seed, as echoes to sound, their calamities answer to their conduct. III. THAT HIS SALVATION FROM RUIN REQUIRES A CHANGE OF LIFE. IV. THAT CHRISTIANITY IS THE ONLY SYSTEM THAT CAN MEET HIS CASE.

The mission of Christianity is to change the heart, to renew the life, and effect a spiritual reformation. This it is designed to do, this it is fitted to do; and no other system on earth is capable of accomplishing this work. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 14. Feed Thy people with Thy rod, the flock of Thine heritage, which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old.—*Christ's pastoral care*.—The prophet gives an account of the state of the professing, visible Church, which he looks upon to be like unto a field or vineyard after the harvest is past and the vintage over. God never leaves a professing Church to be a wilderness, unless upon the utmost apostasy; but He many times leaves them to be as a field after harvest, or a vineyard after the vintage. He takes down the hedge. He suffers the wild beasts to come in, lets persons spoil at their pleasure; but there will come a time of culture again, when He will have fruit brought forth to His praise. The prophet says that those who were good were very few; and that those who were evil were very bad. When this is the condition, inevitable destruction lies at the door of that place or nation. If either of these be otherwise, there is yet hope. This being the state and condition of the people of the land, the prophet makes in the name of the Church a threefold application of himself—1. To God. "I will look unto the Lord." 2. To her enemies. Who is this enemy? Wherein did she show her enmity? 3. To himself. "I will bear the indignation," &c. Here is a very becoming frame under the present state of affliction. In this state and condition, the prophet puts up this request, "Feed Thy people with Thy rod." In these words we have—I. WHAT IS PRAYED FOR. The rod is the sign of the shepherd. Three things in the feeding of God's people—1. That God would supply their spiritual and temporal wants. 2. That God, in that state which is coming upon them, would give them pledges, singular pledges of His own tenderness and love. 3. By "feeding" is intended rule, protection, deliverance. The shepherd has to preserve his flock from all evil. II. THE ARGUMENTS OF FAITH TO BE PLEADED IN THIS CASE. 1. They were the people of God—(1) Upon election. (2) By purchase and acquisition. (3) By covenant. 2. They were "the flock of Thine heritage." They are a "flock." And as such they are helpless, harmless, useful—useful, because a secret blessing goes with them; by reason of their good example; and by reason of their industry. They are "the flock of God's heritage." As such, if God take not care of it, no one else will. It is the heritage of Him whom the whole world looks upon as their greatest enemy. 3. The third argument is taken from their state and condition. The first argument pleads God's glory, His love and faithfulness. The second pleads God's interest. The third pleads God's pity and compassion. They dwell "solitarily," that is disconsolately. "In a wood," that is, in a dark and entangled condition. (*J. Owen, D.D.*) A prayer:—This prayer recognises three things. I. AN INTERESTING RELATION BETWEEN GOD AND HIS PEOPLE. Flock and Shepherd. 1. He is the absolute Owner of the flock. "All souls are Mine." 2. He has a perfect knowledge of the flock. 3. He has an infinite love for the flock. 4. He has abundant supplies for the flock. II. THE TRYING CONDITION IN WHICH GOD'S PEOPLE ARE SOMETIMES FOUND. "Which dwell solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel." The primary reference is to their captivity in Babylon. 1. It is caused by self. Souls have not been driven away into moral captivity. "All we like sheep have gone astray." 2. It is undeliverable by self. No soul ever found its way back to God by its own unaided efforts; hence Christ came to "seek and to save the lost." III. THE IMPORTANCE OF RESTORATION TO FORMER ENJOYMENTS. "Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old." The regions of Bashan and Gilead, on the east of the Jordan, were celebrated for their rich pasturage, and on this account were chosen by the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh (*Numb. xii.; Deut. iii. 17*). Morally, the great need of man is the restoration of normal rights, normal virtues, normal enjoyments. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 18. Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity?—*The grace of God to sinners*.—Micah and Isaiah were contemporaries. They lived in the same land, they lived in the same city; they ministered, we may say, to the same congregation, and they preached the same Gospel. They were very unlike in some respects, so far as we can judge from the remnants of their ministry they have left behind them. Isaiah was, perhaps, the most eloquent

man that God ever made, and He made him for the most splendid of service. Long ago, Jerome, the great Latin scholar, in translating into the Vulgate these books, said of Isaiah that he was the evangelical prophet, and ever since that day the Church of Christ in all her branches has subscribed to that striking description of Isaiah. Micah, again, would seem to be a man of different kind, with a full equipment of spiritual experience. His sayings are short and penetrating; not so captivating to the mind, it may be, as Isaiah's eloquence, but piercing and penetrating to the understanding and conscience and heart of all who heard him. We have an epitome of his ministry in these closing verses, a summary of his life-long service of God and Jerusalem. "Who is a God," he says, "like unto Thee?" He begins to speak to the people, but forgets the people in the presence of God and His glorious grace, and he makes his sermon begin with a doxology, a cry of wonder, an astonishment at the grace of God. It is not written, but I can read it—I am as sure of it as if it had been written—that many a time before he exclaimed, "Who is a God like unto Thee?" he said, "Who is a sinner like unto me?" No man ever is amazed at the grace of God till he is confounded with his own sin. There is a thrill of astonishment and amazement at the grace of God that has borne with him for so long and fruitless a ministry and so sinful and unsanctified a life. There may be an allusion, as allusions run up and down all the prophets, comparing the God of Israel with the gods of the nations round about. The form of the exclamation is, no doubt, taken from that which was a continual debate between the prophets of Israel and false prophets and false gods of the nations round about. They had their gods—he admits that in a kind of way for argument's sake—but he turns and says, "Who is a God like unto Thee?" What priest of Baal or Ashtoreth has a god like unto the prophet Micah? They had their gods of war and their gods of wine; gods of love, gods of the woods, gods of the streams, gods of the seas, gods of the storm-clouds; but never did any prophet outside of Israel say, "Our God pardoneth iniquity." The thing that astonishes him is that God forgives iniquity. "He pardoneth iniquity." Rabbi Adam Duncan, the great Hebrew professor, a man of genius and a saint, if there has been one in our day in Scotland, one day was tottering along the street to his class. A wag of a fellow came out of the door of one of the clubs in Edinburgh, and thought he would have a joke out of the old Doctor, a story to tell. "Well, Doctor, any news the day?" "Oh, great news," says the Doctor, with his blazing eyes; "great news, sir." It staggered the youngster. He said, "What is it, Doctor?" He thought it was some revolution, some tremendous thing that had not come to their ears in the club yet. But, says the Doctor, laying his hand on the youth's shoulder, "the blood of Christ still cleanseth from all sin." There is grace in the grammar. He pardoneth iniquity. He does it now. The school-boy will tell you this is the present tense. It is not that He pardoned in Micah's day, but His grace is dried up this day; or will pardon some time again when there is more prayer and preparation and faith; but He pardons now—He pardons here. This is the joy of the Gospel; this makes it fresh every morning; this makes every minister experimental and autobiographical, because he can say, like Rabbi Duncan, "Come all ye people, and I will tell you what God has done for my soul this very morning; He pardoneth iniquity—things you would rather drown yourself than hear it ever said you had done; He pardoneth it, and you will go home clapping your hands, and saying, 'Who is a God like unto Thee?'" We need many things, but first pardon. If you went into your prison and some man lay waiting execution, and you said, "What can I do for you, my man? I have influence with the magistrates, the Government, the King—what can I do?" He would reply, "Get the rope off my neck, get that scaffold taken away, and then there may be other things you can do; but get my pardon, and get it quick." And therefore it is in the forefront of the message to you and me, when we awakened this morning. There is a note of the Passover there. He passeth by, He does not see it, He does not want to see it. "He retaineth not His anger for ever." He is angry, mind you. He is maybe very angry with you here this morning. I am quoting Goodwin, but I am in a good atmosphere. He says: "The conscience is a little window in the soul through which God throws in a coal of hell-fire to let a man taste beforehand what it will be to make his bed in hell." You say, some fine, young gentleman, that there is no fire in hell. Wait and see! Says Goodwin again: "Hell is not culinary fire." There were sceptics in his day, too, and he said: "Oh, no, not kitchen fire;

quite right. You know better than the apostles and prophets and the Master Himself. It is not culinary fire—that could be put out. But I will tell you what cannot be put out, remorse.” But though He is angry for a little season, He delighteth in mercy. It is worth travelling across the country just to say that to a fellow-sinner. Our Maker and Judge and Redeemer, He delighteth in mercy. It is never said He delighteth in anger. It is against His nature, but mercy is His very innermost nature. If the devil casts my sins in my teeth, I will say, “Yes, it is all true, and you cannot tell the half of it, but I have to do with One who delighteth in mercy.” “He delighteth in mercy.” He enjoys it, it is His nature, and you can satisfy His mercy as, maybe, no one else can. There may be some sin in your case that makes you a peculiar sinner, and makes you a peculiar ornament to the grace of God to all eternity. “He will turn again.” Has He left you? Have you sinned away the peace of God out of your conscience? But He will turn again. He is, maybe, turning this moment. “He will have compassion.” Samuel Rutherford was once at the Communion season talking to the elders after the people were away, and said, “Now, we have been preaching about justification to-day; whether do you think you will be more thankful in heaven for justification or sanctification?” None of them spoke; then an old man said, “Mr. Samuel, we’ll thank Him for baith.” So we will thank Him, some of us, “for baith,” for a pardon that passeth all understanding, and for a sanctification of sinful hearts rotten to the core and running over with all manner of sin. (A. Whyte, D.D.)

*Peculiarities in God’s pardoning*:—God regards you, and the Bible describes you as sinners; and so you are. Sinners condemned, and needing pardon; for condemnation follows sin as a matter of course. When a man has sinned he must receive a pardon, or suffer the penalty. One great object of revelation is to tell you that you may be pardoned. Revelation declares the ground, the manner, the conditions of pardon. What is there peculiar and distinguishing in God’s exercise of pardon? There are not many points in which creatures resemble God. The attributes and ways of creatures are for the most part in contrast to those of God. In nothing is God more unlike other beings than in pardoning. 1. No being pardons with such honour to the law broken, and with such security to the government offended, as God. 2. No one pardons at such an expense to Himself as God does. 3. No one pardons with such a good effect on the sinner pardoned. 4. No one pardons so many as God. 5. God also pardons many sins of each sinner. Men’s pardonings are limited and restrained. He abundantly pardons. 6. Notice the peculiar character of the sins which God pardons. 7. He forgets as well as forgives. 8. He makes provision for the pardon of future sins. 9. God does more than pardon; He justifies, adopts, sanctifies, and eventually glorifies us. 10. God pardons on the most reasonable conditions. 11. These very conditions of pardon God fulfils in us. He gives us repentance, and our faith is the gift of God. (W. Nevins, D.D.)

*Unparalleled pardon*:—In the Gospel of our salvation, all God’s moral perfections are developed and glorified. No one of them is sacrificed to another, nor eclipsed by another’s splendour. Each has its own special office, but freely accords their claims to all the rest. But there is one of these perfections on which the sacred writers dwell with peculiar pleasure—mercy, the first need of the fallen, the everlasting song of the redeemed. It is the theme of the Old Testament prophecy, and the charm of the New Testament history. In this text the prophet asserts, not merely that God is merciful, but that “He delighteth in mercy.” Develop the thought of the peculiarity of the Divine mercy in the forgiveness of human guilt. I. WHO PARDONETH AT SO GREAT A COST? Take parable of sending only son to the rebellious husbandman. The affection of a father for an only son, though the best that human relations can furnish, is a poor emblem of God’s ineffable delight in His co-equal and co-eternal Beloved. And from the first He foresaw what His Son must suffer. II. WHO PARDONETH ON SO EASY A CONDITION? Offenders are frequently forgiven in consideration only of some valuable service rendered. Many imagine that they can merit Divine mercy by their moral virtues. It is a fatal delusion. Man is a creature. His Creator has the unquestionable right to all he is, and all he has. When the creature has done his utmost, he is still an unprofitable servant. And man is a fallen and guilty creature. As such, he is already in arrears with God. His perfect obedience being always due, he can never make up any deficiencies. There is no possibility of doing anything beyond our bounden duty, to be set down to our credit over against any record of former delinquency. Moreover, the fallen creature cannot keep the Divine law, without

the grace of its Divine Author—His prevenient grace to prepare the way—His co-operative grace to assist the effort. Not through any worthiness of our own can we hope for absolution. What is the condition of a sinner's pardon? Simple faith in Christ. What is the justifying faith? It is accepting the record which God hath given of His Son, and relying upon that Son's mediatorial merit with an undoubting trust. It is receiving Christ as the one only suitable and sufficient Saviour, and thus appropriating His purchased and proffered salvation. It is quite conceivable that other and altogether different conditions might have been imposed. But what other could have been so merciful in God, so suitable to sinners, and so easy of performance as this? III. WHO PARDONETH WITH SO CORDIAL A LIBERALITY? What heathen divinity? What human government? What prince or potentate? Often, in the exercise of human clemency, the rich and the powerful are preferred to offenders of inferior rank; and generally, small offences are more readily forgiven than greater. But God pardoneth without partiality, and without respect of persons. Alike, to His all-forgiving love, is the debt of fifty pence, and the debt of five hundred. Though men may pardon a second or third offence, they are not likely to pardon the same offence in its frequent repetition. But God pardoneth a thousand times, pardoneth the same crime a thousand times committed. Monarchs and governors require to be petitioned and importuned for mercy: often it is necessary that others with their intercessions should enforce the plea of the offender, and even thus pardon is obtained with great difficulty, and after long delay. But God waiteth to be gracious, hasteth to be merciful, more ready to forgive than sinners are to be forgiven. Men pardon one offence out of many, and leave the rest for punishment; or they forgive, but never forget. But God pardons all offences at once, and blots them from His memory for ever. You may pardon the offender, without giving him any intimation of the fact. But God absolves when He forgives. Such is the mercy of God in the forgiveness of human guilt—rich beyond all parallel in earth or heaven—admirable beyond all expression of men or angels. Then who can despair? Who can even doubt? (*J. Cross, D.D., LL.D.*)

*A pardoning God:*—In this marvellous and mysterious world alone is mercy harmonised with justice, and it is manifested that "there is forgiveness with God that He may be feared." None pardons like God. This is the sublime import of the text. I. NONE PARDONS SO FREELY AS GOD. He acts self-prompted, self-guided. Free must His salvation be, for it was devised before earth began. There is no other fountain-head whence the tide of boundless love gushes forth to a ruined race. Will it be thought any let or bar to the freedom of God's sovereign love in our salvation, that His love flowed to us through the channel of His own Son crucified for us, bringing to us pardon and forgiveness? II. NONE PARDONS SO GRACIOUSLY AS GOD. Freely as He has prepared forgiveness, so freely does He dispense forgiveness. If we think to purchase it with a price, God will say unto us, "Thy money perish with thee." It costs the poor suppliant sinner nothing but acceptance,—nothing but simple, humble, self-abandoning reception.

III. NONE PARDONS SO PROMPTLY AS HE. God's promptness in forgiving is a striking peculiarity which ought not to be passed over. "Before they ask, I will answer." This is the rule of God's dealing. IV. NONE PARDONS SO PERFECTLY AS GOD DOES. It is a pardon that He represents as so absolute that it utterly puts away all that is past as if it never had been. The sinner is pardoned completely, accepted completely, in the very righteousness of God—the Divine righteousness wrought out by Immanuel, in our nature, for us, and imputed to us when we believe in Him. V. NONE PARDONS SO CONSISTENTLY AND MAJESTICALLY AS GOD DOES. "A God all mercy were a God unjust." God might cease to be, rather than cease to be just. VI. NONE PARDONS SO EFFECTUALLY AS GOD DOES. Then "shall we sin in order that grace may abound"? Nothing slays the carnal mind in us like sovereign grace. (*Hugh Stowell, M.A.*)

*The Lord's pardoning mercy:*—The ground foundation of all our hope and comfort, in our restoration after our distresses, is the Lord's pardoning mercy. "Who is a God like unto Thee?" This abrupt and passionate admiration of God's pardoning mercy sheweth that all these promises had their rise there. There were great difficulties to be overcome before these promises could take place; but the greatest difficulty and obstruction lay in their sins. And the prophet wondreth more at His grace subduing sin, than at His power overcoming difficulties. 1. Sin is the greatest obstacle. Take that out of the way, and then mercies come freely from God. If there be any restraint of God's blessing, it is because of man's sin. 2. Sin is

the cause of all our evils, as well as it stoppeth and hindereth our mercies. Sin being pardoned, the cause of the misery is removed, and the cause being removed, the effect ceaseth. 3. Outward mercies, were they never so great and full, would never yield any true satisfaction, unless they be joined with reconciliation with God, and pardon of sin. No solid happiness till pardon. Use this to reprove—(1) Them that look not after pardon of sin in their distresses, but temporal blessings in the first place. (2) Those that hope to remove evil either by sinful means, or by natural means, without being reconciled to God. (3) Those that, lying under the fruits of sin, have not a heart to seek their recovery from the Lord's pardoning mercy. Use this—4. To instruct us, what should most affect our hearts. Not so much God's acts of power, as His acts of grace. Doctrine—That the chief glory of the true God consisteth in the pardon of sins, wherein there is none like Him. Evidence this by these considerations—1. We have not a true apprehension of God, till we see Him singular and matchless in excellency, and do give Him a distinct and separate honour, far above all other things which are in the world. 2. Among all His excellences, His pardoning mercy shineth forth most conspicuously in the true religion, and is represented with such advantages as cannot be found elsewhere. The business of a religion is to provide sufficiently for two things; to provide a suitable happiness for mankind, and a sufficient means for the expiation of the guilt of sin. Till there be a due course taken for the pardon of sin, there is no provision made for establishment, either of the creature's comfort or duty. Natural light giveth some evidence of this truth, that God is placable. The Gentiles were all of this opinion, that their gods were inclined to pardon. Thence came all their sacrifices and expiations. They thought their gods would be propitious to sinners, if they did come humbly and ask pardon. God's commanding us to forgive one another is an argument that mercy and forgiveness are pleasing to God. In the Christian religion all things are provided for which are necessary to establish a regular hope of pardon. 1. There is full satisfaction given to Divine justice, and the foundation laid for pardon in the death of Christ. 2. We have privileges offered to us by a sure covenant in Christ's name. 3. It is dispensed upon rational terms, such as faith and repentance. 4. In the manner of dispensing forgiveness. God doth it in a free, full, and universal remission of our sins. It is a free pardon. It is not given without our desiring, but it is without our deserving. God doth it for His name's sake, pitying our misery, and for the glory of His own mercy. And there is no renovation of any one sin, but that sin for which men will not ask pardon. Application—1. Information. To show us the excellency of the Christian religion above other religions in the world; because it discovereth pardon of sins upon such terms as may be most commodious for the honour of God, and satisfactory to our souls. The heathen were mightily perplexed about the terms, how God might dispense it with honour, and man receive it with comfort. Somewhat they conceived of the goodness of God, but they could not apprehend Him reconciled to the sinner, without debasing His holiness. 2. To put us upon self-reflection. Do we entertain this offered pardon as such a singular thing deserves? What impressions should it leave upon us? 1. The sense of God's glorious grace in pardoning, should work in us a great love to God, and commend and endear Him to our hearts. 2. Where it is rightly entertained, it breedeth admiring thoughts. Everything about God is marvellous, but especially His mercy. 3. It breedeth a reverence of God. That sense of pardon which worketh no reverence, but rather a contempt and commonness of spirit in all our transactions with God, is justly to be suspected. 4. It confirmeth us in the true religion. Carnal comforts tickle the senses. False religions leave us in darkness and perplexity. But the grace of Christ truly propounded, soon brings ease and peace. 5. It takes off the heart from other things, and brings us back from the flesh to God. 6. It giveth us strength and encouragement to new obedience. 7. It melteth us into the forgiveness of others. We press you to admire the grace of God in the pardon of sins. It is a necessary mercy: a great mercy. This truth should refresh the weary, and make glad the mournful soul. (*T. Manton, D.D.*) *The pardoning God*:—How is God magnified in pardoning sin? I. IN THE PARDON OF SIN, WE SEE A MANIFESTATION OF THE DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY. It is the prerogative of God to give law. It is equally, and on the same grounds, the prerogative of God to forgive the breach of law. Hence the Jews accused Christ of blasphemy, &c. Human forgiveness does not affect guilt. Divine majesty appears, then, in forgiving. II. IN THE PARDON OF SIN, WE SEE A MANIFESTATION OF MARVELLOUS FORBEARANCE. Sin

denies God's propriety in us. It disclaims His authority as a Ruler. It denies the perfection of His character as a standard. Hence it sets aside His Godhead and Being. It wars with and injures all that are His. III. IN THE PARDON OF SIN, WE SEE A GLORIOUS MANIFESTATION OF MERCY. 1. Consider from whence man had fallen, and there was nothing to awaken compassion. 2. Consider him as fallen, and there was seemingly nothing to provoke commiseration. There is—(1) Hatred of God. (2) Active hostility. (3) Contempt of pardon. IV. IN THE PARDON OF SIN, THERE IS A BRIGHT DISPLAY OF THE INFINITE LOVE OF GOD. In order that sin might be pardoned, God gave His Son to suffer and die. We cannot apply this measure of God's love. The love, however, like the gift, must be infinite. V. IN THE PARDON OF SIN, THERE IS A TERRIBLE AND STRIKING PROCLAMATION OF THE JUSTICE OF GOD. Justice pronounces the pardon of sin. And it is justified in doing so. He who sings of pardon, sings of mercy and judgment. VI. IN THE PARDON OF SIN, THERE IS AN UNEQUALLED DISPLAY OF THE UNSEARCHABLE WISDOM OF GOD. Seen in reconciling what seemed necessarily and eternally at variance. Not only is man's salvation made consistent with God's glory, but God is glorified thereby. Apply—(1) Seek for pardon as a sovereign gift. (2) As a mighty gift. (3) For God's name's sake. (4) Through the only channel in which it can be attained. (5) Being pardoned, praise God. (*J. Stewart.*) *Who is a God like unto Thee?*—I. THE CHIEF PARTICULARS OF GOD'S GRACIOUS DEALINGS WITH HIS PEOPLE (ver. 18). What now calls forth the admiration and praise of the prophet, is the manner in which God deals with His people's sins. Our God is distinguished from all others as a God that pardoneth iniquity. All iniquity is rebellion against infinite love and goodness, a trampling upon God's laws, a casting off of His authority, a doubt of His holiness, a contempt for His power. Then it surely is marvellous that the Most High God should pardon iniquity; and go about to pardon iniquity in such a costly way, even by the incarnation and death of His own co-equal Son. But the prophet is not content with merely stating this precious truth, but he amplifies it, and keeps our attention fixed on it, by adding more particularly, "and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage." God calls His Church His heritage or possession, His "peculiar treasure." His heritage is only a remnant. And even this remnant is not pure and holy. As a person can least brook faults or blemishes in that which he hath especially set apart for his own honour and pleasure, so it was least to be expected that the "transgression of the remnant of God's heritage" should be spared. It was every way most justly to be feared that they would be cast off as unprofitable, rejected for ever. But such are not the ways of our God. He passeth by their transgression. The reason is not in them, but in God Himself. He is thus merciful to them, because He "delighteth in mercy." II. THE BELIEVER'S ENCOURAGEMENT IN THE EXPECTATION OF YET FUTURE MERCIES. This is the invariable result of a lively sense of God's goodness, it leads us to desire and look for more. The Lord hath always abundantly more grace in store for His people than they have appetite to enjoy. The prophet adds to his previous account of God's great mercy to His people, this confiding expectation of future blessing. It is not all God's desire that sin should be forgiven, He would also have it overcome. He will subdue our iniquities. III. THE BELIEVER'S WARRANT FOR HIS HOPEFUL ANTICIPATIONS. The grounds on which these promises rest for their fulfilment. It is because of the covenant which God made with Abraham and his seed for evermore, that we may confidently look for the sure performance of God's gracious word to them that believe. It is called "mercy to Abraham," because it was made with him, in the first instance, entirely of God's free grace. This covenant was "truth to Jacob," because the faithfulness of God was now engaged to make good to the son of Isaac what He had freely promised to his father. And God confirmed His promise to Abraham by an oath. And "because God could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself." This covenant was made sure in Christ. Can we then, after this brief review of God's great mercy to us in Christ, refuse to unite with the prophet in ascribing glory to His name? And must we not, at the same time, be careful to see to it, that we answer to this description of Christ's covenant members; and that we "do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with our God"? (*W. E. Light, M.A.*) *An end to sin*:—Micah is so struck with the Divine patience as to break out in the adoring language of the text, "Who is a God like unto Thee?" He sees a day coming when the promises, frustrated so long by man's unbelief, shall be fulfilled to the letter, and the reproach of prophecy shall be rolled away. God's matchless way of redeeming man is the

subject for wonder presented by the text. I. GOD IS WITHOUT HIS LIKE IN FORGIVING OUR SINS. Micah has an eye to the notorious sins of the nation. In saying that God retains not His anger for ever, he means to say that there was cause for anger. A patience that bears daily with many provocations, when it can deal summarily with its objects, is, indeed, a wonder. It is more agreeable to God to forgive than to punish. He delighteth in mercy, and judgment is His strange work. He forgives to the uttermost, and that is only saying that He forgives like Himself—royally, absolutely, omnipotently. We honour God when we magnify His saving power. And God is a very ready God to pardon. His compassion is ever ready to awake at the call of penitence. Compassion kindles within His merciful bosom without any constraint. He is ever only too ready to turn to us, and it takes far less to turn Him to us, than it takes to turn Him from us. Our sins do hurt the fatherly heart of God. We must not think that God cannot be grieved. II. GOD IS WITHOUT HIS LIKE IN SUBDUING OUR SINS. When Micah said, "He will subdue our iniquities," he probably had in view the beneficial effect of the captivity on the religious future of the people. Babylon would give the deathblow to their besetting sin. It did so. They never returned to idolatry after the severe lesson of those seventy years by the rivers of Babylon. They were cured of that great defect in their national life; but even Babylon could not cure them of their iniquities. Idolatry vanished, but their iniquities, like the fabled Hydra, were not long in repairing the loss of this one severed head by throwing out the seven new and deadly heads of pharisaism. The words teach us to believe in a power which is death to sin, even as sin at first was death to man. Man's conqueror is to be in turn conquered by man. If Satan had the brief pleasure of nailing our Saviour to the accursed tree, it was at the expense of being himself crushed to death beneath His subduing heel. We learn from this promise that it is the purpose of God to renew us in His own image, to fill us with that hatred of iniquity and love of holiness that distinguish His own nature. With the Gospel freedom, there comes the call to take on the yoke of Christ, the yoke of obedience, and consequently the yoke of peace and joy. Our faith, being assured of the reality of Christ's victory over sin, gives us an assurance of our own victory over it, and summons us to the attempt. Ideally, in the mind and purpose of God, we are already complete, already without sin, already with the earnest of eternal life, already without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. This ideal is not to be thought of as a picture of the imagination. It should be the very best help to the working out of a high practical aim. III. GOD IS WITHOUT HIS LIKE IN REMOVING OUR SINS. Micah here warrants us in believing that the forgiveness of our sins by God is irrevocable. When he says, "And their sins Thou wilt cast into the depths of the sea," he prophesies a complete forgetfulness of them, a total burial as of something sunk in mid-ocean. What is sunk in the depths of the sea never rises up to the surface again. Such will be the merciful dealing of God with us if we ask Him to forgive our sins. He will not even mention them again, as having no desire to raise one thought of shame in the pardoned breast ever after. (*David Davies.*) *On venial sin, and auricular confession:*—These words are to be understood as ascribing the power of forgiving sins to God only; as declaring that to do so is His sole prerogative; and that He is jealous of this attribute. Mercy, as an attribute, belongs to God only. We must ascribe to God the whole power of forgiving sin. This doctrine is so consonant with reason, so agreeable to Scripture, and so honourable to God, that it might seem unnecessary to say anything with a view to confirm its truth, or to illustrate its importance. Yet there are many who deny it in substance, and more who, though they admit it in words, do not act as if they believed it. Such a doctrine goes directly to show the infinite evil which sin involves in every case. It is the disposition of our corrupt minds to think lightly of the evil of sin. In consequence of this habit, multitudes live without feeling any lively concern about forgiveness at all. Some with but an imperfect sense of guilt in their consciences, conceive that they may merit forgiveness by their good works, or by doing penance, or in some other way equally fallacious and unsatisfactory. 1. As all sin is committed against God, and is an offence in which His honour is concerned, we are led to the conclusion that forgiveness is an act, the exercise of which God will reserve to Himself, and which He will not delegate to any other. Sin is a transgression of His law, and implies a disregard of His will, and a contempt of His authority. The kinds of sins that men may be guilty of are various, and some discover a greater degree of impiety and of depravity of character than others. But the very first departures

from the line of duty involve the guilt of despising the command, of contemning the authority, and of contravening the will of God, and are therefore exceedingly sinful. From overlooking this, many seem to be insensible of the danger of first steps in sin, which are usually so decisive of the character and of the future destiny of a man. When you can sin against God without remorse or fear, you have already lost the only principle which can effectually secure your continuance in the paths of righteousness. As every sin is a dishonour done to God, and an offence committed against His government, it seems peculiarly appropriate that God should reserve the exercise of mercy wholly to Himself, and render it necessary for guilty and rebellious creatures to humble themselves before Him, confess their guilt, and seek for mercy. No repentance can be considered genuine which does not originate in a sense of the evil of sin as committed against God. 2. God alone knows what the honour of His government, and the maintenance of His glory, render necessary. There is no act of government which requires greater wisdom and prudence than that of dispensing pardon; for if it be done without care, it is calculated to give rise to the most pernicious results. Injudicious and indiscriminate mercy emboldens offenders to go on in wickedness, induces others to be less careful to avoid transgression than they would be, and leads to a general contempt of the authority of law, and of the obligations of duty. To conceive that God would surrender to a mere creature the power of forgiving sin, is as difficult to be believed as that He would give a creature power to govern the material creation. In what sense then was power to remit or retain sins given to the apostles? They were specially inspired; and were only agents in stating God's forgiveness. 3. In exercising His power to forgive, God must have regard to His other attributes. The work of mercy must be perfect, as every work of God is perfect. God will exercise mercy only in perfect consistency with the truth, the righteousness, the wisdom, the holiness of His nature. That God might thus exercise mercy in consistency with all the perfections of His nature, He sent His Son into the world, to die in our room and stead. Since God has appointed this way of forgiving sins, who may safely act in opposition to it, either for himself, or by leading others to neglect the great salvation? The way in which forgiveness is exercised, is the way in which God has seen it best for His glory, and most consistent to His perfection, that it should be exercised. He is consulting, in the work of redemption, high and holy ends. 4. As the forgiveness of sins is an inestimable blessing, it is reserved by God to Himself to exercise it, that He may draw forth our love and gratitude, in return for His infinite compassion and kindness. The blessing implied in the forgiveness of sin, is of all others the most precious which men can receive, and the most important which they can seek for. How daring is that individual who would step in between God and His creatures, and lay claim to the power of exercising pardon, and dispensing forgiveness! Four grounds of practical improvement—(1) The duty of confessing our sins to God, and to God only. (2) The insufficiency of all human absolution and pardon; and the delusive nature of these rites as practised by the Roman Church. (3) The danger of calling any sin *venial*. (4) The obligation of those who have obtained forgiveness to devote themselves to the service of God, and to walk before Him with attached and dutiful dispositions, as becomes the children of so many mercies. (*John Forbes*.) **And passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage.**—The prophet speaks these words in a transport. He is telling us something about God which drew his wonder and amazement. It was God's pardoning mercy to His sinful creatures. **I. WHOM GOD PARDONS.** "The remnant of His heritage." The reference is to the Jews, but the expression is equally descriptive, in all ages, of those whom the Lord pardons. They are but a small remnant of a sinful world. All need pardon, but multitudes die without having received pardon. Men like to hear of pardon, but they like not the way in which God offers to bestow it on them. Those whom the Lord pardons are also called "His heritage," or His inheritance, His portion, His property. The term is frequently applied to Israel, but it is applicable, in a stricter sense, to that company of pardoned sinners who constitute the Church of Christ. They are, peculiarly, eternally, the Lord's heritage. How many belong to this heritage of God we know not. **II. HOW DOES GOD PARDON?** Observe the variety of expressions which the prophet uses. Literally it is "who beareth iniquity," and it refers to the way in which the Lord pardoneth sinners by bearing their iniquities Himself. He hath caused them to rest like a tremendous burden on His own sacred head, and what sinners

themselves deserved to suffer, He hath suffered in their room. The prophet also says, "He passeth by the transgression." Here is the consequence of a man's coming to the Cross, of his putting faith in what the Saviour has been doing for him. God "passeth by" that man's "transgression," just as He passed over the blood-sprinkled houses in Egypt. The prophet says, "He will turn again. He will have compassion upon us." Here is another representation of the riches of God's pardoning grace. And what an affecting representation does it give of God's tender dealing towards the penitent transgressor! The prophet says, "He will subdue our iniquities." Here our iniquities are considered in the light of formidable enemies rising up against us to destroy us. What will God do on behalf of those who make His Son their Saviour? He will "subdue" both their past and their present iniquities. The last expression the prophet uses is, "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." Here is indicated the extent of God's pardon, and the completeness of it. The pardon is final, unchangeable, eternal. III. WHY DOES GOD PARDON? What moves the Holy and the Just to save a remnant of His guilty creatures from destruction? The text does not answer in a way to flatter man; as if any estimable qualities in him were the moving cause of Divine compassions. The reason is—"because He delighteth in mercy." It is, as it were, His favourite attribute. He hath pleasure in mercy. Gladly do the redeemed of the Lord ascribe every tittle of their blessedness to the mercy of their God. (*A. Roberts, M.A.*)

**He retaineth not His anger for ever.**—*God's anger and mercy:*—Can God be angry? The ancient philosopher, and the modern man of science, represent the Infinite Spirit as incapable of any emotion. The old Greek thinkers tell you that the Divine existence is passionless and free from pain. Our modern men of science laugh at us if we attribute feeling to the Almighty. They tell us we are guilty of anthropomorphism, and that is a pitiable weakness in their eyes, if not a sin. Not only is it impossible for God to be angry. He is incapable of any emotion at all. And we must admit there is considerable difficulty in reconciling the idea of anger in the Divine nature with any large and spiritual conception of it. Note two considerations—1. Anger, as shown by man to man, always goes along with some measure of surprise. But God cannot be surprised. 2. In anger there is a desire to put some one to pain. The disobedient child, the careless servant, the treacherous friend, shall be made to suffer for what they have done. But you cannot think of God as desiring to put any one to pain. How stand the facts of the case, and what do they teach? They teach that we, with our triple nature of body, mind, and spirit, stand in the midst of an everlasting order, and live in a universe of unvarying law. This constancy of nature, this unfailing order, this universality of law is the great postulate upon which all our action proceeds, and all our thought. The cause being the same, the effect will be the same always and everywhere. Law is everywhere; facts teach that. But they teach something besides. That to disobey the laws, to violate the order, brings punishment and pain. These two truths are of capital importance in answering the question whether psalmists, prophets, and apostles meant anything when they spoke of the anger of God. We say that the fact of universal law is not the ultimate fact. There is somewhat behind it—not somewhat, but some One. Eternal Power, Infinite Life, God. This law and order we call the will of God. Then if the laws under which we live are to us the declaration of the personal will of the Eternal, then it is no figure of speech to say that the pain and punishment that follow on the violation of the laws are the anger of the Eternal. Anger not vindictive, but righteous. "Sin is the transgression of the law." Of what law? Of the law which unfolds to us the conditions of spiritual life and health for us; the law which stands written in the conscience of every man, which may be spelled out from the sacred writings of all nations, of whose growing clearness and fulness the Bible is a magnificent record—the law which tells us that if we would enter into life, we must keep the commandments. To love God—that is religion. To love man—that is morality. Obedience to this two-fold law is the way to the enjoyment and strengthening of the very highest life possible to man. If, knowing this law, you do not obey it, there will come to you a sense of defeat, of unrest, of dissatisfaction, of spiritual weakness and decay, which will be keen and crushing in proportion to your knowledge of your moral and religious duty. This experience is the punishment and pain which always follow upon the violation of God's law. It is His anger. It is anger with a heart of love as its centre. But God does not retain His anger for ever. He delights

in mercy, He pardons iniquity, He passes by transgressions. Are these things true? In one sense He does not forgive sin. God is Infinite Love and Infinite Law. Forgiveness of sins, as commonly understood, means one of two things. Either it means that when you ask God to forgive you your sins, you ask Him to forbear to retaliate; or it means that you ask Him to save you from the consequences of them. But the first meaning is inconsistent with God's nature as the Infinite Love. What does your request signify? This—that you entreat Him not to serve you as you have served Him. But can Infinite Love ever be suspected of such conduct? And the second meaning is inconsistent with God's nature as the Eternal Law. The law of God—the expression of His will—brings pain and punishment to him who transgresses it. This is the case in all spheres of life, bodily, mental, spiritual. The consequences of transgressions are natural, bound up with the very constitution of things. To pray for the forgiveness of sins is, in many minds, equivalent to a prayer for deliverance from their consequences. But such deliverance would involve a perpetually repeated miracle, the suspension of the action of those very laws which God has placed us under as the conditions of life and good for us. Is He, then, going so to stultify and contradict Himself? In one sense for God to forgive sin is an impossibility. Yet, in another sense, God does forgive sin. God retains His anger only so long as you are transgressing His law. The moment you repent, that moment His mercy, in which He delights, comes to you, bringing healing and remedial blessing on its soft wing. In those spiritual relations between God and ourselves, with which, in the great question of sin and its forgiveness, we are primarily concerned, the central thought of the soul when awaking to a sense of sin, is not the violation of the impersonal laws, but the grieving of the Father-spirit behind the laws, whose expression they are. We dare not attribute to the Eternal such anger as is vindictive, and desires to put the cause of it to pain, but we may attribute to Him such grief over human sin as found its most pathetic earthly expression in the broken heart of Christ upon the Cross. (*Henry Varley, B.A.*)

**He delighteth in mercy.—God merciful.**—For the proof of this we are entirely dependent on revelation. The deist is challenged to produce one valid argument in demonstration of the Divine mercifulness. The light of nature discovers nothing beyond mere forbearance, and forbearance does not necessarily imply mercy. Revelation—1. Announces to us that God is merciful, and this repeatedly, and in terms the most explicit. The fact is declared that God is merciful; but there is something very peculiar in the manner in which this doctrine is taught. Notice the words that are synonymous, or nearly so, with mercy; such as gracious, long-suffering, slow to anger, pitiful. Notice that the inspired writers, not content with the singular, mercy, by a felicitous fault of style, employ the plural form, mercies. They speak of “the multitude of His mercies.” Notice that they speak of God as rich in mercy, plenteous in mercy, and full of compassion. Notice that the mercy of God is compared to certain human exercises. “Like as a father pitieth,” &c. Notice that it is said of God, “He delighteth in mercy.” Some things we do by constraint, some by a sense of duty; others we delight to do. It is not by constraint that God is merciful. See some proofs that God delights in mercy. Infer it from the fact that He has made mercy a part of our moral constitution. He has made it a part of our duty, not merely to show mercy, but to love it: He requires us to delight in it. He expresses the highest displeasure against the unmerciful. Infer it from the manner in which God exercises mercy to sinners of the human race. Illustrate by following particulars—1. He shows mercy without waiting to be asked to do it. 2. He shows mercy at great expense to Himself. 3. He lets us see how it is that He can consistently exercise mercy towards us; discloses to us the plan of salvation, as well as the fact of its possibility. 4. The first moment that sinners manifest a willingness to comply with the terms on which He exercises mercy, they are met by His mercy. 5. The terms of mercy are brought down as low as they could be. 6. To those very terms His mercy brings us. He even fulfils in us the conditions of salvation. 7. He waiteth to be gracious; spares us long, and overlooks many provocations. 8. He makes many offers of mercy. 9. He shows mercy to many sinners. 10. He shows mercy to His enemies. Then what shall we make of this doctrine? Shall we infer that God is not just, not holy, not faithful, because He is merciful? Surely sinners, sensible of their sins, have the greatest encouragement to hope in God's mercy. If God delights in mercy, what can be plainer than that men should?

(W. Nevins, D.D.) *God's delight in mercy* :—When we speak of mercy in God, we must realise that it differs from the corresponding affection in man. In God it is not a passion, causing any mental disturbance. In Him, infinite goodness, perpetually, without any disquiet, impels to the manifestation of kindness. In the exercise of this attribute Jehovah delights. The ministration of justice is necessary, that of mercy is voluntary. I. CONSIDER THE NATURE OF GOD. His very essence is love, and mercy is but one of the forms of love. 1. Take a view of the perfections of His nature. Infinite, Eternal, All-wise, Just, Almighty, Faithful. Turn to whatever perfection of God you may, still His mercy comes into view. 2. View His nature in the powers which He exercises. In Scripture we read of His eyes, ears, lips, hands, &c. He is said to think, to will, to remember. He is afflicted, and He rejoiceth. All these powers are set forth as occupied in the exercise of mercy. II. LISTEN TO THE WORDS OF GOD. 1. The words of His law. Here mercy holds a distinguished place. It requires of us that we “be merciful.” 2. His words in the Gospel. Truly these are full of mercy. Viewed as a whole, the Gospel is simply “the grace of God, which hath appeared unto all men, and bringeth salvation.” Doctrines, promises, and invitations are all full of mercy. III. SURVEY THE DOINGS OF GOD. 1. What God does in the purchase of redemption. 2. In the application of redemption. IV. OBSERVE THE GIFTS OF GOD. 1. Their value and variety. 2. Their constancy and permanence. Then be merciful, as God is merciful. (1) Deal kindly with enemies. (2) Show compassion to the afflicted. (3) Seek the salvation of sinners. (E. Brown.)

*He will have compassion.*—*He delighteth in mercy* :—My text is the keynote of the Bible, and reveals the very heart of God. You will see there is in the beginning of the passage a recitation of God's wonderful works, “pardoning iniquity, passing by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage, and retaining not His anger for ever.” And then the Prophet gives the reason for it, and looks joyously out into the future and says, “He will turn again; He will have compassion upon us, He will subdue our iniquities; and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.” I. I WANT TO EXPLAIN THE TEXT, “God delighteth in mercy.” What is meant by mercy? Of course, a great many people don't think about God. It never enters into their heads to ask what God is, what His intentions are; and there are those who seem to confound His attributes most painfully. Some confound this beautiful word mercy with others of His attributes. They confound it with love, with pity, with justice. We cannot make an error in this matter without suffering more or less from doubts and fears. Let us try to get a clear idea of the meaning of this blessed word. Now, I will put the question to each of you, what do you understand to be the meaning of this word mercy? Let my illustration help us. Here is a man who is a father and a master. Let us follow him five minutes, and I think we shall have a clear idea of the meaning of the word mercy. The men go to the master for the wages. When you go to the master for the wages do you ask for mercy in that transaction? Your labour is your capital, and you have entrusted your master with your capital for six days, and now you bring in your bill for your master to pay; if the master pays you, you say he is just; if he does not pay, you say he is unjust. There is no idea of mercy in that transaction. We have not found mercy, have we? We have found justice, having to do with right. Let us try again. I said this man was a father. To-morrow is his child's birthday. He has had a good week, and is in a generous mood. He makes up his mind on his way home that he will buy a book that will gladden his child's heart. He reaches the bookseller's shop, purchases the book, pays the money, and goes on his way. What was that? That was not justice, for he had not promised it to the child. You say at once it was love, having to do with the lovable. Now then, there is nothing of mercy in that. We have found justice having to do with right, and we have found love having to do with the lovable; but we have not found mercy yet. As he goes along he sees on the doorstep a little half-naked, hunger-bitten, shivering child. He hurries by; but he has seen that face, and he cannot get away from it. He compares it with the little sunny faces awaiting his arrival at home. That morning when he was with his companions he said what a wrong thing it was to relieve beggars, it did harm to the recipient and it did harm to society, and it ought to be carefully avoided. That is his theory. But he can see the child's face, and he stops, and his heart runs away with his head. He comes back to the child, puts his hand into his pocket for the third time, and puts something into the little trembling hand. That was not justice. The claims of justice were met in the Poor Law arrangement. It

was not love ; for when he had relieved the child he shrank from kissing it. What was it ? Pity, to be sure, pity having to do with misery ; but no mercy in the sense used in my text. Let us try again. A concrete instance. I said this man was a master. He has in his employ a man who is a splendid workman, but he is a drunkard. He knows where some of his master's property is, and under the shadow of evening he lays his hand upon it, and takes it to the pawn-shop, and finds his way to the drink-shop again. Just after the master had relieved the little child he meets this man full face. The poor man wishes there was a corner to run into ; but there is not one. The master says, "William, you have not been for your wages to-day." "No, sir ; I have not done anything this week." "And you knew that you had work to do that was very important, and you knew that I should suffer by your absence." "I am very sorry, sir." "But that is not the worst of it ; not only have you not done your duty, but you have taken my property, and you have applied it to your own base, sensual purpose." Tell me, what will that man say to the master ? Will he say, "Be just" ? That would be to imprison him. Will he say, "Love me" ? Such a thought never presents itself. Will he say, "Have pity" ? He would have pity on the drunkard's wife and children. He looks at the master and he says, "Do have mercy on me." When the master says, "Well, William, I will. The past shall be as if it had never happened, and shall never be mentioned. Here's your full week's wages. Go, and sin no more," would not that man know what mercy was ? Mercy is kindness shown to the guilty. When you go, then, to God in prayer, let this thought be before you : I am coming not for justice, I am coming for mercy. If I am wronged I can appeal to God's justice, and He will take my part. If I am in trouble I can appeal to His pity and He will sympathise with me. But if I am guilty, mercy is the only attribute that I can appeal to. There is an attribute which can touch the sinner without damning him. II. I WANT TO GIVE YOU A FEW PROOFS THAT THIS BLESSED DECLARATION IS TRUE. Why should I do that when it is expressly stated in the Book ? My answer is this, as soon as a man's eyes are opened and he sees his sins, then despair takes hold of him. I read the text to him to-night, "God delighteth in mercy," and he says, "Too good to be true, too good to be true." The Devil brings out the past sins, and aggravates them and flings them into our heart till the pangs of hell get hold of us and we dare not think of God. Can it be true, He delights in mercy ? Let me give one or two proofs. 1. First, I know God delights in mercy because He says so much about it. "Out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh." That is so with man, and that is so with God. I go to a home where I hear the music of children's voices, and I always know I shall be happy with such music. I sit down at the tea-table, and the mother tells me about the wonderful things the children have said and done, and she goes on and on, and I listen interestedly. I try to say a little about my own, but it does not go, so I listen to her and thank God for a mother's love. When I get home they ask me, "Well, how did you get on ?" "Very well, but how she does delight in her children." They ask, "How do you know ?" "Because she was never tired of talking about them, that is how I know." I come to you to-night and I say to you with a glad heart, our God delights in mercy, for He is never tired of talking about it. Take the Book. What did I say, mercy was kindness to the guilty ? To whom did God give the Bible ? Not to saints, but to sinners. Now, I find that this word "mercy" studs the pages of the Bible like the stars stud the heavens. God's mercy is higher than the heavens, is longer than eternity. God is rich in mercy, "God delighteth in mercy." Over and over you have it in one of the Psalms. In that one Psalm we are told twenty-six times God delights in mercy, because "His mercy endureth for ever." 2. Again, I know God delights in mercy, because so many people have found mercy. Look at the millions on the earth in all lands, in all climes, in all colours, that could stand before us and bear the same testimony, "I obtained mercy." If we could write out the names of the people who had found mercy, and were to unroll it, would it not reach from the gate of heaven to hell and back again ? And hundreds of you could say, My name is there. Ah, what a lot of trouble God took to get us to yield to Him. How He followed us, how He knocked at the door, how He pleaded with us many long rebellious years. When at last we cried for help He showed us mercy, and our names were on the roll. Thank God, if your name is not there it may be there to-night. Does God delight in mercy ? Yes. How do I know it ? You want solid ground to rest upon. How do I know that God delights in mercy ! "Behold the Lamb

of God." How can one speak in His presence, beholding the bleeding Saviour, and hearing Him say, "I suffered this for thee." See Him on the Cross. Is it too easy? Is the mercy bought at such a price too easy? Fling thy doubts to the wind. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "It is so easy," said a young girl; "I wonder I did not believe before." We have all felt the same, I daresay. It is so blessedly easy that a dying man may find mercy. And now, may I say a word to you? When you go to the Throne of Grace, never forget that you are coming for mercy. The Devil never troubles me so much as in prayer. He brings up the horrible past, and asks me how dare I to stand face to face with that holy God. It is said, in the time of Napoleon one of his officers was accused of disloyalty and was apprehended. His daughter prepared a petition. One day when the Emperor entered Paris she approached with her petition. The Emperor was struck with her looks, and the earnest words she used in presenting the petition, and he read it. He said, I will inquire about it. In a day or two her father was liberated. Two or three years afterwards that same officer was involved in some scheme against the Emperor and was again apprehended. The daughter came again with a petition to the Emperor: The Emperor saw the petition, but did not take it. He said, "Child, you came to me before for your father, and I granted your request; I cannot grant it again." "Sir," she said, "my father was innocent then, and I asked for justice; now my father is guilty, and I ask for mercy." Take the name of Jesus with you; link Him with your prayers, and ask for that mercy which God never denies. (C. Garrett.)

*The mercy of God:—* The deliverances from Egypt and Babylon were types of our deliverance from the captivity and bondage of a natural state by our Lord Jesus Christ.

**I. THE MERCY OF GOD.** 1. Mercy is an essential attribute of the Divine nature. Mercy in God differs in two important respects from mercy as it is to be found in any of His rational creatures. Not only is the mercy of God infinite, while in them it is only finite; but mercy is essential to God, while it is not so either to men or angels. In them mercy is only a quality which they either may or may not possess. 2. Guilty and miserable creatures are the proper objects of Divine mercy. Mercy is otherwise named bounty or grace. The bounty of God respects all the creatures as creatures. Grace respects the creatures as unworthy. Sinners are the proper objects of mercy. In what does the mercy of God towards them consist? In His willingness and readiness to pity, help, and relieve them. Sympathy with the distressed, or a fellow-feeling of their sorrows and pains, is not essential to mercy. 3. The exercise of mercy in God depends entirely on His sovereign will and pleasure. In this justice differs. It requires that every sin shall be punished. Were God to allow sin to pass with impunity He would cease to be what He is—the infinitely perfect Jehovah; there would be an end to His moral government, which consists in governing His rational creatures according to the law of perfect holiness and righteousness. But this is not the case with the exercise of mercy. It is as natural for God to exercise mercy as justice; for both are essential to His nature. The difference lies here. The existence of sin in His rational creatures is a sufficient reason for the exercise of justice; but the existence of misery in these creatures is no reason why mercy should be dispensed to them; for misery is richly deserved as the just consequence of sin, and certainly neither sin nor its consequence, misery, can entitle the sinner to mercy. When God exercises mercy, it is of His sovereign, wise, and gracious pleasure.

**II. HOW DOES IT APPEAR THAT GOD DELIGHTETH IN MERCY?** 1. From the express testimony of Scripture. 2. From the astonishing medium through which mercy flows to sinners, namely, the atonement of Christ. By a single act of His will the scheme of human redemption was devised and fixed. 3. From the names of glory which God takes to Himself from the exercise of mercy, "The Lord God, merciful and gracious," &c. &c. 4. From the great variety of means which God employs to make sinners partakers of His mercy. Such as the mediation of Christ, a standing ministry, gracious providences, &c. 5. From the sins that mercy pardons. 6. From the kindness which He shows to His own people after they have been made sharers of mercy. They are under a dispensation of mercy. 7. From His merciful conduct towards sinners in this world. There is nothing more wonderful than God's unwearied patience and mercy towards sinners. (J. Clapperton.)

*A God of mercy:—* **I. THE MERCY OF GOD.** See His mercy in pardoning iniquity. It is a full pardon. It is a free pardon. Observe the persons to whom pardon

is extended. The promises do not apply to the careless, thoughtless, and indifferent. This full pardon is not promised to any who are ignorant of the scheme of salvation offered to us in Christ. It is those who have known God, who have been called to God, and who have been sanctified through the Spirit, who are pardoned. But mercy and anger, on the part of God, do and must consist together. Chastisements are fatherly mercy. II. THE CLAIMS THAT MERCY HAS ON OUR OBEDIENCE. It has a claim on our love. We are always to remember that our love does not purchase God's love, but that God's love has a claim upon ours. If we would have our love increased towards Him we must avoid all those things that would lead us from Him. We must be jealous of ourselves, lest we dishonour Him by our inconsistency. (*Montagu Villiers, M.A.*) *The mercy of God*.—Causes are best discovered in their effects. We judge of men's principles and dispositions by their pursuits and conduct. God Himself, so to speak, submits to be examined in the same way. To ascertain what He is, we have but to consider what He does. The proofs and illustrations of this text are more wonderful than the assertion itself. "What hath God wrought" to gain the confidence of our guilty, and therefore foreboding and misgiving, minds? In God's sending His Son, the inspired John saw most clearly that "God is Love." God's soul delights in His own Son, yet He would seem to delight more in mercy. He delights not only in the exercise of mercy to us, but *by* us. He therefore would not leave mercy to the operation of reason and religion only; but as our Maker, He has rendered it a law of our being. By our very physical constitution pity is an unavoidable emotion. We involuntarily feel an uneasiness, which prompts us to succour a fellow-creature in distress, even to relieve ourselves. Though this be originally an instinct only, by cherishing it we render it a virtue; and by exciting and exercising it, from religious motives, we turn it into a Christian grace. See what stress God has laid upon it in His Word. He has told us that no clearness of knowledge, no rectitude of opinion, no fervour of zeal, no constancy of attendance on ordinances, no talking of Divine things, will be a compensation for charity. Let us therefore not only believe and admire, but let us be followers of Him who delighteth in mercy. We cannot love Him unless we are concerned to please Him, and we cannot please Him unless we are like-minded with Him. Neither can we enjoy Him. Resemblance is the foundation of our communion with Him. He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. (*William Jay.*) *The grace of God in pardoning sin*.—There is scarcely anything in religion more difficult than deeply to feel our sins, and mourn over them, and yet to believe firmly in the readiness of God to forgive them. It is easy to yield to despondency, and to consider the pardon of them as impossible. To oppose such gloomy suggestions is an important as well as pleasing duty. I. THE MATCHLESS EXTENT OF GOD'S PARDONING MERCY. The uniform character of God in His dispensations to His Church in all ages is that of a God who "pardoneth iniquity, transgression, and sin." Note the several expressions in verse 18. He is ever engaged in remitting the sins of those who plead His mercy. "He pardoneth iniquity." He voluntarily overlooks offences. "Passeth by the transgressions of the remnant of His heritage." He does not allow Himself, as He justly might, to be hindered or stopped by our sins, but acts as one who sees them not. When God pardons sin, He passes, as it were, over it, even as a hastening traveller urges on his way, and neglects the impediments in his road. "He retains not His anger for ever." He is provoked with the obstinate and rebellious; but when they truly repent and turn to Him, He lets go His wrath, He views them with infinite compassion, He pardons them, He passes by their sins, and accepts them "to the praise of the glory of His grace." The spring of all this grace and consideration is, that He "delighteth in mercy." He does not pardon reluctantly, and pass by our sins with hesitation or backwardness, but with willing promptitude and satisfaction. There is a force in the original phrase which deserves notice. It reads literally: "Because, as for Him, He delighteth in mercy"; or "He delighteth in mercy, even He." His very nature prompts Him to it. Why, then, should any inquiring and self-condemned penitent despair of pardon? The difficulties in the way of remission may be great; and to us may appear insurmountable, but the glory of God in bestowing it is therefore so much the more illustrious. II. THE CONSOLING APPLICATION OF THIS MERCY TO THE CASE OF THE PENITENT SINNER. In the text this general truth is applied to the particular circumstances of the Jewish Church. It would be of little

moment to have some surprising ideas of the clemency of God unless this application of it to the actual circumstances of the Church were added, and unless the faithful were assured for themselves that God would be merciful to them when they call upon Him. And this is indeed the true reasoning of humble piety in every age. The awakened inquirer may be assured that God "will turn again." Though He may have withdrawn from us on account of our sins, yet He will return and bless us with His salvation. And how will He return? "He will have compassion upon us." All the misery and distress which we endure will be observed by Him; all our state will touch His heart, and move His pity. A claim to merit we cannot advance, but an appeal to the compassion of God in Christ will never fail. And what will be the effect of this compassion? "He will subdue our iniquities"; that is, God will bestow the very blessing we need, and which we most ardently desire. He will, by His grace, overcome the power and dominion of iniquity in the heart, and enable the penitent to love and obey Him. To subdue the tyranny of our sins is one blessing which flows from the compassion of God. But what shall become of our past iniquities and present imperfections? To meet this question, it is added, "God will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea." His forgiveness shall be signal and complete. It shall be as if the whole mass of our guilt were buried in the mighty waters. What is cast into the depths of the fathomless ocean sinks never to rise again. III. THE CONFIRMATION BOTH OF THE EXTENT OF GOD'S PARDONING MERCY, AND OF THE CONSOLING APPLICATION OF IT, WHICH IS TO BE DERIVED FROM THE COVENANT OF MERCY ITSELF. God had chosen Abraham, and had made a covenant with him and his seed. In this covenant, pardon, grace, strength, consolation were assured to all God's heritage. A distinction may be observed between the words "mercy" and "truth," as they are applied to this covenant. God is said to "perform His truth to Jacob, and His mercy to Abraham." Possibly because His covenant, as it was given to Abraham, was an act of mere mercy; but in ratifying it to Jacob, God only made good what He had before promised. Mercy first bestowed, then truth confirmed, the covenant. So still, God first offers Himself freely to us, and then is faithful and true to His promises. Application—1. Encourage the trembling penitent to act on the views thus unfolded. 2. Ascertain your interest in the Everlasting Covenant. 3. Allow that possibly your sins may be pardoned, and your case relieved. 4. Nay, cherish a fully assured hope of being pardoned and accepted. (*D. Wilson, M.A.*) *The matchless mercy*:—The drift and scope of this place is to show God's infinite and constant mercies to His children. This is propounded in the benefits they receive: justification by the blood of Christ, and sanctification by His Spirit. Justification is thus set forth. He shows what He will take away; even original sin, and our rebellion. What He will pass by; "the transgression of the remnant of His heritage." Sanctification is amplified in two degrees: in this life, and in the life to come. The reasons moving God are taken from His nature, from His mercy, and from His truth. Strengthened and confirmed from divers other reasons, from antiquity, from the often repetition thereof; and God has even sworn it. Doctrine 1. There is none so merciful as God. Reasons—Mercy is God's nature. All creatures in heaven and earth have their mercy by derivation from this mercy of God. Mercy in God is free, without any cause of us moving Him to the same. Doctrine 2. That it is the mercy of all mercies to have our sins forgiven, to have them covered, buried, and done quite away. Reasons—Because other mercies reprobate men may have, as an abstinence from some sins, a show of sanctification, some outward gifts of the Spirit, &c.; but this mercy of forgiveness none can have but the elect. Because this benefit is the chiefest fountain which flowed from Christ's blood. Because it bringeth unto us the happiest fruits and benefits here and hence. Because it brings us to an everlasting peace in heaven. Doctrine 3. That God in a wonderful and special manner respecteth His heritage. Reasons—Because they are God's purchase. Because of His providence, in that He keepeth a continual watch over them. Because He dwelleth amongst His Church, and therefore He will have a special care to His own heritage, to do them all manner of kindnesses. Doctrine 4. That the people of God be but a remnant in regard of the wicked, even like the gleanings of the corn, a small company. We must not be discouraged though we see few go with us in the way to heaven. Doctrine 5. That the afflictions of God's children shall have a seasonable and a speedy end. Reasons—Because "the Lord doth not afflict willingly,

nor grieve the children of men." Because we have such a sure Friend in the court of heaven. Because by afflictions we gain instruction. Because God correcteth only for our profit. Doctrine 6. Those who have once had any saving comfort shall have it again. Reasons—Because all God's saving graces be given for everlasting. Because He will turn again and have compassion, for His heart is near unto us. Because of all burdens the absence of God's favour is so intolerable. Doctrine 7. Where God forgiveth sin, there He also subdueth sin. Reasons—Because the virtue of Christ's death can never be separated from the merit of the same. Because without this subduing of sin upon forgiveness, neither should we have comfort from Him, nor He glory from us. Doctrine 8. Those who have their sins subdued whilst they live shall have them all drowned when they are dead. Doctrine 9. That wherein God delighteth it is impossible but it must needs come to pass. And He delighteth in mercy. Doctrine 10. God is bound, in regard of His truth, to fulfil all His former mercies to His children. Too often we neglect God's promises, because we do not receive immediate help. We must labour by all means to remember and apply the promises, and so turn them into prayers. (*R. Sibbes.*) *The God of the Christians a God delighting in mercy*:—Heathen religions rest on the principle of terror. This appears in the very aspect of their gods. The enlightened nations even formed their gods on this principle. They put the thunder into the right hand of their Jupiter; they placed the eagle at His feet; they represented Him as ruling the world by terror. It was reserved for revelation to present the Divine character in the full circle of His perfections. To "delight in mercy" was a conception, in connection with the Deity, which the heathen world would never have formed.

**I. THE GOD OF THE CHRISTIANS IS LOVE.** "God is Love," said the Apostle John; and all His various perfections are but so many modifications of love. **II. ALL HIS TRANSACTIONS WITH MEN HAVE PROVED HOW MUCH HE DELIGHTS IN MERCY.** Even the covenant of works was but an introduction to the display of Divine mercy; and if sin had not entered into the world we should not have known the thousandth part of His love. **III. THE GOD OF THE CHRISTIANS HAS WRITTEN HIS CHARACTER IN A BOOK.** Its histories, prophecies, laws, doctrines, threatenings, promises, all tell of the mercies of the Lord. **IV. ALL THE WORKS OF GOD GO TO SHOW THAT THE GOD OF THE CHRISTIANS DELIGHTETH IN MERCY.** The world was made as a theatre for His mercy. His providence displays His mercy. Every act of mercy is to allure men to the provisions of mercy; every act of judgment is to alarm men that they may avail themselves of His mercy. **V. VIEW THE SUBJECT IN REGARD TO THE SCHEME OF OUR RECOVERY.** This, from first to last, is a revelation of the richest mercy. What is the incarnation of the Son of God? What are the miracles? What were His sighs, but the heart's breath of His mercy? What His death, but the sacrifice of His mercy? What is the Gospel, but the royal proclamation of mercy? **VI. ALL THE PERFECTIONS OF GOD ARE EMPLOYED IN ILLUSTRATING HIS MERCY.** His eyes are employed in exercises of mercy, in watching its objects, and ascertaining their wants. His ears are ever open to the cry of the needy. His lips are employed in uttering the thoughts and purposes of mercy. His hands are engaged in works of mercy. His feet are ever hastening to the relief of the objects of His mercy. His wisdom, power, justice, truth, sovereignty, immutability are all occupied in the designs of His mercy. **VII. THE INNUMERABLE FORMS IN WHICH GOD'S MERCY APPEARS SHOW THAT HE DELIGHTETH IN MERCY.** The whole of the water of the world is called the ocean, but this takes various names, according to the shores it washes. As the Atlantic, German, Pacific, Indian, &c. So it seems with the mercy of God. It bears different names, according to the state of those whom it visits. It is either calling, protecting, pardoning, or comforting mercy. How unbounded are the stores and resources of Divine mercy. Then should not we too be merciful; delighting in mercy even as doth our heavenly Father? (*A. Waugh, D.D.*) *God's patience*:—In the Old Testament much is special to its age, and has to us only a secondary value. But while the elements that were local and special to one people and one age no longer have to us the importance which they had to them to whom they were first delivered, yet other portions contain universal truths,—that is, truths that belong to men everywhere, in every age. Joys, sorrows, the literature of those sorrows, universal afflictions, remorse, yearnings after goodness; in short, all the moral sentiments, and all the natural affections, are the same under all governments, under all laws, and in every age. The Scriptures that relate to these things are perennial. If you

cast into oblivion the Psalms of David, you throw away the best literature of the feelings that has ever appeared in human language; and where can you replace it? The noblest applications of moral principles to human affairs are to be found in the prophets. Let anyone ask himself where he will find a substitute for that sublime conception of God that rules throughout the Old Testament. There are not, even in the New Testament, any descriptions of God that, for majesty and completeness and symmetry and harmony, go beyond and higher than those contained in the oldest parts of the Old Testament. One of these Divine elements comes before us this morning—God's great patience with men, and His forgiveness of them. 1. Our sin is not so much a violation of a law that lies outside of the bosom of God, as it is a disregard of the feelings and nature of God Himself. There is a marked distinction between personal feeling infringed upon and law transgressed. In worldly affairs there is a distinction between a disregard of the rules of business and a personal disagreement with you yourself. When a man offends against you, his wrong is more heinous and provoking than when he offends against your rules and laws. God and His laws are one, in such a sense that when you offend against His moral law you offend against His own personal feeling. In this light it may be seen that every man sins every day of his life. There are innumerable evils and wrongs and injuries against God's feelings in the history of every single man. Men have been living in a perpetual violation of all the thoughts and feelings of God's mind. And yet the race has thriven; there have been joys, there have been mercies and blessings, there have been reforming and stimulating influences developed in the world. These things explain what is meant when God is spoken of as being so patient, so long-suffering. He suffers and endures; and the reason is, that He "delighteth in mercy." He delights to be kind. Kindness harmonises with His nature. Consider the literature of this kindness as it is represented in the Bible. He is the one who, though offended, needs no persuasion to forgive. He is not only merciful, He is magnanimous. 3. Consider what it is to have such a Being as this at the centre of power and administration. The most intensely thoughtful and the most intensely active of any being in the universe is God. In view of this brief opening of the character of God, and of His feelings towards men that are sinning and trespassing against Him, I remark—(1) This conception of God should quicken every moral sensibility, and make a life of sin painful and distasteful to us. (2) There is in this presentation of God's character an argument against a dishonourable reliance on God's goodness as a means of sinning. (3) Consider, in the light of this discourse, how we ought to forgive each other when we have been offended one by another. Contrast our ordinary mode of forgiveness with that of our God. (4) In this view of God there is encouragement to all who are honest, and who are seeking to live a godly life. (*Henry Ward Beecher.*) *The mercy of God:—Consider God's mercy—I. IN ITS RISE. II. IN ITS PROGRESS. III. IN ITS CONSUMMATION. (Skeletons of Sermons.) The incomparableness of God illustrated in His forgiveness of sin:—I. THE NATURE OF HIS FORGIVENESS.* The Bible generally sets Divine forgiveness forth under figures corresponding to the aspects in which sin stands before the mind of the writer at the time. For example—1. When sin appears as a debt, an unfulfilled obligation, then pardon is spoken of as cancelling. 2. When sin appears as an estrangement from God, then forgiveness is represented as reconciliation. 3. When sin appears as an indictment, forgiveness is spoken of as justification. 4. When sin appears as a pollution, forgiveness is represented as a cleansing. 5. When sin appears as a disease, forgiveness is represented as a healing. 6. When sin appears as an obstruction between the soul and God, forgiveness is represented as a clearing. There are three points of contrast between Divine forgiveness and human. (1) In human governments forgiveness is exercised with most cautious limitations. There is no such limitation to the exercise of this prerogative in God. (2) In human forgiveness there is no guarantee against future criminality. But the God-pardoned man is a changed man. (3) Human forgiveness can never put the criminal in such a good position as he had before his transgression. But in Divine forgiveness the criminal is raised to a higher status even than that of innocence. II. THE SOURCE OF HIS FORGIVENESS. Anger in God is not passion, but principle; not antagonism to existence, but to the evils that curse existence. Here is the source of forgiveness, "He delighteth in mercy." 1. Forgiveness as a merciful act. It is not an act of equity, but of compassion; not of justice, but

of love. 2. This act of mercy is the delight of God. Mercy is a modification of benevolence. (2) If He delights in mercy, then hush for ever the pulpits that blasphemously represent Him as malign. (2) If He delights in mercy, then let no sinner despair on account of the enormity of his sins. (3) If He delights in mercy, may we not hope that one day there will come an end to all the misery of the moral universe? III. THE COMPLETENESS OF HIS FORGIVENESS (ver. 10). 1. The entire subjugation of all sins. Sin is the enemy of all enemies. Divine forgiveness is the destruction of sin in us. 2. The entire submersion of all sin. Forgiveness is deliverance from sin. Figures employed—"Blotting out of a thick cloud." "Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back." Casting sins "into the depths of the sea." "Remembering sin no more." All true forgiveness involves forgetfulness. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 19. And Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.—*God putting away the iniquity of His people*:—The mercies and promises of the Old Testament were but the outline of the glory thereafter to be revealed. The latter portion of this chapter abounds with assurances of Jerusalem's restoration, involving in it the confusion and degradation of its enemies. The prophet's apostrophe to Jehovah in the last verses, both in the clearness of its views and the fulness of its statements, is one well suited to the Christian. It is much to be released from sin's captivity, to have its iron yoke removed, and the foul garments of its bondage torn away. But it is more to find that He who pardoneth iniquity because He delighteth in mercy will also have compassion on us, and subdue our iniquities; not merely cleanse us from their stain by the blood of Jesus, but also deliver us from their power by His Holy Spirit. The particular turn of the language of the text appears to be taken from the destruction of the hosts of Egypt in the Red Sea. As their ruin was so utter that they were to be seen alive no more for ever, it implies that our great spiritual tyrants and foes, our sins, shall, when God by His Spirit arises to subdue them, be as completely cast out, and their final penalty be as thoroughly put away, as though they were buried in the depths of the sea. Sin is closely connected with suffering. If, then, God may be said in a metaphor to cast sin into the sea, may we not literally say the same of the suffering? What the sea is said typically to do for the former, it often actually does for the latter. With so much of injury and destructiveness connected with the sea, there is also bound up much of benefit; benefit especially to suffering humanity, in the multiform maladies which embitter our existence. Then let the sea remind you how noble is the gift of spiritual health; how all-important that the moral disease of evil should be washed away, and your sins through mercy cast into the depths of the sea—that ocean of heavenly grace and love which shall hide them for ever from merited condemnation! (*Edmund Lilley, M.A.*) *What God would do with our sins*:—"Our iniquities." "Our sins,"—is it possible for us to be quite rid of these? This great question finds in the text a still greater answer. The words are two clauses of promise, each with its own shade of figurative meaning—a strong shade, and a stronger. I. THE DIVINE ONE AS EFFECTING THE CONQUEST OF HUMAN SINS. "He will subdue our iniquities"; that is, He will tread them down, will trample them in triumph under His feet. The very sound of the words suggests that it is no easy enterprise, this managing of our sins. We are apt to think lightly of sins. We underestimate the terrible capacity of wrong and death which lurks in them, and in each one of them. We yield them quarter, rations, parole, friendship. They swarm round us, and we cannot subdue them. Give your welcome, then, to Him who conquers this haunting throng on your behalf. Here He stands, at your side and mine. With Him beside us the whole matter passes beyond mere hopefulness into utter assurance. "But," it may be asked, "is it not an arduous and a daring task for any one to undertake for me?" It is so much this, and so much more than you can think, that only the One need attempt to undertake it. You may safely entrust the great task to Him. See the comprehensive completeness of the conquest. Christ not only conquers all the bad legions that had mustered around us during bygone years, but He tramples down the upspringing legions as they venture to arise,—thinning their ranks and enfeebling their energy, and impoverishing their condition, with the sure prospect for us that soon the hour will have struck when He can look back upon nothing but conquest, and forward upon nothing to conquer. II. THE DIVINE ONE AS EFFECTING THE DESTRUCTION AND OBLIVION OF HUMAN SINS. The new figure substantially

repeats the sense of the other; yet it advances further, and is more vividly full of the gracious truth upon this subject. "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." "Sins," not "iniquities" only, but the gravest as well as the lightest violations of Divine law. "Into the sea," and into the deep places of the sea; far to seaward, where the sounding line descends in miles—buried, without resurrection, for evermore. Some who have entrusted themselves to God's grace are still timid and doubtful as to whether it can really be all, and once for all, and irrecoverably, settled about those sins of theirs. Be sure that when God pardons at all He pardons altogether. The sins of a Christ-trusting man are not only lost, but are what may be called securely lost. A thing is most safely gone, not when it is banished we know not whither, but when, knowing where it is, we are sure that it is absolutely irrecoverable. Apply. Never dream of managing your sins yourself. When God has put our sins into forgetfulness we ought ourselves no more to remember them. (*J. A. Kerr Bain, M.A.*) *How God forgives*:—The gist of the two verses is in the sentence, "And Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." However unlike to each other we may be, we all have need of pardon. In human pardon there is nothing remarkable save this, that it is often remarkably slow in coming, and as remarkably ungracious when it does come; and that when it is born it is remarkably short-lived. Our pardons, like ourselves, are full of imperfections. What a painful operation it is to be forgiven! A man seldom forgives without first humiliating. When God forgives He does it in a style worthy of Himself. There is a dignity about His forgiveness; it is a positive luxury to be forgiven by Him. God only is perfect in the art of pardoning. In the text God's pardon is described by four words—I. PARDON. "Pardoneth iniquity." While in everything God is incomparable, He is most unrivalled in the matter of forgiving. The glory of God is His ability and willingness to forgive. The word "pardoneth" in the Hebrew means "to lift up and carry away." Do not run away with the idea that pardoning is only a matter of uttering a word. God cannot forgive at the expense of His own righteousness. He is a God that lifteth up the iniquity. The Son lifted the sin up on His shoulders, and He walked away with it. II. PASSETH BY. "And passeth by the transgression." Transgression here means "rebellion." "Passeth by,"—that is, as if He did not see it. God deals with sin as if He did not see it. He has seen it once. He saw it on Christ. He does not see it on me, because He saw it on Him. III. SUBDUE. The R.V. has, "He will trample under foot our iniquities." When God forgives the guilt of a sinner's sins He breaks their power. Have you ever tried to trample on your own iniquities? When God forgives the guilt He says: "I will do more—I will put My foot down on the neck of your iniquities." IV. CAST INTO SEA. God provides that His act of grace shall never be repealed. He will never take back the pardon He has once bestowed. "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." That is how God puts away the sins of His people. When God pardons a man's sins He takes the sins, and drops them into the deepest place He can find, and there they lie, for ever forgiven, for ever forgotten. Micah may have had the drowning of the Egyptian host in his mind when he penned this passage. When God pardons, the tablets of His memory, if I may so put it, are wiped, and there is no remembrance for ever made of this sin. When God buries our sin He takes it right out into the mid-ocean of Divine pardon and Divine forgetfulness, and it is for ever forgotten. (*Archibald G. Brown.*) *Divine compassion to sinners*:—Though the Almighty is absolutely incomprehensible, and cannot be found out to perfection, yet He has explicitly revealed Himself as a God "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and ready to forgive." And this propitious character of the Deity is peculiarly appropriate and interesting to mankind. Infinite mercy has graciously provided a way of salvation, by faith in Jesus Christ, which is perfectly consistent with Divine justice, and admirably suited to the necessitous circumstances of the "world that lieth in wickedness." I. THE BLESSINGS PIOUSLY ANTICIPATED. "He will subdue our iniquities," &c. There may be an allusion to the deliverance of the Israelites from the Egyptian bondage. As the Lord then literally subdued Pharaoh and His host, so He will spiritually "subdue the iniquities" of His faithful servants, and by His pardoning mercy "cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." The prophet evidently anticipates—1. The absolution of the guilt of sin. As "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" we must certainly either be pardoned or punished. When sinners return unto God with penitent and believing hearts, He graciously

forgives their transgressions, and heals their backslidings. This inestimable blessing is called in the text, "casting all our sins into the depths of the sea," which is a mode of expression that intimates both the extent and completeness of pardon. 2. The subjugation of the power of sin. We are not only guilty, but depraved. Sin is frequently personified in Scripture, and described as a vile usurper and destructive tyrant, reigning in the hearts and lives of the disobedient. Hence it is not only necessary that the guilt of sin be mercifully cancelled, but that its power be effectually subdued. Omnipotence alone is equal to this glorious achievement. He principally accomplishes this work of grace by His Son, as the Saviour of sinners, by His Word as the instrument of salvation, and by His Spirit as the agent of personal religion. II. THEIR SOURCE DISTINCTLY SPECIFIED. "He will turn again; He will have compassion upon us." The prophet attributes the pardon and destruction of sin to the Lord Jehovah. These blessings are Divine in their origin. God only can forgive sin, and save the sinner. It is His sole prerogative to absolve our crimes and purify our souls. And this perfectly harmonises with the perfections of His nature. 2. These blessings are propitious in their medium. We have no natural right or claim to the Divine mercies, and can only receive them by way of sovereign favour, "through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." For this purpose He assumed our nature, died for our sins, and ever lives to intercede for sinners. 3. These blessings are gracious in their bestowment. We cannot receive them on the ground of personal worthiness or human merit. Nor does the Lord require any previous goodness or moral fitness to render us worthy of the blessings of salvation. He freely and graciously pardons and saves the truly penitent, for the glory of His name, through the merits of the Redeemer. III. THE CONFIDENCE DEVOUTLY EXPRESSED. "He will turn," &c. This is not the language of enthusiastic presumption, but of inspired and rational assurance; it is founded on—1. The character and covenant of God. 2. The atonement and intercession of Christ. 3. The doctrines and promises of the Gospel. We may infer from this subject—(1) The necessity of repentance and faith. 2. The possibility of pardon and holiness. 3. The felicity and duty of the saints. (*Eta*, in "Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.") *Divine forgiveness*.—Three ideas involved in figures of Divine forgiveness. I. AN ANTECEDENT LIABILITY TO PUNISHMENT. All the terms imply something wrong, and the wrong is moral. It is crime, and crime must ever expose to punishment. Because of this moral wrong there must be a *liability* to punishment. II. THE EXERCISE OF A MERCIFUL PREROGATIVE. God is disposed to forgive. Two things connected with this pardoning prerogative which marks it off from its exercise in human governments. 1. In human governments it is exercised with most cautious limitations. 2. In human governments forgiveness is invariably valued by those to whom it is exercised. III. AN ACTUAL DELIVERANCE FROM ALL LIABILITY TO PUNITIVE SUFFERING. The forgiven man is delivered from punishment. (*Homilist*.) *Sins lost in the depths of the sea*.—You see the Thames as it goes sluggishly down through the arches, carrying with it endless impurity and corruption. You watch the inky stream as it pours along day and night, and you think it will pollute the world. But you have just been down to the seashore, and you have looked on the great deep, and it has not left a stain on the Atlantic. No, it has been running down a good many years and carried a world of impurity with it, but when you go to the Atlantic there is not a speck on it. As to the ocean, it knows nothing about it. It is full of majestic music. So the smoke of London goes up, and has been going up, for a thousand years. One would have thought that it would have spoiled the scenery by now; but you get a look at it sometimes. There is the great blue sky which has swallowed up the smoke and gloom of a thousand years, and its azure splendour is unspoiled. It is wonderful how the ocean has kept its purity, and how the sky has taken the breath of the millions and the smoke of the furnaces, and yet it is as pure as the day God made it. It is beautiful to think that these are only images of God's great pity for the race. Our sins, they are like the Thames; but, mind you, they shall be swallowed up—lost in the depths of the sea, to be remembered against us no more. Though our sins have been going up to heaven through the generations, yet though thy sins are as crimson, they shall be as wool, as white as snow. (*W. L. Watkinson*.)

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