

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

REV. JOSEPH S. EXELL, M.A.

ZEPHANIAH.

London:

FRANCIS GRIFFITHS,
34, MAIDEN LANE, STRAND, W.C.

1905.

INTRODUCTION TO ZEPHANIAH.

AUTHOR OF THE BOOK.—Of Zephaniah we know absolutely nothing but what he himself mentions in the superscription of his Book. No information can be gathered from the contents of the prophecy, where the writer's personal history is wholly unnoticed. He calls himself "the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah." As it is usual to mention only the name of the father, it has been inferred that the genealogy is carried up to the fourth generation, because Hizkiah, i.e. Hezekiah, was a celebrated personage, and most probably the famous King of Judah. But the inference is not undoubted. Hizkiah is not called "King of Judah" in the genealogy, which would naturally have been done had he been the ancestor intended, as in Prov. xxv. 1; Isa. xxxviii. 9. There is room enough, indeed, between Hezekiah and Josiah for the four specified descents, though only three are named in the case of Josiah himself; but the name Hezekiah was not unknown among the Jews, and we cannot assume without further support that the person here mentioned is the king. It is fair to argue that the insertion of the genealogical details shows that the prophet was of distinguished birth; but further it is impossible to go with any certainty. The name of the prophet is variously explained as "The Lord hath hid," or "The Lord hath guarded," or "The Lord's Watch-tower." Keil is generally followed in interpreting it as "He whom Jehovah hides, or shelters." The LXX writes it *Σοφορίας*: Vulgate *Sophoniah*. There were others who bore this name (see 2 Kings xxv. 18; 1 Chron. vi. 36; Zech. vi. 10, 14).

DATE OF THE BOOK.—Zephaniah, in the inscription of his Book, states that he prophesied "in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, King of Judah"; and this assertion has never been seriously disputed. The only question is in what part of that king's reign did he exercise his office. Josiah reigned thirty-one years, according to the usually received dates—from 640 B.C. to 609 B.C. The destruction of Nineveh, which Zephaniah foretold, took place quite at the end of Josiah's reign, and his prophecy must have been uttered some time before this event. No other data for determining the question exist save what may be gathered from internal evidences. And these are most uncertain, depending chiefly upon inferences drawn from the great reformation effected by the good king. Did he prophesy before this reformation was begun, or after it was effected, that is to say, in the first or second half of Josiah's reign? A third alternative may be added—Was it during the progress of this religious amelioration? Those who assign the prophecy to the earlier period, before the king's eighteenth year, when his vigorous measures produced their happy results, rely upon the fact that the prophet speaks as though idolatry and the disorders which Josiah repressed were still rampant, even the members of the royal family being implicated in the general iniquity. It is inconceivable, they say, that Zephaniah should have taken this gloomy view, and have entirely omitted all mention of the young prince's noble efforts to effect a change for the better, had this attempt already

been commenced. All this points to a time when Josiah was still a minor, and before he had begun to assert himself in the direction of affairs. On the other hand, it is contended that certain statements in the body of the work prove that the reformation was being carried on at the time when it was composed: the public worship of Jehovah existed (iii. 4, 5), and this side by side with that of Baal and with many idolatrous practices (i. 4, 5); there were priests of Jehovah as well as priests of false gods at the same time. Nor can we reason from Zephaniah's silence concerning reforms that none had been essayed; for Jeremiah, who began to prophesy in the thirteenth year of Josiah, is quite as strong as Zephaniah in his denunciations of idolatry, the fact being that, though it was publicly abolished, it was still practised extensively in secret. Others, again, claim a still later date for the prophecy, because it speaks of the extermination of the *remnant* of Baal (i. 4), which implies that the purification had already been effected, and that only isolated instances still existed; the prophet also speaks of and refers to the Mosaic books as well known to his hearers (comp. i. 13, 15, 17, ii. 2, 5, 7, 11, iii. 5, 19, 20), which could only have been after the discovery of the "Book of the Law," in Josiah's eighteenth year (2 Kings xxii. 8). It must be noted that on this occasion reference was made to the Prophetess Huldah, not to Zephaniah (2 Kings xxii. 14). Hence some suppose that he was dead at this time. From this brief recapitulation of arguments it will be seen that each of the three theories mentioned above has much to be said in its favour; and that the only safe conclusion to adopt is this—that although the present book, as now displayed in the sacred canon, forms one connected whole, it is composed of prophecies uttered at various times and gathered by their author into a volume and arranged on a definite plan. Its place in the canon is the same both in the Hebrew and Greek, and coincides with the chronological order to which it is assigned. (*W. J. Deane, M.A.*)

THE TEMPER OF ZEPHANIAH.—For so young a man the vision of Zephaniah may seem strangely dark and final. Yet not otherwise was Isaiah's inaugural vision, and as a rule it is the young and not the old whose indignation is ardent and unsparing. Zephaniah carries this temper to the extreme. There is no great hope in his Book, hardly any tenderness, and never a glimpse of beauty. A townsman, Zephaniah has no eye for nature; not only is no fair prospect described by him, he has not even a single metaphor drawn from nature's loveliness or peace. He is pitilessly true to his great keynotes: "I will sweep, sweep from the face of the ground; He will burn, burn up everything." No hotter book lies in all the Old Testament. Neither dew nor grass nor any tree nor any blossom lives in it, but it is everywhere fire, smoke, and darkness, drifting chaff, ruins, nettles, salt-pits, and owls and ravens looking from the windows of desolate palaces. Nor does Zephaniah foretell the restoration of nature in the end of the days. There is no prospect of a redeemed and fruitful land, but only of a group of battered and hardly saved characters; a few meek and righteous are hidden from the fire and creep forth when it is over. Israel is left "a poor and humble folk." No prophet is more true to the doctrine of the *remnant*, or more resolutely refuses to modify it. Perhaps he died young. The full truth, however, is that Zephaniah, though he found his material in the events of his own day, tears himself loose from history altogether. To Zephaniah the day of the Lord begins to assume what we call the "supernatural." Though the first of apocalyptic writers, Zephaniah does not allow himself the licence of apocalypse. (*Geo. Adam Smith, D.D.*)

THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.

ZEPHANIAH.

CHAPTER I.

VERS. 1-6. **The word of the Lord which came unto Zephaniah.**—*The Word* :—I. **THE DISTINGUISHING CAPACITY OF MAN, AND THE WONDERFUL CONDESCENSION OF GOD.** 1. The distinguishing capacity of man. To receive the word of Jehovah. To receive a word from another is to appreciate its meaning. The word of the Lord comes to every man at times,—comes in visions of the night, comes in the intuitions of conscience, comes in the impressions that nature makes on the heart. 2. The wonderful condescension of God. Even to speak to man. "The Lord hath respect unto the humble." II. **THE MORAL CORRUPTION OF MAN AND THE EXCLUSIVE PREROGATIVE OF GOD.** 1. The moral corruption of man. There are three great moral evils indicated in these verses. (1) Idolatry. "I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests; and them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops." The remains of Baal worship, which as yet Josiah was unable utterly to eradicate in remoter places. (2) Backsliding. "Them that had turned back from the Lord." The other evil here is—(3) Indifferentism. "And those that have not sought the Lord nor inquired for Him." 2. The exclusive prerogative of God. What is that? To destroy. "I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the Lord. I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumbling blocks with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the Lord." (1) No one can really destroy but God. "I kill and I make alive." Annihilation is as far behind the work of the creature as the work of creation. (2) God has a right to destroy human life. (3) His destructive work is as beneficent as His sustaining and creating. Destruction is a principle in all nature: one plant destroys another, one animal destroys another, and there are elements in nature whose work is destruction. From destruction new life and beauty come; destruction keeps the universe alive, fresh, and healthy. (*Homilist*.)

Vers. 2, 3. **I will utterly consume all things from off the land.**—*The menace of Zephaniah.*—It would not be easy to find words more fully charged and surcharged with terror than these. Nor do they grow less sombre and dreadful as we consider either the men against whom they are launched, or the occasion that gave them form. In the time of Zephaniah the Jews were incredibly corrupt. The occasion of Zephaniah's writing was the invasion of Asia by the Scythians. As he looked out from the walls of Jerusalem and saw the goodly land stripped and devoured before them, and recalled the havoc they had carried through neighbouring kingdoms, he found the very symbol of judgment which would best express his thought. Jehovah would sweep everything from the face of the whole earth, even as the Scythians, with fire and sword in their train, were sweeping away the fruits and the wealth of the East. The conception which the passage suggests is that, angered beyond endurance by the sins of men, Jehovah is about to storm through the earth like a mighty Scythian chieftain destroying empire after empire, sweeping the whole world bare and empty. But these words, when rightly understood, are found to breathe a most catholic charity, a most tender humanity, and a mercy wholly divine. I. **A MOST CATHOLIC CHARITY.** His view extended

over the whole civilised world, over the whole world the prophet knew. We commonly conceive of the Hebrew prophets as the most narrow and exclusive of men, as devoted solely to the affairs and interests of the Hebrew race. And in so conceiving of them we do them a grave wrong. They were patriots, indeed, and patriots of the sincerest and noblest strain. Instead of being the most exclusive, they were really the most catholic of men. There is no one of them who does not look beyond the limits of his own country and desire the welfare of the world. And men ought to rejoice that the judgments of man are abroad in the whole earth, especially when they can see that Divine judgments veil purposes of mercy. This is the true catholicity, which desires not only the good of all men, but the highest good of all. II. A MOST NOBLE AND TENDER HUMANITY. They exalt man, and yet they take thought for beasts. They are at once human and humane. It is now too much the fashion to regard man as the mere creature of the vast natural and cosmic forces amid which he stands and moves. It is assumed that physical laws govern his whole being. The Hebrew prophets breathed another, and surely a higher spirit. To them it seemed that man was the lord of natural forces and laws, though himself "under authority." This high conception of man, as standing with only God above him, and the whole world beneath his feet, though it was the conception of a pre-scientific age, accords with the profoundest intuitions, and satisfies the deepest cravings of our hearts. III. A MERCY WHOLLY DIVINE. Though the words of the text sound so stern and judicial, all the Hebrew prophets are rooted and grounded in the conviction that the meaning of judgment is mercy, that all the sorrows and calamities of human life are designed to reach an end of compassion and love. That it was the mercy of judgment which Zephaniah had in mind when he rejoiced that "their offences" were to be swept away with the sinners of his time, that *men* were to suffer in order that *man* might be saved, is evident so soon as we permit him to interpret himself. In passages of an exquisite tenderness and beauty he expands his opening words. See chap. ii. 11, iii. 9. It was because the Hebrew prophets were so strong in this conviction of the beneficent uses of "judgments" that they could dwell on them, and even exult in them, as they undoubtedly do. Let us learn of Zephaniah the mercy of the Divine judgments. They simply sheathe and convey the saving health of the Divine compassion and love. With Zephaniah let us welcome and rely on the conviction that, when God sweeps the face of the earth, it is that He may renew the heart of the world, and gladden us with larger disclosures of His grace. (*Samuel Cox, D.D.*) **I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea.—Animals sharing the punishments of man:**—Why did God turn His wrath against fishes and other animals? This seems to have been a hasty and unreasonable infliction. But let this rule be first borne in mind, that it is preposterous in us to estimate God's dealings according to our judgment, as froward and proud men do in our day; for they are disposed to judge of God's works with such presumption that whatever they do not approve they think it right wholly to condemn. But it behoves us to judge modestly and soberly, and to confess that God's judgments are a deep abyss; and when a reason for them does not appear we ought reverently and with due humility to look for the day of their full revelation. This is one thing. Then it is meet at the same time to remember that as animals were created for man's use, they must undergo a lot in common with him; for God made subservient to man both the birds of heaven and the fishes of the sea, and all other animals. It is, then, no matter of wonder that the condemnation of him who enjoys sovereignty over the whole earth should reach to animals. The reason is sufficiently plain. Why, the prophet speaks here of the beasts of the earth, the fishes of the sea, and the birds of heaven; for we find that men grow torpid, or rather stupid in their own indifference, except as they are forcibly roused. It was therefore necessary for the prophet, when he saw the people so hardened in their wickedness, and that he had to do with men past recovery, to set clearly before them these judgments of God. (*John Calvin.*)

Vers. 4, 5. **And that swear by the Lord, and that swear by Malcham.**—*The demonstrativeness of true religion:*—In this text it is a sort of mixed religion that the Lord declares He will not tolerate. Impress the necessity of decision in religion. What is the lowest amount of faith in Jesus Christ which will avail to save a man's soul? 1. What definition the Scripture gives us of true Christianity. Mark the distinction between coming to Christ and following Christ. Coming to Christ costs

a man nothing ; but following Christ and remaining with Christ involve the taking up the cross and the exercise of stern self-denial. True Christianity demands an entire surrender of the heart to God, a thorough abandonment of wilful sin, an unceasing vigilance against the wiles of the devil. 2. If a man has cordially embraced, with a living faith, the truth as it is in Jesus, will he—can he—be undemonstrative ? By demonstrativeness is not meant talkativeness, nor can it be explained by formalism. When forms are allowed to usurp the place of the heart, they demonstrate too much. Nor is it being charitable, or regularly attending worship. By demonstrativeness is meant a quiet earnestness, which will show itself as much by what it does not as by what it does. A man cannot, in a proper sense, be undemonstrative if he has embraced, with a living faith, the “truth as it is in Jesus.” 3. To what is the undemonstrativeness of the mere professor of religion traceable ? Is it not that he makes God the offering of half his heart, while he gives the other half to the world ? 4. Are we to call the undemonstrative true Christians, and the demonstrative advanced Christians ? Let God answer. See the text. He who readeth the heart will not be mocked and trifled with. God will cut off the undecided. In the last great assize those who in their lives have halted between two opinions shall find no mercy. (*W. I. Chapman, M.A.*) *Double-hearted people*.—A little while ago I was with some friends, going through Her Majesty’s State apartments in Windsor Castle. At the end of the great banquet-hall we were shown, in a gallery above our heads, a fine organ. Now this organ, I found, was just like one of the double-hearted people ; for the old man who was taking us round explained carefully that it performed double duty, having two finger-boards. At the sides from which we saw it it was played on the occasion of a royal banquet, to the delight and pleasure of those who feasted below. But on the side which we could not see it had another finger-board, and performed a wholly different service, for it was in the royal chapel, and pealed forth strains of sacred music to help the worship of those who gathered there. Well, I despised that organ for its double-dealing, though, of course, you know the organ could not help itself. It was only what it had been made, but it seemed to me like “a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” God keep us from having two finger-boards ! Do you understand what I mean ? Do you see that we, who are blood-bought and made nigh to God, have the blessed privilege of being brought as worshippers into the holiest ? That there we may be as beautiful instruments, in full tune for the Master’s hand, that, when He strikes the chords, there may rise rich swelling notes of worship and praise to His ear and heart. Having, then, a finger-board in the holiest, in the place of worship, let us be very jealous that there be none to which the revellers of this world can have access, that no note of sympathy may be ever struck from our hearts by the world, that has rejected Christ, the David whom we own as Lord. (*A. J. Gordon, D.D.*) *There ought to be continuity in our religious life*.—There should be continuity in our religious life. Some people are pious by fits and starts. They are with God in the sanctuary, but not in the shop ; they drink the cup of the Lord on Sunday, and the cup of the devil on Monday. At the mouths of certain large rivers are formed what geologists call lagoons. A lagoon is a small lake separated from the sea by a bar of sand, and is filled with fresh and salt water by turns. Often a lagoon communicates exclusively with the river for months, and during this period its water is fresh. Then a breach is made in the bar of sand and there is an eruption of salt water, which for a season holds undisputed sway. In these lagoons we may find an illustration of not a few people connected with all our churches. For a time they are seemingly in communication with God and spiritual things, and these are the forces that shape and mould and colour their life. But suddenly that communication seems to break off, to be interrupted ; the world rushes in through some breach of their own making, and for a season, at least, the things that are seen and temporal gain complete mastery over them. The change in their life and conduct is no less marked than the change in the waters of the lagoon. This type of Christian, this religious Reuben, will never attain to spiritual strength and ripeness, the stature of the perfect man Christ Jesus. The true follower of the Son of Man finds his illustration not in the lagoon, but in the glory of the Shechinah which shone continuously and with unabated splendour in the temple. (*W. B. Sproule.*)

Vers. 7–18. *The day of the Lord is at hand.—The day of war, the day of horrors*.—The war day is represented here—I. AS A DAY OF ENORMOUS SACRIFICE.

1. Sacrifice of life. Among several classes. (1) Royalty. (2) Nobility. (3) Traders. (4) The masses. 2. Sacrifice of property. II. AS A DAY OF DIVINE RETRIBUTION. All the horrors of war are here represented as judgments from the Almighty. In using war as a punishment for sin it may be observed—1. That all who perish in war righteously deserve their fate. 2. That warriors, in executing the Divine justice, demonstrate the enormity of the evil requiring punishment. 3. War, as an officer of Divine justice, reveals the amazing freedom allowed to the sinner in this world, and God's controlling power over hostile forces. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 8. I will punish . . . all such as are clothed with strange apparel.—*The sinfulness of strange apparel*.—I. THE CRIMINALS. Consider the principals, and the accessories. II. THE CRIME. Either wearing exotic and foreign apparel, or such as they had newly invented among themselves. III. THE PUNISHMENT. This is indefinitely expressed. How, in what way, degree, or measure, He will punish, He reserves to Himself. (*Vincent Alsop, A.M.*)

Ver. 12. At that time.—*At that time*.—The day of the Lord is any season in which He reveals Himself in a special manner. Of the dealings of God with His visible Church on that day the text presents a striking description. I. THE PARTY HERE SPOKEN OF—JERUSALEM. 1. In the day of the Lord the visible Church is not exempted from His special notice and appropriate dealings. 2. The grounds of God's procedure towards His Church may be the following. To whom much is given, of them shall much be required. With the visible Church the interests of the world are entrusted. With the visible Church, in a sense, the honour and glory of God's name are entrusted. God, having loved His Church, is jealous of His Church's love. 3. These views not only satisfy as to God's procedure, but furnish strong inducements to faithfulness to the Church. 4. When God shall come, it will be to His Church specially. II. THE PECULIAR ASPECT OF THE DAY OF THE LORD TOWARDS JERUSALEM. That is, the particular character of His dealings towards His Church—He shall "search with candles." 1. This expression proves the existence of suspicion. 2. It shows that the Church has hidden her sin. 3. It teaches that the search is close and narrow and prying. Illustration—The woman seeking her lost piece of silver, candle in hand. 4. It teaches that God Himself will search His Church. Not to satisfy Himself, but to indicate His complete knowledge, and to lead the Church to seek knowledge. 5. God searches by various means or agencies. 1. Ministers of the Gospel. 2. Individuals or churches. 3. Events of providence. 4. All these by the candle of His Word. Are you prepared to be searched by God? III. THE RESULT OF THIS SEARCH IN JERUSALEM IS THE DISCOVERY OF THE MEN THAT ARE "SETTLED ON THEIR LEES." 1. The class described (*Jer. xlviii. 11*). 2. The cause of this feature of their character. Quiescence of one and another class of feeling. 3. This is infidelity of heart. 4. There is not necessarily a quiescence of worldly feelings. IV. THE DIVINE TREATMENT OF THIS CLASS. Their punishment may be judicial blindness. In eternity it will be God's wrath. (*James Stewart.*) I will search Jerusalem with candles.—*Searching with candles*.—The Lord threatens, in the taking of the city, to take order with all atheists and epicures, who, abounding in wealth, lay secure and at ease (like wine on its dregs when it is not removed), in their heart denying God's providence, or that He took any care of things beneath, to reward good or punish evil; and therefore neither loved nor believed His promises, that they might walk in His way, nor feared His justice, so as to abandon sin. Concerning these the Lord threatens, that as a man searcheth what is hid or lost with a candle, so He would narrowly search out their sins, and themselves so as to punish them for their sins, so as none should escape; and their goods to give them for a spoil; whereby their houses should become desolate, and they should be disappointed of all their expectations from their enjoyments, according to His sentence pronounced of old in His law (*Deut. xxviii. 30, 39*). Doctrine.—1. Ease and prosperity slayeth the fool, and breeds such distempers of security, and settling on the earth, as justly provokes God to smite. 2. Prosperity and want of exercise, by vicissitudes of dispensations, is a great feeder of atheism, and an enemy to the observation and making use of Divine providence; and this again doth embolden and harden men yet more in their secure and wicked courses. 3. Secure atheists and contemners of God and His providence may expect that God will refute them in a language which they will understand, and make them know His providence at their own expense. 4. When

the Lord strips a sinful person or people of any mercies which they enjoyed they will find upon narrow search that their enjoyment thereof hath been a snare to them, to lead them into sin; and they should read this in the stroke. 5. The holy justice of God is to be adored in disappointing men of any happiness or contentment they expected in these things for which they hazard their souls, and so rendering them twice losers who will not serve Him. (*George Hutcheson.*)

Soul searching :—It seems to be commonly thought that the one fear and the one foe in these days is infidelity. Two things only have to be remembered by those who preach against infidelity to ordinary congregations,—the one is, that they do not, in furnishing answers, suggest the doubt with them; the other is, that they be careful to deal fairly and charitably with opponents in a place where, of course, there can be no reply. I. **INDIFFERENCE IS PRACTICAL INFIDELITY.** Without disparaging the prevalence in these days of an intellectual and speculative infidelity, we must feel that there are other dangers and other impediments to the life of souls which may make less demand upon the logic or the rhetoric of preachers, but which are at least as serious in their nature, and even more likely to be found in an assembly of worshippers. There is indifference. Indifference and infidelity have a closer affinity than is implied in their natures. For one person who is made sceptical by thinking or reading, twenty and a hundred persons are made sceptics by indifference. They “care for none of these things,” and therefore they can amuse themselves by playing with those edge-tools of sarcasm over things sacred which they would rather die than do, if they knew what may be the consequences to others now, and some day to themselves. The figure of the text is taken from the experience of vintners and wine merchants who have suffered some of the necessary processes of their business to be too long delayed, with the effect of making the wine what the margin represents the Hebrew original to call curded or thickened. The general idea seems to be that of the Psalm, “Because they have no changings, therefore they fear not.” It may be the sad, remorseful feeling of some one whom I address, that there is gradually sinking down upon him something of the dull, drowsy, stupid indifference towards the three paramount realities—God, the soul, and eternity, which, if it should become permanent, if it should become inveterate, will be in the most terrible of senses the very sleep of death. II. **CAUSES OF SPIRITUAL DECLINE.** This state has many histories. It is a dangerous thing, dangerous even for the soul, to live always on one spot, in one society, a life of routine, whether that routine be of pleasure or of business. The life of what is called society not only lays a heavy weight on the soul, of weariness, of depression, of simple worldliness; it has a dissipating, it has an enfeebling action upon the vigorous energy, upon the sturdy independence, upon the pure affection of mind and heart. There is a wonderful inequality in this matter of human experience. One life has its even tenor from year to year, another life is lacerated by a succession of sorrows. There is nothing of fatalism in saying that the never being emptied by providential discipline from vessel to vessel, the never going into captivity under a chastisement not joyous but grievous, is a less advantageous treatment, morally and spiritually, than the opposite. How graphic the description of the man who is “settled on his lees”; the man who has lost all freshness and liveliness of feeling, in the monotony of comfort and luxury, of health and habit, of regular alternation and unbroken routine! They say in their heart, “The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil.” This is the Nemesis of long forgetfulness. God, the living, acting God, disappears at last from the scene of being. . . . Then let us try earnestly to bring God back into our lives; let us try to do or forbear each day some one thing quite definitely and quite expressly because of God; because He wills, and it will please Him; or because He wills not, and therefore we will forbear. It is wonderful how this kind of self-treatment will spread and grow, till at last the blessed habit has become ours of setting God always before us, and doing all things as in His sight. (*Dean Vaughan.*)

Divine judgments :—To the Hebrew prophets the world was without meaning if it was not moral. Righteousness—the desire for it, the endeavour after it, was at the heart of things. We may thank Matthew Arnold for the phrase “The power that makes for righteousness” as a definition of God. The Hebrew prophet was a moral philosopher, a statesman, a preacher of righteousness, a declarer of God’s will as expressed in the laws and tendencies of human history. He was a scientist as well as a seer, discerning the face of the sky and the signs of the times, and predicting the rise and fall of states. It was the fate of Zephaniah

to fall on evil times. I. THE SUBJECT OF DIVINE JUDGMENTS. 1. They embrace the whole earth. God's moral law is co-extensive with the whole world. God's commandments are one and the same all the world over. 2. It is just as true that, though universal, God's judgments are sometimes particular and special. "I will search Jerusalem." God begins at home. When God comes to make inquisition for sin He begins at the sanctuary. 3. The prophet leads us into yet inner circles,—“I will punish the men that are settled on their lees.” The metaphor is drawn from the manufacture. By the expression two classes are intended—(1) The indifferent and ease-loving. (2) The carnally-minded. The man who settles down upon the sediment that is in him takes his tone and standard from the worse and not from the better part of his nature. 3. The innermost circle of all is occupied by those who say “in their heart, the Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil,”—the practical atheists of the Church who swear by the Lord, but relegate Him to a distant corner of His domain.

II. THE METHOD OF GOD'S JUDGMENTS. “Search with candles.” No half-measures, no compromise with evil will satisfy Jehovah. III. THE PURPOSE OF GOD'S JUDGMENTS IS NOT SIMPLY PENAL, BUT PURIFYING AND REMEDIAL. Our God is just to forgive, loving to punish. Let the Lord work His gracious fatherly will in your life. (*J. D. Thompson.*) Punish the men that are settled on their lees.—*Religious indifferentism*.—We have it here—I. DIVINELY PORTRAYED. It is marked by two elements. 1. Carnality. “The men that are settled on their lees.” The image is taken from the crust that is formed on the bottom of wines that have been long left undisturbed. It is marked by—2. Atheism. “They say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil.” This atheism is—(1) Not a theoretical denial of the existence of God. “They say in their heart, The Lord will not do good.” They assume His existence, they have no intellectual conviction for or against. The most popular and pernicious atheism is that which theoretically admits the being of God. It is a stupid, stolid, thoughtless state of mind, and you cannot argue with it. This atheism is—(2) A heart misrepresentation of God. “They say in their heart, The Lord will not do good,” &c. They have a God; but He is inactive, dormant, and concerns Himself with neither good nor evil. He is a mere fiction of their depraved heart. We have religious indifferentism here—II. DIVINELY DETECTED. “I will search Jerusalem with candles,” or lamps. The language, of course, is highly figurative. Omniscience does not require lamps to light Him, or to employ any effort to discover. He sees all things. “There is not a word on my tongue but lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether.” The language means, God's complete knowledge of this religious indifferentism wherever it exists. He sees it.—1. He sees it though it may not reveal itself in any palpable forms to men. Though it may conform to all the rules of social morality and popular religion, He sees it. 2. He sees it though it may be robed in the forms of religious devotion. It may attend churches, join in liturgies, sing psalms,—yet He sees it.

III. DIVINELY PUNISHED. I will “punish the men that are settled on their lees.” “Though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out” (*Amos ix. 3.*) The religiously indifferent must be punished sooner or later. How? By burning moral convictions. Convictions—1. As to the absurdity of their conduct. They will one day have the miserable god of their own hearts and the God of the universe brought into contact within them. 2. As to the wickedness of their conduct. 3. As to the ruinousness of their conduct. “Because I called and ye refused, I stretched out My hand and ye would not; therefore I will laugh when your fear cometh, and mock at your day of calamity.” (*Homilist.*) *Stagnant upon their lees*.—This starts questions for ourselves. Here is evidently the same public temper which at all periods provokes alike the despair of the reformer and the indignation of the prophet, the criminal apathy of the well-to-do classes sunk in ease and religious indifference. We have to-day the same mass of obscure nameless persons, who oppose their almost unconquerable inertia to every movement of reform, and are the drag upon all vital and progressive religion. The great causes of God and humanity are not defeated by the hot assaults of the devil, but by the slow, crushing, glacier-like mass of thousands and thousands of indifferent nobodies. God's causes are never destroyed by being blown up, but by being sat upon. It is not the violent and anarchical whom we have to fear in the war for human progress, but the slow, the staid, and the respectable. And the danger of these does not lie in their stupidity. Notwithstanding all their religious profession, it lies in their real scepticism.

Respectability may be the precipitate of unbelief. Nay, it is that, however religious its mask, wherever it is mere comfort, decorousness, and conventionality; where, though it would abhor articulately confessing that God does nothing, it virtually means so—"says so" (as Zephaniah puts it) "in its heart," by refusing to share manifest opportunities of serving Him, and covers its sloth and its fear by sneering that God is not with the great crusades for freedom and purity to which it is summoned. In these ways respectability is the precipitate which unbelief naturally forms in the selfish ease and stillness of so much of our middle-class life. And that is what makes mere respectability so dangerous. Like the unshaken, unstrained wine to which the prophet compares its obscure and muddy comfort, it tends to decay. To some extent our respectable classes are just the dregs and lees of our national life; like all dregs, they are subject to corruption. A great sermon could be preached on the putrescence of respectability,—how the ignoble comfort of our respectable classes and their indifference to holy causes lead to sensuality, and poison the very institutions of the home and family, on which they pride themselves. A large amount of the licentiousness of the present day is not that of outlaw and disordered lives, but is bred from the settled ease and indifference of many of our middle-class families. It is perhaps the chief part of the sin of the obscure units, which form these great masses of indifference, that they think they escape notice and cover their individual responsibility. At all times many have sought obscurity, not because they are humble, but because they are slothful, cowardly, or indifferent. Obviously it is this temper which is met by the words, "I will search out Jerusalem with lights." (*Geo. Adam Smith, D.D.*) *The danger of uninterrupted prosperity*:—God is omniscient. Why, then, should He represent Himself as searching Jerusalem with candles, as though there were the remotest possibility of any acts escaping His detection? These representations are simply intended to work powerfully on our minds. For whom is it that the Almighty institutes this close and piercing search? Not the perpetrators of any very secret and hidden sin; but men who are "settled on their lees," whom prosperity has lulled into a kind of practical atheism, so that they deny the providence of God or His interference in human affairs. God would not employ this strong figure if there may not be a great deal of this sensual indifference, this haughty indolence, even in those in whom prosperity may not seem to us to have acted injuriously. I. THE NATURAL TENDENCIES OF A STATE IN WHICH THERE IS NO ADVERSE CHANGE. Take the case of a man on whom, from his youth up, everything has seemed to smile. When there is not unbroken prosperity there is often a sudden tide of success. This may apply to both public and private life. To these the description "settled on their lees" may apply. Prosperity is really far harder to bear than adversity. It is a great touchstone, and marvellously exposes the weakness of man's virtues. There is a direct tendency in prosperity to the fostering and strengthening the corruptions of our nature. The more a man obtains, the more will he desire. The bent of our dispositions being towards the earth, if nothing ever happen to turn them from earth there is little ground for expecting that they will centre themselves on heaven. Prosperity has a tendency to keep men at a distance from God. A religious man may be prosperous, and prosperity not prove the grave of his religion; but the prosperous man who is yet a stranger to religion is amongst the most unpromising of subjects for moral attack. II. WHAT ADVANTAGES FOLLOW UPON UNCERTAINTIES AND REVERSES OF FORTUNE. 1. Change admonishes us of the transitory nature of terrestrial good. Every change, but yet more a succession of changes, speaks, saying, "Arise ye, and depart hence, for this is not your rest." It is a gracious appointment of Providence for most of us that we are not permitted to "settle on our lees." The great practical, personal truth is, the necessity, the paramount necessity, of moral renewal. To disciples the Lord presented the necessity of being converted. Regeneration is no argument against the need for conversion. (*Henry Melvill, B.D.*) *That say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil.*—*The unheeding God*:—There was widespread apathy and unresponsiveness, a temper which seemed to make the judgments preached by Zephaniah inevitable. Even those who had a theoretical faith in the supremacy of Jehovah looked upon Him as of little practical account in history. This apathetic temper miserably disqualified both for worship and reform. Zephaniah, like others of his goodly fellowship, demanded not only formal allegiance to the authority of Jehovah, but a thousand loyalties of the secret and the solitary thought. I. The prophet reminds us of THE HABIT OF

LIFE OUT OF WHICH THIS DISTORTED VIEW OF THE DIVINE CHARACTER OFTEN GROWS—GROSS INDOLENCE. This condition of character is described by an Eastern metaphor that has become one of the commonplaces of religious speech, "settled upon their lees." The figure brings before us one of the processes of the Jewish vintage. The fermented wine was poured back upon the thick sediment of the grapes from which it had been pressed, and in this way the wine gathered to itself greater strength. But the process needed care and watchfulness, for if left upon the lees for an undue length of time the wine became highly intoxicating, and incurably harsh in flavour. It needed to be separated, by careful and repeated strainings, from the husk and sediment with which it had been mixed for a time. The man whose soul has sunk into moral and religious stupor is just like that. In his daily life and consciousness the coarse and the fine, the earthly and the spiritual, the brutish and the God-like, lie mixed together in contiguous layers. There are the base deposits of animalism within the man, and not far off there are likewise elements of purity, reverence, and righteousness. In those who are godly and zealous for the things of God an effectual separation between these opposing qualities has been brought about. The soul is no longer touched, inflamed, stupefied by the grossness of the blood. On the other hand, one who is careless of God and the things of God derives the dominating tone of his thought and life from the things that address the senses. A man, of course, is compounded of flesh and blood, and there are legitimate needs that must be satisfied. He is providentially placed in social relations, and he may rightly feel pleasure in the warmth and sunshine of those relationships. But the type of man described in this Jewish metaphor finds in mean and sensuous things the satisfactions that fix the qualities of his personality. No separating crisis has come to save the man from his dregs and his animalisms. These words imply that men of the inert and careless type are accustomed to make the pleasant monotony of their outward lives an occasion for encouraging themselves in apathetic tempers and traditions. Intellectual and moral life stagnates in the race that is cut off by some high dividing wall from surrounding nations. We have the highest possible securities for our temporal happiness and well-being. Our national habit tends to become more and more luxurious, self-contented, imperturbable. We build ourselves up in our sleek and well-insured respectability. Nations themselves play the rich fool, saying, "Soul, take thine ease." All such things tend to beget the temper of a lethargic materialism within us, and to favour our unconfessed belief that God is just as apathetic as ourselves. That, of course, applies to the individual as well as to the nation. For some in our midst life is comparatively even, although as a rule Providence sooner or later provides us with many sharp antidotes to the coma which steals upon us. Few changes may have come since the first position in business was attained. It is only at rare intervals that death creeps into our homes. Life is genial and soul-satisfying, and we should like to keep things as they are for generations to come. We discountenance new movements, because they might disturb the *régime* that has worked so smoothly in the past. Men settle down into a refined sensuousness that is fatal to stern conviction, keen consciousness of spiritual facts, and consuming zeal for righteousness. No wonder that the children of elegant and not entirely godless somnambulists should grow up apathetic and come to believe in an apathetic God, if indeed they hold to any figment of a God at all. And this description applies too often to the man who was once religious after the best pattern. In the earlier stages of his history many things combined to keep him active, prayerful, strenuous. His life was one of struggle, sacrifice, hardness, disappointment. But smoother and more prosperous days came to him, and he met the temptation that deteriorated the best fibres in his character. He is nominally religious still, but a model Laodicean. The danger of this condition is great, and perhaps no surer sign of it is to be found than in the change it makes in a man's view of God. A self-contented Laodicean is always under the temptation to believe that God must be more or less like himself, since he has ceased to feel any necessity to become like God. II. THE PROPHET VENTURES TO PUT INTO ARTICULATE SPEECH THIS VAGUE LAODICEAN CREED OF THE HEART. "The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil." Men sometimes hold contradictory and antagonistic creeds at one and the same period of their history, and the creed fenced in with whispered reserves is often the more significant and decisive of the two. There is a sceptic and a believer, a pagan and a theist in most of us, and a depraved

will sometimes impose itself on a sound and healthy creed. All that is a part of the dualism of human nature. Those supine and well-to-do citizens of Jerusalem denounced by the prophet may have had reserves of orthodoxy and of pious patriotism behind their time-serving expediency and supineness. God does not interfere even for the nation supposed to be under His special protection. He lets Hezekiah and Manasseh, Amon and Josiah, do as they like, and neither frowns nor smiles upon the national fortunes. The pains and pleasures of human life have no fine correspondence to character. Good and evil befall men without any special relation to the kind of lives they live. It is not easy to see any sign of God's judicial dealings with the children of men. We need not stay to discuss the question whether it is the habit of life or a dishonouring idea of God against which the prophet threatens sharp and discerning penalty. The two things are inseparable. A careless life always fosters an irreverent creed, and an irreverent creed is formulated as excuse or sanction for a careless and self-indulgent life, and makes the carnal sleep doubly sound. It is something in the character which is to be punished, but a vice which shows itself in twofold form, disabling from all reforming enterprise on the one hand, and turning the creed into a blasphemy on the other. The wickedness of a supine and self-indulgent temper culminates when it engenders a base conception of the Most High. Sometimes a man may make God in the image of an ideal that is far loftier than anything to be found in his own character, but in the case of the man who is "settled upon his lees" such ideals are extinct. We cannot be tepid in our moral sensibilities without making God tepid also. The strenuous man will believe in a strenuous God, and will turn atheist if asked to do homage to an Olympian dilettante who lounges on a couch of ivory with cupbearers at his side. It is perhaps a more insulting thing to make God a Laodicean like ourselves than to think of Him as a fiction of the imagination. A denial of His existence may be better than wholesale misrepresentation. If God seems slow to act, it is because He is waiting for our repentance. Natural law is so widespread and inexorable that there is no room for moral interpositions. We can understand a being who never concerns himself with human affairs because of the limitations of his intelligence, but to concede intelligence and deny the will or the capacity for moral interest in human affairs looks like an insult of supreme shamefulness. We refuse to the Being behind and above and within the universe that which is greatest and most honourable in ourselves. We accept the broad dogma of a God, for the universe would be too much of a tangle without that, and then make His sway theoretical, secretly questioning whether He cares to exercise retributive power over the realms subject to His sway. That compromise is necessary to our mental comfort. It is often said that in comparison with the universe, man is such an insignificant atom that, even assuming the existence of a God, it would not be worth God's while either to reward or punish him. Is it too much to say that the least thing in the world of animate is greater than the sum of all things in the world of inanimate life? The ant, after all, is more wonderful than the sun with its unfathomable marvel of brightness. Mere magnitude cannot become a true standard of value for the estimate of that which is moral and intellectual. Most of us have come to learn that there is an arithmetic which deals with quality as well as quantity, and it is perhaps the more important of the two. There is a power and possibility of feeling in God to which no conceivable term can be put. He does care even for ants, and has shown that by bestowing upon them a wonderful talent for caring for themselves and their kind. He does think about me, and it is rank blasphemy to say He cares about every side of my nature but its moral side. History teems with the rewards and punishments He never fails to administer for our encouragement and warning. If His kingship is living, competent, righteous, it is impossible He should forget His duties to those whom He governs. If we accept the message of modern science, evolution itself in its higher ethical stages is a sufficient refutation of this Laodicean travesty of God. We are told that the so-called sense of right and wrong has been slowly awakened within men, and that it has its primitive roots in an elementary susceptibility to pleasure and pain. That theory implies that through the untold cycles of the past, retributive activities have been playing upon the sense of pleasure and pain, till at last, when the animal emerged into the human, this complex and marvellous faculty appeared. For ages upon ages some unseen power has been patiently reading into the consciousness of mankind the blessings and curses of the law, and enforcing the

message with lavish bounty on the one hand and strokes of the rod on the other, till at last mind-stuff quivered into the Divine thing we call conscience. That looks as though God had intervened in the past times without number, and as though His righteousness were always unresting in asserting itself. The analogies of our imperfectly ordered social life often give some kind of colour to these false and insulting estimates of God and His ways. It is said that the passing age has been one of exaggerated individualism. Men have been so much occupied in asserting the sacredness of the individual and his separate rights that they have forgotten the responsibilities of each member of the community to the organic whole. They repudiate the duties of citizenship. "They will not do good, neither will they do evil." For those in authority over us to pursue a policy of masterly inaction in times of national peril and demoralisation would be a capital crime, and can it be accounted less shameful in Him whom we assume to be King of kings and Lord of lords? A man may sometimes excuse himself from taking part in public affairs, because he trusts the aggregate good sense and virtue of his fellow-citizens, and assumes things will not go very far wrong. But God cannot abstain from intervening in human history on the ground that the course of affairs will move on in the same way, whether He come upon the scene or not. We loathe the wretch for whose arrest the Poor Guardians offer a reward because he has deserted his family, and that kind of man as well as the man brought to book by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children is punished. God would be just as guilty and shameless if He were to show no concern for our moral discipline and upbringing, and abstain from all interposition in our lives; and His greatness would aggravate and not excuse the misdemeanour. If we believe in a God we must believe in His moral earnestness. Is it not possible that this tendency to attenuate God's moral earnestness may underlie the half beliefs and the limp, amiable theology of the hour? If it be true that the God in whom we have come to believe would satisfy the Laodicean ideal, the call to repentance loses its urgency, and sin neither needs specific forgiveness upon a basis of righteousness nor will the sinner have to dread an awaiting punishment, keen, overwhelming, irremediable. We can disburden ourselves of the rigid and uncomfortable doctrines of the past. He will not trouble Himself about our peccadilloes. Those thoughts concerning God to which we lean in our silent meditations, and which influence us in the critical and tempted moments of life, will be subject-matter of Divine judgment. We cannot separate this whispered creed of the heart from selfish and neglectful courses of conduct, for it is that by which we excuse ourselves. The fluid creed within us crystallises into a superstructure of character. The creed of the heart, moreover, must be judged because we belong to invisible more essentially than to visible spheres. The man who says, "I believe in a Laodicean God," is not only inert and selfish himself, but is bent on making his own characteristic vice dominant on the throne of the supreme sovereignty. III. We are reminded of THE FAR-REACHING AND INEVITABLE JUDGMENT THAT WILL ONE DAY OVERTAKE THOSE WHO ARE LETHARGIC IN CHARACTER. "I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men who are settled on their lees." These lethargic souls had said God was slack to fulfil His promise, and careless as to the chastisement of every kind of transgression. God will answer the libel by inexorable punishment. Their evil creed had been cherished in secret, but God will bring wrath upon them for their half-formulated aspersions upon His holy zeal, and will find them out in the dim places to which they have fled. This half-articulate murmur which makes God magnificently inert may have a power of mischief in it sufficient to wreck a universe. These minute blasphemies and scepticisms God will search out with an illuminating severity nothing can escape. This sin was more or less veiled, for at one time Jerusalem had been religious to the verge of fanaticism. And in one party in the state there was still enough of zeal to make it expedient for unbelief to be wary and reticent. With the spread of religion and the growth of a strong public opinion there is always a danger lest men should be driven into secret irreligion and unbelief. Pagan contaminations are sometimes latent where there is a devout and zealous exterior. (T. G. Selby.) *Practical atheism in denying the agency of Divine Providence exposed.*—Practical atheism brought the judgments of God upon the Jews. These were fully executed in the Babylonish Captivity. By being "settled on their lees" we may understand their riches; for wine grows rich by being kept on the lees. So, by a long scene of peace and prosperity, the inhabitants of

Jerusalem were arriving at very great riches. Or it may signify a state of security; like wine settled on the lees, they have been undisturbed. "I will punish" should be "I will visit." The charge here brought against the Jews amounts to this—that their temper and practice were such as would not at all agree to the practical belief of a Providence. They thought and acted as if it were their real and professed belief that the Lord would do neither good nor evil, nor meddle with human affairs. This atheistical affectation of independency, and secret or practical renunciation of Divine Providence, is the fatal thing that generally overturned the empires, and impoverished, enslaved, and ruined the nations of the earth. I. THE DOCTRINE OF A DIVINE PROVIDENCE. Maybe you already speculatively believe this doctrine, but the grand defect lies in the efficacy of this belief on your hearts and lives. We may argue from the perfections of God, and His relations to us. We may argue from our confessed obligations to religion and the worship of God. The testimony of Scripture is plain. New and unexpected witnesses may be found in the heathen,—such as Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Plato, Horace, Cicero, and various poets and philosophers. II. THINGS IN TEMPER AND CONDUCT WHICH ARGUE A SECRET AND PRACTICAL DISBELIEF OF THE DOCTRINE OF PROVIDENCE. 1. Would there be so little prayer among us, if we were generally affected with this truth? 2. Is not the general indulgence of vice, and neglect of religion, a plain evidence of the general disbelief of a Divine providence over the country? 3. Is not the general impenitence, notwithstanding the many public calamities under which our country has groaned, a melancholy evidence of this practical atheism? 4. Is not the general ingratitude a plain evidence of the general disbelief of a providential government over the world? 5. How little serious and humble acknowledgment of the providence of God in our disappointments and mortifications is to be found among us. III. THE WICKEDNESS OF THIS ATHEISTICAL TEMPER AND CONDUCT. To deny the agency of providence is the most daring rebellion against the King of heaven; it is to abjure His government in His own territories, in His own world which He has made. What unnatural ingratitude! What intolerable pride and arrogance! What impiety and insolence! This atheistical spirit is the source of all vice and irreligion. (*S. Davies, A.M.*) *Moral scepticism*.:—Beyond a doubt there is a great deal of moral scepticism in our own time and in regard to our own lives. And there is excuse enough, explanation enough, of this sort of moral scepticism when we look round at national and political life. We think of the Armenians, of a nation massacred. It passes by, it is half-forgotten, and God is silent. Where is the God of Judgment? Surely He does not care! "The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil." And from a number of other sources we may feel inclined to draw that same lesson. Of course, those who look deeper will tell us the reasoning is shallow. Look, they will say, at the very empire of the Sultan. It is, by the confession of all men, on its way to ruin. It cannot stand, simply because it is corrupt and vicious and cruel. The mill of God grinds slowly, but it grinds at last, sure and small. Yes, it is certainly true, if you look at any section of human life in the political field you may draw the conclusion that there is no judgment and no moral God governing the nation. It is not so if you take a long enough view of history down its long region. Where there is a luxury and an undue love of pleasure there you sap the roots of steadfast industry, and where industry fails the nation fails. Where commercial dishonesty goes beyond a certain point, there the reputation and therefore the position of the nation suffers. Certainly there is always in national vice a tendency, an inevitable tendency, towards national decay. It is sin that is first the reproach and then the disaster of any nation. There is a tendency towards judgment, a tendency very imperfect at present in its manifestation, but even in the great national regions the tendency is there. You cannot, unless you are shallow-hearted, say that the Lord doth not good, neither doth He do evil. But let us leave the wide sphere of national life and think of this moral scepticism as it touches individual lives only. Here, too, the excuse for it is apparent enough. It is only sometimes that honesty appears to be the best policy. There are men whom we would not trust, because we believe they are hard-hearted. And yet they come to no abrupt or signal ruin; they seem to flourish as well as anybody else. There are moral collapses, disgraceful, disgusting to our moral sense, and yet a little while, and without any appearance of repentance, simply by lapse of time, the subjects of them seem to creep back into respectability or even credit. There are struggles, persevering as it seems, against vice and sin which never seem to become effectual or to succeed. The Lord in the region of

our own lives, as we watch human life in experience, the Lord surely doth not in fact do good, neither doth He do evil. But, once again, the scepticism is shallow. You cannot take this as a complete account of human life. There is that in all human consciousness and in all human experience which rebels against the conclusion. Call no man's life happy till you have seen the whole; watch the life to the end. Even cautious sin is found to ruin persons and families. And sin—is it not true?—is very seldom always cautious. So it is that we look around, and in all classes, in our own experience, we see the victims, the manifest victims, of lust and gambling and drunkenness. But these, you say, are the disreputable vices; nobody ever doubted that these open and disreputable and reckless vices brought ruin. Ay, but short of these, in respectable lives! Why are so many marriages failures, moral failures? Inquire, and you will find, because those marriages were rooted in worldliness and selfishness; there was no moral and spiritual discipline behind them. After a little time the temporary attraction wears off, and there is nothing left there but the conflict of two rival selfishnesses and the discrepant traits of divergent characters to make the bond. And what is that? It is but the mark of the Divine judgment upon selfishness. Or, look at this and that and the other individual. Wilfulness is one of the commonest of human qualities—wilfulness which comes from being spoilt when one is young, or from having the opportunity to do just as one pleases in somewhat later life, but the sort of wilfulness that will not bend itself to the Divine requirements, sooner or later brings more or less of ruin or misery. God's judgment is in this and that and the other life which comes under our experience: God's judgment is upon wilfulness. These are facts. But, we say, there is no complete picture of Divine judgment. No, that is the fact, no complete picture here, certainly. This world, certainly, is no sphere in which a Divine judgment works itself out full and satisfactorily. We walk by faith, certainly not by sight,—if we believe in the reality of Divine judgment—certainly by faith. But what there is is this, surely a tendency, an indication of Divine judgment which checks anybody who thinks at all. If he takes the sceptical conclusion—"The Lord does not do good, neither does He do evil," there is something rooted alike in men's moral consciences and in their experiences which assures them, in spite of its imperfect manifestation here and now, that those who are on the side of righteousness are in harmony with the system of things, and those who are neglectful are walking upon a volcano. He will render to every man according to his works, by no arbitrary judgment from which there can be any possible exemption, but by an inevitable moral law which works as securely as the physical laws of growth and decay, of life and destruction. There is no chance of escape, not for a single sin. There is the difference between moral scepticism and moral belief. "The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil," therefore "I will not be righteous over-much, nor will I be over-much wicked." It does not really at the bottom so very much matter; there is no such very searching sieve through which my life has to be passed. That is the scepticism, that is the shallowness, that is the lie. On the other hand, there is the tendency, now the tendency pointing to its perfect realisation afterward. The Lord judges every man according to his works. He is the God of knowledge; He sifts thoroughly. There is no escape for a single sin. That is the point. Therefore awake to righteousness and sin not. Other prophets may have other topics in store for us. Let Zephaniah take this and that moral scepticism which tolerates sin because the Divine judgment, after all, does not seem to act, because it believes your hopes, it believes that the Lord does not do good, neither does He do evil. That moral scepticism is shallowness and a lie at the bottom. God is a living God; God is a God of judgment; God trieth the heart. The Lord will do good, and the Lord will do evil. Everything depends on what you are trying after, what you are tolerating, and what you are not tolerating; whether you are simply smoothing over the surface of your life, and leaving its real moral contents at the bottom, unsifted, unexamined, unresisted. (*Bishop Gore.*)

Ver. 14. The great day of the Lord is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord.—*The comings of the Lord*:—The times of King Josiah, about 606 years before Christ, were times of much religious awakening, like our own. The Book of the Lord had been found and studied, the idols had been destroyed, the bones of false prophets and idolatrous priests publicly burnt. But under the outside, external improvement there remained

an inner and obstinate corruption which resisted cure, and threatened ere long to break out in renewed acts of idolatry and profligacy. Against this the prophet Zephaniah was sent to raise a warning voice—to protest that the Mighty Lord was in the midst of His people, watching not only their public acts, but their private ways and thoughts. In the seemingly purged Holy City there were men who, in their heart of hearts, were practical atheists, men really careless about serving God, living secure in ease and plenty, not having God in all their thoughts, persuading themselves that the Great Ruler would take no notice of good or evil, and that a watchful, rewarding, and punishing providence was but an empty dream. The prophet denounces and warns all such. But alas! the prophet's voice was disregarded. So Judah went into captivity, and the coming of the Lord was with awful vengeance. Bitter woe descended on the insensate people who wickedly despised their day of grace and warning. These things are written for our admonition. May we all profit by the Church's faithful warnings! There is a tendency in many of us to sink the future in the present, and to lull ourselves with the delusive notion that it will be all right at last; that God is love, and love will cover all our sins. Nevertheless it is our duty to proclaim in word and deed our faith in the Lord's coming, in its nearness and its greatness. He who once came in the flesh will come again as our Judge. Yet men's lives are often a practical denial of this elementary foundation doctrine of Christianity. Some men say, No doubt there is a judgment, but it is going on continually from day to day now. The Judge is now at every man's door; He comes quickly indeed, for every action brings at once its immediate reward or immediate punishment. No doubt, in the main, this is true, but, brethren, the voice of conscience and the voice of God in His Word agree in telling us that the present judgments are but heralds of the future final one. When they are judgments now of pain and punishment, they are merciful judgments to turn sinners to repentance. But the future judgment will have still higher aim and purpose. To vindicate the ways of God to men, to finally put a stop to sin, and bring in everlasting righteousness. We who really believe in the second coming of our Lord in glory to judgment, as we believe in His first coming as Man to live on earth in great humility for our sakes, should "be diligent that we be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless." (*Canon Emery, B.D.*)

Ver. 17. **They shall walk like blind men.**—*The sinner a blind traveller*.:—The sinner is on a journey, step by step he is moving on to a destination. But how does he walk? The text tells us as a blind man. How does the blind man walk? I. **UNNATURALLY.** Though a few men may be born blind, vision is one of the chief attributes of humanity. Without the human eye all the beauties of nature would go for nothing. Blindness is unnatural. So is sin. The life of sin is a life of unnaturalness. II. **PRIVATIONALLY.** What does the blind lose? The great world of beauty and sublimity, the great firmament of burning worlds, and all the exquisite and exhilarating sensations of vision are excluded from him. What does the sinner lose? Peace of conscience—harmony of feeling—fellowship with the Infinite—power over death—a blessed hope of heaven, &c. III. **SERVILELY.** The blind man must slavishly depend on others to guide him on his way. We have seen him feeling his way with a stick, led by a little child, and sometimes dependent even on a dog. The sinner, however he may boast of his independence, is a slave to the world. He is the servant of sin—a tyrant. He has no true independence. IV. **PERILOUSLY.** The blind man always feels himself in danger when alone. The sinner's walk is perilous indeed. His danger is great—ever accumulating, and ever approaching. Such then is the walk of the sinner. But moral blindness is worse far than corporeal. 1. The one is a calamity, the other is a crime. 2. The one is to be pitied, the other is to be condemned. 3. The one can be turned to a good account, the other cannot. (*Homilist.*)

CHAPTER II.

VERS. 1-3. *Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth.*—*Sin and repentance, the bane and antidote*:—An exhortation to the men of Judah to repent ere the Chaldean invaders approach and wreak destruction on their land. I. SIN EXPOSES MAN TO RUIN. It was sin, in the form of idolatry and gross immorality, that exposed the Jewish people to the terrible doom that was now hanging over them. 1. The suffering that follows sin is sometimes very terrible. Sin brings to a people famines, pestilences, wars, hells. 2. The suffering expresses God's antagonism to sin. "The fierce anger of the Lord," or, as Henderson has it, "the burning anger of Jehovah." The connection between sin and misery is a beneficent arrangement. It is well that misery should pursue wrong. II. THAT REPENTANCE DELIVERS MAN FROM RUIN. 1. The preparation for repentance. "Gather yourselves together." It is well for sinners in the prospect of their doom to meet and confer concerning their relations to Almighty God. 2. The nature of repentance. "Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth"; or, as Henderson renders it, "Seek ye Jehovah, all ye humble of the earth." There are two seekings here. (1) The seeking of God. He is "not far from every one of us." But we are all away from Him in sympathy. The other seeking is—(2) The seeking of goodness. "Seek righteousness, seek goodness." 3. The urgency of repentance. "Before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger come upon you." (*Homilist*.) *Seek righteousness, seek meekness.*—*True way of seeking God*:—The prophet defines what the true and rightful way of seeking God is, and that is, when righteousness is sought, when humility is sought. By righteousness he understands the same thing as by judgment; as though he had said, "Advance in a righteous and holy course of life, for God will not forget your obedience, provided your hearts grow not faint, and ye persevere to the end." We hence see that God complains, not only when we obtrude external pomps and devices, I know not what, as though He might like a child be amused by us; but also when we do not sincerely devote our life to His service. And he adds humility to righteousness; for it is difficult even for the very best of men not to murmur against God when He severely chastises them. We indeed find how much their own delicacy embitters the minds of men when God appears somewhat severe with them. Hence the prophet, in order to check all clamours, exhorts the faithful here to cultivate humility, so that they might bear patiently the rigour by which God would try them, and might suffer themselves to be ruled by His hand (1 Pet. v. 6). The prophet requires humility, in order that they might with composed minds wait for the deliverance which God had promised. They were not in the interval to murmur, nor to give vent to their own perverse feelings, however severely God might treat them. We may hence gather a profitable instruction. The prophet does not address here men who were depraved, and had wholly neglected what was just and right, but he directs his discourse to the best, the most upright, the most holy: and yet he shows that they had no other remedy, but humbly and patiently to bear the chastisement of God. It then follows that no perfection can be found among men, such as can meet the judgment of God. (*John Calvin*.) *It may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger.*—*Prayer and providence*:—Zephaniah could not promise the people exemption from the trials that should come upon them from the Chaldeans. But neither was it possible for him, or any other, to say how much, in the way of mitigation of those threatened evils, might be effected by prayer, by effort, by an humble seeking unto the Lord their God. "It may be"—a theology from which these words should be excluded, would, if it met with universal acceptance, go far towards turning the world upside down. It would paralyse all the powers of our religious nature. It would take from under us all grounds for trusting in a moral providence. Let certainty, in relation to the Divine Being, be as fixed a thing as you will, I must have some room left for a peradventure—must be permitted to believe that there are possibilities in the future of indeterminate issue. This indeterminateness may be looked at in two different ways. I. AS IT BEARS UPON THE PRINCIPLES OF A DIVINE ADMINISTRATION. Is the use of such language as "it may be," compatible with that fixed order of procedure by which, it is commonly assumed, the Almighty governs the world? 1. These words suppose, if they do not directly affirm, the doctrine

of a moral providence ; as opposed to the doctrine of fatalism ; or of irresistible necessity. There is a constant, continuous, moral superintendence over the affairs of men, for moral purposes. God never permits secondary agencies to go out of His own hands. This view is not more a disclosure of revelation, than it is an essential element of our first conceptions of an Infinite Being. On the Christian showing of what God is, we cannot admit His existence without admitting His providence also. Of course nothing more is contended for, than the fact of a special providence overruling the affairs of men. Of the methods of our preservation, or deliverance, in trying circumstances, we often know nothing. 2. Take the words "it may be," as against that unchanging fixity of natural laws, which it is the fashion of a modern philosophy to make the grand autocratic power in the universe of God. The form of the objection is, that since cause and effect, in the natural world, are joined together by a nexus of undeviating certainty, all prayer for the modification of events, occurring in the order of physical law, is "absurd." But this not only limits the agency of the Divine Being in the natural world, but strikes at the root of all our conceptions of God as a moral governor. God and nature, upon this theory, make up the universe, and the only relation which God has to nature is to keep the wondrous machine going. A high and impersonal abstraction governs all things. Free moral agents, in this apparatus of eternal sequences, there are none, either in relation to God or man. What is the foundation fallacy of this reasoning ? But prayer asks for no violation of any inevitable law of sequence. It is merely an appeal to Infinite Wisdom to devise some method for our relief. This is the fault we charge upon the so-called scientific objection. It assumes that all the events in this world's history, however intimately affecting man's happiness, depend for their accomplishment on physical laws only, rather than, as they do, upon those laws liable to be modified in their operation by the intervention or volition of moral agents. Just here, where a fixed thing is intercalated with an unfixed thing, room is left for the putting forth of human effort, and the offering up of faithful prayer. The assumption is entirely gratuitous that, in praying against any form of apprehended danger, I expect the laws of the material world to be suspended, or altered, or put out of course, in any miraculous way. My prayer only goes upon the supposition that there are multitudinous agencies in God, which may be employed to turn a threatened evil aside, or to modify its operation before it reaches me. II. CONSIDER THE SUBJECT IN RELATION TO HUMAN AGENCY. Or what man may and ought to do towards the same object. 1. Seek the Lord by earnest prayer. 2. Take care not to stipulate for any particular form of relief. (*D. Moore, M.A.*) *The saint's hiding-place*.—Notice the matter of the exhortation to the godly, which is, "To seek the Lord, to seek righteousness, to seek meekness." The subjects or persons upon whom this exhortation falls. "The meek of the earth." And the motive pressing thereto. "It may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger." Ye shall surely be hidden from the wrath to come, and it may be from the wrath present. I. GOD HATH HIS DAYS OF ANGER. Take anger properly for a passion, and then there is none in God. Take anger for the effects and fruits thereof, and so it is not with God as mercy is. Yet He hath His days of anger. The more excellent a person, the sooner he is moved to anger. Now there is most excellency in God, and therefore sin being a contempt of Him, He cannot but be moved to anger. Anger is the dagger that love wears to save itself, and to hurt all that wrongs the thing loved : there is infinite love in God, and therefore there must needs be anger too. God has three houses that He puts men into : an house of instruction, an house of correction, an house of destruction. It is not in itself unlawful to be angry, only your anger must be unto reformation, as God's is. If there be wrath in God, how infinitely are our souls bound unto Jesus Christ, by whom we are delivered from the wrath to come, reconciled to God, and made friends to Him. And being friends, His very wrath and anger are our friends also. II. IN DAYS OF ANGER, GOD IS VERY WILLING TO HIDE, SAVE, AND DEFEND HIS PEOPLE. God knows how to deliver from danger by danger, from death by death, from misery by misery. Much of the saints' preservation is put into the hand of angels. Those that hide the saints are sure to be hidden by God. Those that keep the word of God's patience, have a promise to be hidden by God. Those are sure to be hidden by God in evil times, that fear not the fears of men. And those that remain green and flourishing in their religion, notwithstanding all the scorching heats of opposition that do fall on them. And the "meek of the earth" shall be hidden by God. III. THOUGH GOD IS WILLING

TO HIDE HIS OWN PEOPLE IN EVIL TIMES, YET HE DOETH SOMETIMES LEAVE THEM AT GREAT UNCERTAINTIES. They have more than a "may be" for their eternal salvation. But as for our temporal and outward salvation, God doth sometimes leave His people to a "may be." God loves to have His people trust to the goodness of His nature. IV. WHEN HIS PEOPLE HAVE ONLY A "MAY BE," IT IS THEIR DUTY TO SEEK UNTO GOD. There is no such way to establish our thoughts as to commit our ways unto God. The text points unto three things—1. Seek the Lord Himself: not His goods, but His goodness. 2. Seek righteousness. 3. Seek truth. V. IF ANY MAN CAN DO ANY GOOD IN THE DAY OF GOD'S ANGER, IT IS THE MECK OF THE EARTH. Therefore the text calls on them specially to seek the Lord. The meek have the promise of the earth. The meek do most honour Christ, the way of Christ, and the Gospel. A meek person leaves his cause with God and his revenge to Him. The meek person is most fit for the service of God. Hereby, even your meekness, ye walk as becometh the Gospel, ye inherit the earth, are made like unto Jesus Christ, have a great power and credit in heaven for yourselves and others, and shall be hidden in the evil day. (*W. Bridge, M.A.*) *Divine discipline* (with chap. iii. vers. 11 and 12):—The prophet spoke, and in fact it happened that judgment fell; the nations passed. Israel was chastised; it went into captivity. And there did come back that meek, that poor, that afflicted people, despised even of the Samaritans—those feeble Jews. They came back trusting in Jehovah; they laid the foundations of that piteous and miserable new temple. Its very foundations cause contempt; those who remember the old temple could but weep. But this new temple was to be clothed with a glory which the old temple had never known. It was the religion of humanity that was to come out from that regenerated and purged people—that little band of the meek of the earth. Brethren, we speak of poetical justice, and we mean by that generally when we want to see the lines of ideal actions clear and unblurred. We have to look to our great works of fiction, to some great drama, or poem, or novel, and there, if they are great of their kind, we see the ideal lines of Divine judgment, and of human progress, standing out clear and vivid in that which the imagination of the artist conceives. And the artist must conceive it for us, and teach us through these ideal lines, because, in the most of our ordinary experience, the lines of Divine action, of human experience, are blurred and confused in the mixture and confusion of this common earthly scene. But it is not always so. There are days of the Lord. The days of the Lord are the moments in history when the ideal issues appear, and the Divine hand is plain. Such a moment was the judgment and the restoration of Israel. There have been other such moments in history, like the decay of Spain, like the French Revolution, like the collapse of Napoleon. There are moments in history when God bares His arms and speaks plainly. It might be so again one day upon what is proud and exalting in this English nation of ours. Anyway, God does it. Beyond our sight He will do it, or in our sight from time to time He does it. That is the Divine method. Always, it is through this discipline, whereby God must single out for progress those who will consent to be chastened into meekness. But for to-day let us leave again the scene of political and social history, and trace this method of God again in the individual soul. There again, the method of Divine discipline, the method whereby we, individual after individual, are prepared for effective fruitfulness, is this same method of chastening. One after another, in our pride and our haughtiness, we have to be chastened into that quality which—it is the very paradox of Divine justice—is the one really strong and effective quality in the progress of the human soul, and it is meekness. Disciplined into effective meekness—that is the verdict which might be written upon the history of every single human soul which fulfils in any real measure the purpose of God. Englishmen are proud; we know it. In a certain way we are proud of being proud. Look round about in the world. What are the spectacles, the strange and overpowering spectacles, which we behold of the insolence of human pride? From time to time the record of some millionaire in America or South Africa or England is laid bare to us—some one who confessedly, and before the eyes of men, bids defiance to all the laws of mercy, and simply sets himself to scrape together gold, almost professedly making gold his god, and trampling under foot the laws of mercy and of justice and of consideration. And there are smaller men who never rise into note, or come before the public either in their rise or their catastrophe, who are in their humbler sphere doing the same thing. Or, look at him, that rich young man, that Superbus,

who feels that the land is made for him. Look at him as he goes out into life with his preposterous claim for amusement, for luxury, for self-satisfaction, with the recklessness of his selfish lusts, as he does despite to every law that ought to bind men in mercy and consideration and purity, because he must gratify his passion at all costs in that claim for amusement, in that almost riotous estimation of himself; so that, as one looks at him in his arrogance, one wonders why God stands it, and why a very little thunderbolt is not sent about its business to despatch him there in the impotence of his vanity. God does not strike them with thunderbolts; God has other methods. He is the Father of each one. In slow and patient silence God waits; God provides for them His judgment. It waits upon them; it will come at last in this world, so that we can see it; or beyond this world, where it is dark to our vision, God will judge them. But the question is this—When the judgment falls, how will it strike? Surely they will know that God is God, they will know at the last it is the fool that saith in his heart, "There is no God." Yes, they will know that they were fools. But the question is, in what disposition of mind? Will it be to them mere punishment, mere retribution, or will it be to them purging, healing, disciplining chastisement? That is the question. No question so far as the intention of God is concerned; in God's intention these judgments are for chastisement, for discipline, for recovery. But there is a soul that has worked itself into a stubbornness which will not bend, and perforce can only be broken. That is the question. Pharaoh is in the old story raised up in the scene of human history, to stand as the type of the soul that must be broken because it will not bend. But, on the other hand, our Bible, Old and New Testament, is full of the gracious pictures of those whom the chastisement of God has slowly, and at last, disciplined into that effective meekness which is the one charm, the beauty of the children of God. Moses, brought up in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and in the splendid opportunities of that court—we read of him how, in the pride of strong manhood, he went out to be the deliverer of his people. He met with nothing but rebuffs. "Who made thee a leader and deliverer?" and he fled alarmed and baffled, and, in the back side of the desert, through the long discipline of silence, away from all political interests, Moses learned the lesson of meekness, and he goes back, that old call of God not withdrawn, now effective because meek. Moses was very meek. "O Lord, I am not eloquent, neither now nor since. Thou hast spoken unto Thy servant." Pass to the New Testament. Think of those words to Peter, "When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself; when thou shalt be old, others shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." It is the record of experience of every one. Limitations crowd in upon us. There are multitudes of things which in our hateful arrogance we thought we would do. We find we cannot do them. Limitations close in upon us—hindrances, disappointments, sufferings, pain. How are we to bear it all? Are we to become all the more querulous, resentful, irritating, or is each stroke of the Divine discipline to be the learning to us all a lesson, so that all the more, stroke after stroke, the soul learning its limitations, is forced into the line of Divine correspondence, and made meek is made effective? So it was with the proud and the impulsive Peter, so that that late writing of his, that epistle of his, is full, as hardly any other book of the New Testament is full, of the rich power of the spirit of meekness. Or Saul the Pharisee, yielding at last with one blow to the Divine claim, and becoming, for all that Jewish pride of his, once and for ever the slave of the meek Jesus. These are the meek of the earth; because they are meek, therefore, in the kingdom of God, the effective—the men who do fruitful things, the men whose work lasts because they are the followers of Him who was meek and lowly in heart. Jesus had no pride to be overcome. What are you expecting of this human life of yours? It matters so much what we expect. Pleasure, success? Ah, yes! There is in this human heart of ours an inextinguishable thirst for happiness. And it is there, God-given. Do not listen to those altruistic philosophers of our modern time who would tell us that to have care for ourselves is simple and radical selfishness. Nay, the Bible throughout is true to what I call the inradicable instinct of the human heart. God made us, and because He made us we are made for happiness, we are made to realise ourselves. But the question is, How? Look for happiness, make it your aim, hunt for pleasure, and you are baffled. It is by the law of indirectness that we are to realise happiness. He that saveth his life, seeketh his own life, he shall lose it; he that loseth it, he shall save it. That is the law. Here in this world we are set to gain character.

So we are to expect discipline. It is one of the simple laws of human life, character develops by discipline, develops through pain. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." Therefore this is the point, a point of supreme importance when you come to think about your life. Am I, I as I am to-day, I being the sort of man I am, am I yielding myself so that God by disciplining me can make me meek and, in meekness, effective? That very thing which I have always said is the one thing I could not stand, when it comes, as it probably does come, if I set myself too much to rebel against it—when it comes, how do I take it? Have I that measure of spiritual insight and thoughtfulness which enables me to say, "This is just that moulding, graving tool which is so necessary to rub off that sharp angle, to blot out that dark stain, to do this or that or the other necessary work in my character?" Do I regard it as the trenchant treatment of the surgeon who is to again make me sound? Humiliation is the way to humility. Learn the lesson which the humiliation contains for us, to become the wiser man, the more docile while not the less resolute. That is the discipline of God—point by point, step by step, biting after biting of the tool, smiting after smiting of the hammer. So it is, moulding after moulding of the Divine hand, we are to be brought into shape. Now, I say it, there is not a day of our life in which it does not make a real vital difference whether we have had this expectation in our will, our intelligence, our heart, so that when the blow, little or great, comes, the disappointment, be it never so trivial, it may teach us the lesson. The little humiliation may come on its way and speed on as a messenger which has fulfilled its obligation and done its duty. For it has taught us something, and we go to bed something wiser men and women than we got up in the morning. There is hardly a department of life in which there are not great and vital changes which are needed. Yes, but are we fit to do them? That is the question. Perhaps we have willingness, but have we what is a part of meekness—patience? Do we arrive with our enthusiasm, our ideal enthusiasm, and then shrink altogether from the task of drudgery? Because you know there are only two qualities by which anything finally effective can be done—enthusiasm and drudgery, and they are no good apart. Or, is it vanity? Yes, I offered myself to work on that particular committee, I offered myself to do that good job which surely was for the bettering of mankind. But then I thought that I was to be secretary, or I was to be put into the chair, and somebody else who surely had no better claim than I was put there. Or, is it the refusal of pain? There it is, the pain, the ugliness, the dirt, and squalor, and to do anything effective I must be in contact with the pain and the dirt and the ugliness and the squalor. I must not be hiding myself from my own flesh. But I shrink from it, I think I cannot bear it, and the task is undone, and the Kingdom of God makes not the progress it might make because I am not with the meek and the patient, with the sorrowful and the suffering. Or, is it prayerlessness? I have my schemes, my plans, but I do not keep myself in correspondence with God. It is my own pride that guides me, my own ideas, my own schemes. The question is, whether in the larger or less sphere we will mould, mould to the Divine hand, or whether we will be that obstinate stuff, that moral character that will not mould, and which becomes the vessel of wrath, the vessel which the Divine Potter, after patient trying, finds unmalleable, and at the last must cast aside as of a stuff that will not make under the Divine hand. That is it, the Divine Potter would mould you. And is there anything to the spiritual imagination so beautiful, anything so lovely to think about, as the discipline of the soul, conscious of the hand of God upon it, and, for all its occasional wilfulness and sins and faults, ever coming back to be moulded according to the plan and will of the Divine Potter, according to the love of our Father, Who chastens us into effective meekness that at the last we may share in the glory of His kingdom as things that have realised their end in that fruitfulness which belongs to the meek? That is the consciousness which every Christian soul is sooner or later meant to have. (*Bishop Gore.*)

Vers. 4-7. For Gaza shall be forsaken.—The sinner's baleful influence, and God's disposal of all:—1. THE CALAMITIES FALLING UPON ONE SINNER OFTEN INVOLVE OTHERS. The ruin of the Hebrew nation would be most calamitous to the Philistine cities, and indeed to the neighbouring States. It is so—1. With nations. 2. With individuals. This shows—(1) The social connection between man and man. No man can live unto himself. Each man is a link in the great chain of human life; and he cannot move without influencing others. Each

man is a limb in the great human body; and if one suffers, all suffer. (2) The duty of man to look well after his own conduct. A sinner has no right to say he will do what he likes, and that no one has a right to interfere with him. II. THAT THE LOT OF MAN IS AT THE DISPOSAL OF ALMIGHTY GOD. "And the sea coast shall be dwellings and cottages for shepherds, and folds for flocks. And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed thereupon: in the houses of Ashkelon shall they lie down in the evening: for the Lord their God shall visit them, and turn away their captivity." Here the Almighty is represented as arranging the future home and circumstances of "the remnant of the house of Judah." Though we are free, and are conscious of our freedom, we are at the disposal of One above us. He has appointed—1. Our place in the world. He has set bounds to our habitation "that we cannot pass." 2. Our period in the world. "My times are in Thy hand." We are often tempted to imagine that chance rules us. But amidst all this feeling of contingency and over all there is the ruling plan of the Beneficent God. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 8-10. I have heard the reproach of Moab.—*The persecution of the good*.—I. THAT GOOD MEN ARE OFTEN SUBJECT TO ANNOYANCES FROM THE UNGODLY WORLD. "I have heard the reproach [abuse] of Moab, and the revilings of the children of Ammon, whereby they have reproached My people [abused My nation], and magnified themselves against their border." These people, the Moabites and the Ammonites, were constantly annoying and abusing the chosen people. In the time of Moses, Balak, the king of the Moabites, sought to destroy the Israelites by means of Balaam's curses (Numb. xxii.). And in the time of the Judges, both peoples endeavoured to oppress Israel (Judg. iii. 12, x. 7). The charge here probably refers to the hostile attitude assumed by both tribes at all times towards the people of God. Both Isaiah and Jeremiah charged them with annoying them (Isa. xvi. 6; Jer. xlviii. 29). The hostile conduct of Moab and Ammon towards Israel is only a specimen and an illustration of the antagonism of wicked men towards the truly pious. They "reproach" them, they charge them with superstition, fanaticism, cant, hypocrisy, &c. The best men, the men of whom the world is not worthy, are always persecuted. II. THAT THESE ANNOYANCES ESCAPE NOT THE NOTICE OF GOD. "I have heard the reproach." 1. God's attention to the minute concerns of human life. 2. God's special interest in His people (Jer. xxiii. 23). III. THAT GOD WILL NOT FAIL TO CHASTISE THE AUTHORS OF SUCH ANNOYANCES. "Therefore as I live, saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, even the breeding of nettles, and salt pits, and a perpetual desolation." Mark—1. The doom of those reproachers. They shall be as Sodom and Gomorrah. 2. The cause of their doom. "This they shall have for their pride." (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 11. And men shall worship Him.—*Good things in the future*.—I. THE DESTRUCTION OF IDOLATRY. You may burn up all heathen temples and leave idolatry as rampant as ever. II. THE ADVANCEMENT OF TRUE WORSHIP. "And men shall worship Him, every one from his place, even all the isles of the heathen." Observe—1. The object of true worship. "Men shall worship Him,"—that is, Jehovah. Him, not it—not the universe, but the Infinite Personality that created it. 2. The scene of true worship. "Every one from his place." Wherever he is. He need not go to any particular scene—to temple, chapel, or cathedral. 3. The extent of true worship. "Even all the isles of the heathen." What a glorious future awaits this world! (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 13-15. He will stretch out His hand against the north.—*National pride and national ruin*.—Two facts are suggested—I. THAT MEN ARE OFTEN PRONE TO PRIDE THEMSELVES ON THE GREATNESS OF THEIR COUNTRY. The men of the city of Nineveh—the capital of Assyria—were proud of their nation. There was much in the city of Nineveh to account for, if not to justify, the exultant spirit of its population. It was the metropolis of a vast empire; it was a city 60 miles in compass, it had walls 100 feet high, and so thick and strong that three chariots could be driven abreast on them; it had 1500 massive towers. Italy, Austria, Germany, America, England, each says in its spirit, "I am, and there is none beside me." This spirit of national boasting is unjustifiable. There is nothing in a nation of which it should be proud, except moral excellence. On

the contrary, how much ignorance, sensuality, worldliness, intolerance, impiety, that should humble us in the dust. It is moreover a foolish spirit. It is a check to true national progress, and its haughty swaggerings tend to irritate other countries. II. THAT THE GREATEST COUNTRY MUST SOONER OR LATER FALL TO RUIN. "He will stretch out His hand against the north, and destroy Assyria." "Flocks shall lie down in the midst of her," &c. Not only a receptacle for beasts, but a derision to travellers. "Every one that passeth by her shall hiss, and wag his hand." This is the fate that awaits all the nations under heaven, even the greatest. (*Homilist.*)

CHAPTER III.

VERS. 1-5. Woe to her that is filthy and polluted, to the oppressing city!—*A religious city terribly degenerate*.—I. A PROFESSEDLY RELIGIOUS CITY TERRIBLY DEGENERATED. 1. The princes are mentioned. They are "roaring lions." 2. The judges are mentioned. They are "evening wolves." 3. The prophets are mentioned. They are "light and treacherous persons." 4. The priests are mentioned. These "polluted the sanctuary," by desecrating the sacred, and outraged the "law," by distorting its meaning and misrepresenting its genius and aim. II. A PROFESSEDLY RELIGIOUS CITY TERRIBLY DEGENERATED ALTHOUGH GOD WAS SPECIALLY WORKING IN ITS MIDST. "The just Lord is in the midst thereof; He will not do iniquity: every morning doth He bring His judgment to light, He faileth not; but the unjust knoweth no shame." 1. The wonderful freedom which the Almighty allows to wicked men on this earth. Though He strives to improve them, He does not coerce them. He makes no invasion of their moral agency. 2. The tremendous force of human depravity. What a power sin gains over man! (1) Do not hinder Christian propagandism from entering a city because it is nominally Christian. The Gospel is wanted there perhaps more than anywhere else. (2) Do not expect that the world will be morally renovated by miraculous agency. Almighty Goodness does not coerce. There is no way by which mere force can travel to a man's soul. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 2. She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in the Lord.—*God's lamentations of His people's incorrigibility*.—There can be no doubt that the city mentioned in the first verse of this chapter is Jerusalem; and if we duly consider the whole description of its moral state, as detailed from vers. 1 to 4 inclusive, we shall be constrained to exclaim, "How is the faithful city become an harlot!" And to confirm this statement, we only need refer to the historical records of the two preceding reigns, to that of Josiah, at the beginning of the latter of which Zephaniah prophesied. Manasseh and Amon, the two preceding kings of Judah referred to, were flagrant idolaters, and filled Jerusalem with impiety, violence, and blood (2 Kings xxi. 3-6, 11, 16, 19, 22). What a change in that city which had been called "a city of righteousness"! Well, indeed, might Jehovah say, "Shall I not visit for these things, and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" Yes; and He assures them in ver. 8 that He will punish them in an exemplary manner. The timely reformation of good King Josiah, however, averted the stroke for a time; but ultimately "wrath came upon them to the uttermost." I. THAT THE FOUR FACTS AFFIRMED IN THE TEXT ARE APPLICABLE TO SINNERS OF THE PRESENT TIME, AS WELL AS TO THE JEWS OF OLD TIME. The facts alleged are the following—1. Inattention to instruction. "She obeyed not the voice." During the reign of Manasseh, God sent His prophets to remonstrate with the idolatrous king and His people, but they would not hear (2 Chron. xxxiii. 10). Their conduct in this matter seems to have disappointed Jehovah Himself, as is evident from verse 7: "I said thou wilt fear Me, for thou wilt receive instruction, but they rose early, and corrupted all their doings." Truly, then, "They obeyed not the voice." The fact is asserted concerning them, Jer. xxii. 21: "I spake unto thee in thy prosperity, but thou saidst I will not hear. This hath been thy manner from thy youth, that thou obeyedst not My voice." Ministers preach, conscience reproves, the Holy Spirit strives, and Providence pleads against men;

yet do they not hearken nor consider. Furthermore, the text alleges against them—2. Incurribleness. “She received not correction.” For the confirmation of this part of the charge let us hear the prophet Jeremiah, chap. v. 3: “O Lord, are not Thine eyes upon the truth? Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; Thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction; they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return.” And if you would know how severely and repeatedly He had stricken them, read Amos iv. 6-11. There you will find that Jehovah had stricken them by want of bread, scarcity of water, blasting mildew, palmer-worms, pestilence, the sword, fire, and destruction; and yet, after all, had to say, “Yet have ye not returned unto Me, saith the Lord.” How impervious must have been their hearts to withstand all these corrective measures. Call to mind, ye hitherto incorrigible sinners, the afflictions, privations, losses, and troubles that have come upon you; still many of you have not yet “heard the rod, nor Him that appointed it.” Can all these things have come upon you by chance? Is there no meaning in them? “He that, being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.” “Hear, therefore, and your souls shall live.” Again, our text alleges against them—3. Perfidy, or faithlessness towards God—“She trusted not in the Lord.” This stroke makes their moral portraiture darker still. In the days of their fidelity to the God of their forefathers, in seasons of perplexity, they had confided in the all-sufficiency of His wisdom, love, power, and faithfulness. But when they turned aside after other gods, in their straits and national troubles, they looked to man alone for succour and deliverance. Hence they are reproved for this by the prophet Isaiah (xxx. 1, 3, 15, 16, and Jer. ii. 18-36). Ah, how anxiously did they rely upon Egypt, Assyria, or any other heathen nation, in time of invasion, instead of trusting in their God. And, alas! is not this the conduct pursued by multitudes in the present day? In times of afflictive visitations they know not God, nor put their trust in Him. They look alone to human prudence and prowess; they “weary themselves in the fire”; but seek not unto Him who alone can save or deliver. But how frequently are they ashamed of their confidence, as was Israel of Egypt. No language can sufficiently describe the turpitude of this defection from God. Finally, our text alleges against them—4. Neglect of His worship. “She drew not near to her God.” There can be no doubt that by “drawing near to God,” His worship is meant (1 Sam. iv. 36; Psa. lxxiii. 28; Heb. x. 22). It appears that in the days of the prophet Isaiah “they drew near with their lips”; but now they had entirely relinquished the worship of Jehovah. Manasseh, and Amon his son, had uprooted the worship of the living and true God, and established the worship of idols instead thereof, having placed images and altars in the very house of the Lord (chap. i. 4, 5; 2 Kings xxi. 3-7). Thus they “forsook the Lord, and lightly esteemed the Rock of their salvation.” Solemn feasts and daily sacrifices to her God no longer graced this city. Well, indeed, might He say, “I will go and return to My place till they acknowledge their iniquity” (Hosea v. 15). “I will forsake you” (Jer. xxiii. 33). But what did these backsliders more than is done by multitudes in the present day? Have we need to go far to find those who walk in the same footsteps? First look at the scanty attendance at every place of worship; then visit those synagogues of Satan which abound in our land, and mark the crowds, the bustle, and the business there. We need not ask, do these draw near to God? II. GIVE A GENERAL VIEW OF WHAT IS IMPLIED IN THIS CASE. 1. An awful manifestation of wilful disobedience. The very facts here stated, as well as the manner of their being stated, demonstrate that all this was done by the Israelites contrary to the will of God. The doctrine of human free-agency is here, as in many other places of sacred writ, and also in the daily deportment of millions of transgressors, most decisively and irrefragably demonstrated. 2. A state of dreadful impiety. The allegations contained in the text are at variance with every thing like duty to God. There is no docility, reverence, affiance, nor devotion. Notwithstanding all God had done for that people, thus did they requite Him with hatred and disobedience. So enormous was their guilt that Jehovah exclaims, “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth,—I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me.” But what shall be said concerning the flagrant impiety of vast numbers in our times? If possible, the latter outdoes the former. If we reflect on the vastly increased facilities we enjoy for knowing and serving God, can we hesitate to entertain this fact? 3. A view of the gradations of

apostasy from God. When men depart from God, He reproves them secretly by His Spirit; if they proceed, He chastens them by various means; if they fly from Him still, and put their trust in men, He withdraws His Spirit, and frequently confirmed apostasy is the result. Let this serve as a warning beacon to us; for assuredly it is written for our admonition. Would we avoid this disgraceful conduct we must beware of turning away our ear from the warning voice of the Spirit. 4. A rational vindication of those signal acts of retribution which have fallen on incorrigible sinners at sundry times. Certainly the most appalling calamities have befallen the Jews at sundry times, especially by the Chaldeans and others of their surrounding nations, as well as the Romans. Yes, whenever God has arisen to shake terribly the nations, or sections of His Church, there has certainly been a cause; nor could that cause be other than what is indicated in our text. Apart from the necessary exercises of a probationary state, the unerring wisdom, pure benevolence, and impartial justice of our Sovereign God, necessarily prevent Him from wanton displays of His omnipotent power and terrible majesty. "The just Lord," it was said of old, "is in the midst of us, and He will not do iniquity." Rather than complain, therefore, when "God cometh out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth," be it our care to "stand in awe and sin not";—"to humble ourselves under His mighty hand." Remark—1. What a caution we have here against apostasy: in effect it says to professors of religion, "awake to righteousness, and sin not." 2. What care and concern does the Almighty manifest in using so many endeavours for the preservation of His followers. 3. What an inducement for sinners to avail themselves of the mercy and forbearance of God. 4. How affecting the expressions of God's regret at the infidelities and apostasies of His people. How pathetic His apostrophe, "Why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (*G. W. Armitage.*)

Vers. 6-8. **I have cut off the nations.**—*Terrible calamities in human history*:—In these verses the prophet sums up all that he had said in the preceding verses of this chapter, and thus closes his admonition to repentance with the announcement of tremendous judgments. These verses remind us of the following great truths—I. THAT THERE IS A SENSE IN WHICH THE MOST TERRIBLE CALAMITIES IN HUMAN HISTORY MAY BE ASCRIBED TO GOD. Here He is represented as cutting off the nations, destroying their "towers," making their "streets waste," so that "there is no man," and "none inhabitant." II. THAT THE GRAND DESIGN OF SUCH CALAMITIES IS THE PROMOTION OF MORAL IMPROVEMENT AMONGST MANKIND. As the storms, the snows, the frosts, and the cutting winds of winter help to bring on the luxuriant spring, so the calamities in human life contribute to the moral regeneration of mankind. III. THAT THE NON-REALISATION OF THIS DESIGN AMONGST A PEOPLE EXPOSES THEM TO TERRIBLE RETRIBUTION. "But they rose early, and corrupted all their doings." The men of Jerusalem, instead of getting better for these terrible calamities, grew worse. They "corrupted all their doings." This they did with assiduity. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 8-10. **Therefore wait ye upon Me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey.**—*The encouraging aspects of God's judgments*:—In this latter portion of his prophecy, in language pathetic, awe-inspiring, and sublime, Zephaniah foretells "the restitution of all things," when "all the ends of the earth shall remember themselves, and turn unto the Lord." I. THE BENEFICENT END WHICH THE ALMIGHTY HAS IN VIEW IN SENDING THE JUDGMENTS REFERRED TO. 1. The conversion of the heathen. 2. The bringing back of the dispersed of Judah, by the Gentiles. II. THE GREAT EFFECTS WHICH WILL FOLLOW THE CONVERSION AND RESTORATION AS HERE PREDICTED. 1. God will turn to the nations a pure language (Heb., "a pure lip"). And 2. The nations of the world shall all call upon the name of the Lord, and serve Him with one consent (Heb., "with one shoulder"). III. THE LESSONS TO BE DRAWN FROM THE DECLARED PURPOSE OF ALMIGHTY GOD. These are—1. Patience under the judgments of God. 2. Faith in the promises of God. 3. Encouragement from the partial fulfilment of the different judgments and promises of God. (*C. Appleyard, B.A.*)

Ver. 9. **For then will I turn to the nations a pure lip, that they may all invoke the name of the Lord, and serve Him with one shoulder.**—*On serving God with one shoulder*:—"Then!" When? In the day in which God has risen up to pour out all the heat of His fury on the nations

and kingdoms of the earth. No question more frequently and deeply frets our hearts than this,—What is the meaning, what the intention of the innumerable miseries by which we are tormented? What is the true function of the sufferings of which the world is full? The best answer is this,—The miseries of men are intended to purify and elevate them, to make them perfect. Springing from their sins, they are designed to correct their sins, and to lead them to the love and pursuit of righteousness. God deals with us as the goldsmith deals with virgin ore. He tempers it with an alloy, and thus makes it hard enough to endure “the file’s tooth and the hammer’s rap,” and the keen edge of the graver. When the work is done, he washes it in “the proper fiery acid,” which eats out the base alloy, and leaves the pure gold untouched. No grain of the precious metal is lost; but its value is indefinitely enhanced by the artistic labour bestowed upon it. And thus God deals with us. The miseries and calamities which come upon us are but as the edge of the graving tool, the rap of the hammer, the grating teeth of the file. By these He gradually and patiently carries out His conception of us, His purpose in us. And at last, like the fiery acid which separates the base alloy from the pure gold, death comes to divide the carnal in us from the spiritual, and to reveal the beauty and the value of the character which the Divine Artist has wrought in and upon us. “Cure sin, and you cure sorrow,” say the reason and the conscience of man. And “the sorrow comes that the sin may be cured,” says the Word of God. The mercy of judgment is the prophet’s theme in the verse before us. To the image of the final clause of the text—they shall “serve God with one shoulder”—attention is now directed. The image the prophet had in mind was that of a number of men bearing a single burden. If they are to bear it without strain or distress, they must walk with even or level shoulders, no one of them shirking his part of the task, each of them keeping step with the rest. They must stand and move as if they had but “one shoulder” among them. Only thus can they move freely and happily, and make the burden as little burdensome as possible to each and all. The law of God is a burden which all men have to bear; it rests on the shoulders of the whole world. Men can only bear it without strain or distress of spirit as each of them freely assumes it, as they all help each other to bear it, as they pace together under it with a happy consent of obedience. I. THE DIVINE LAW IS A BURDEN WHICH MEN ARE RELUCTANT TO ASSUME. Does that need proof? Do we not ourselves find it hard to cross our wills, in order to adopt the pure and steadfast will that rules the universe? The will of God is never so full of grace and attraction for us as when it is incarnated in the life of the man Christ Jesus. And yet even this is hard. To our self-will it is hard, and cannot but be hard, to submit even to the purest and tenderest will. Take any of the most distinctively Christian precepts, and there is that in us which resents and rebels against them. We delight in the law of Christ after the inward man; but we find another law in our members, warring against the law of our mind. We can only find rest as we impose a yoke on the flesh with its passions and lusts, and compel them to bear the burden of obedience to the higher law. In the flesh, or in the spirit, we must suffer. The only option before us is—in which? Of course it is the flesh that ought to be subdued and made to serve. Shall we let these weak wavering wills of ours be the sport of the impulses, now good and now evil, which rise within us, and try to be content with yielding at one time to the flesh, and at another time to the spirit? We *must* get unity into our life. II. THE TRUE FREEDOM CONSISTS IN A WILLING ASSUMPTION OF THIS BURDEN, A CHEERFUL AND UNFORCED OBEDIENCE TO THE DIVINE LAW. Doing the will of God from the heart. Sooner or later self-will makes us hateful both to ourselves and to our neighbours. It renders us incapable both of social and of spiritual life. Let a man acknowledge no higher will than his own. no law which he is bound to obey, and he becomes a burden to himself and to all about him. We must take up some burden; we must bear some yoke. All we can do is choose the law to which we will yield. The law of God it will be wise for us to accept. This is the law which really rules in human affairs. If we would enter into a true security and an enduring rest, we must make His will our will. It is not enough that we *yield* to the will of God; we must heartily and cheerfully adopt it if we are to be free. Obedience involves self-denial, self-sacrifice. There is but one way in which we can make the hard yoke easy, and the heavy burden light. It is the excellent way of charity, of love. When a true and pure affection has been kindled in the soul, the most difficult tasks grow easy. III. THE HAPPINESS OF OBEDIENCE DEPENDS LARGELY ON THE UNANIMITY AND

THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE OBEDIENCE. Only when *all* men serve God with one shoulder that all sense of distress and effort will pass away. And that for two reasons—1. If we really love God and His law, we must also love men, and yearn that they should keep His law. 2. Till they love Him and do His will, they will put many hindrances in our path, strew in it many stones of stumbling and rocks of offence which cannot fail to make obedience difficult and painful for us. When the Church serves God with one shoulder, and when all “the nations” serve Him with one shoulder, then at last the pain and effort of obedience will be over, and we shall serve God with unbroken gladness because we and all men serve Him with a single and a perfect heart. (*Samuel Cox, D.D.*) *The chosen people; their language and worship*.—I. THE FIRST PRIVILEGE WHICH GOD GIVETH HIS PEOPLE IN THIS PROMISE IS PURE LANGUAGE. Pure Hebrew had become degenerate Hebrew in Zephaniah’s time. The language of Adam in the garden had no sin in it; it was not capable of expressing falsehood, rebellion, or error. We speak the human language, but not as God gave it. We have learnt some of the language of demons. Let man alone, and his language would be a constant opposition to the Divine will; it would be full of envy, greediness, covetousness, murmuring, rebellion, blasphemy against the Most High. When grace comes, God will restore the pure language. What is this pure language, and how may we know it? By its very letters. In those letters Christ is Alpha, and Christ is Omega. Give the soul once the pure language, and it begins to talk of Christ as its beginning, and Christ as its end. Christ becomes all in all to that man who has received Christ into his heart. You may know that language by its syntax, for the rules of that language are the law of God. Its hardest words are such as these,—implicit trust, unstaggering faith. It is the language which Jesus spoke. You may know it by its very ring and tone. Wherein does its purity lie? You may discover its purity—1. When it is used towards God. Then a man must be humble, confident, and filial. There is a pure language with regard to providence. The child of God talks about God’s providence as being always wise and good. 2. When it is used concerning the doctrines of the Gospel. 3. In reference to our fellow-men. Where is this pure language spoken? In the Bible; from the pulpit; in Christian society. II. OUR COMMON WORSHIP. All converted men and women do call upon the name of the Lord. 1. In public. 2. In private prayer. 3. In making Christian profession. III. WE SHOULD SERVE HIM WITH ONE CONSENT. When the Lord saves souls, it is that they may serve Him. “Serve and save” are two good words to put together, but you must take care which you put first. Note that the service is, and must be, altogether voluntary. It is not “with one constraint,” but with one consent. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) To serve Him with one consent.—*The adaptation of the established Church to the prophesied purposes of God*.—The right improvement of life consists, mainly, in two grand pursuits; our personal preparation to meet our God, and the proper employment of our talents for edification and benefit to our fellow-men. These two pursuits will generally be found to prosper the most when they are duly carried on together. Hence it is necessary to press on your attention your Christian obligations. The manifold varieties of Christian benevolence will be found resolvable into two classes: the one relating to the temporal, the other to the spiritual good of our brethren of mankind. God’s purpose is, the extension among mankind of “the knowledge of the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent”; His end is, that we, through Divine grace, should secure the eternal salvation of our perishing brethren. 1. The foundation of all our hopes and confidence for success, in the purpose of God, as shown in revelation, concerning the universal extension of religious knowledge in the world. 2. There is a peculiar adaptation in the system of our national Church for the promotion, under the Divine blessing, of the gracious purpose of Jehovah. This is seen in—(1) The purity of her doctrines. (2) In the spirituality of her ordinances. (3) In the catholicity of her devotions. 3. A plea for the promulgation of the scriptural principles of our Church among the rising generation. (*W. Scoresby, B.D.*)

Vers. 11-13. In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings. —A sketch of a morally regenerated city.—I. THE UTTER ABSENCE OF THE BAD. There is an absence of—1. Painful memories. “In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings.” Thou wilt not need to be ashamed of all thy iniquities—(1) Because they are all forgiven, (2) Because they will occur no more. 2. Wicked citizens. “I will take away out of the midst of thee them

that rejoice in thy pride." 3. All crimes. "The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth." No wrong committed, no lies spoken, no deceit practised. The whole atmosphere of the city cleared of such moral impurities. II. THE BLESSED PRESENCE OF THE GOOD. "I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord." Who will be the citizens? 1. Men of humility. Delitzsch translates the word "afflicted," "bowed down"; and Henderson, "humble." Humility is evidently the idea. There will be men who are "poor in spirit." Moral humility is moral nobility. The humbler a man is, the nobler and the happier too. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." 2. Men of piety. "They shall trust in the name of the Lord." Their chief confidence will be placed, not in their strength, their wealth, or their wisdom, but in God. They will centre their trust, not in the creature, but in the Creator. 3. Men of concord. "They shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid." There will be amongst them no acrimonious disputations, no commercial rivalries, no social jealousies or envyings, no painful divisions of any kind. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 12. I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord.—*The rich poverty*:—I. GOD'S DEALINGS WITH HIS POOR CHURCH WHEN HE COMES TO VISIT THE WORLD. "I will leave in the midst of thee." God will have some in the worst time. This is an article of our faith. We believe in the "holy Catholic Church." The world should not stand were it not for a company in the world that are His. Though God's people be but a few, yet hath He a special care of them. Sometimes, indeed, it seems otherwise. God's children are taken away in common judgments. But He deals with His children as becometh His infinite wisdom, and so that they shall find most comfort in the hardest times. II. THE STATE AND CONDITION OF THESE PEOPLE. "An afflicted and poor people." This is for the most part the state of God's children and Church in the world. We must not say it is a general rule. Reasons are—1. It is fit that the body should be conformable to the head. 2. By reason of the remainder of our corruptions it is needful. God sanctifies outward affliction and poverty, to help inward poverty of spirit. It takes away the fuel that feeds pride. And it has a power to bring us to God. Inward and spiritual poverty is not mere want of grace. There is a poverty of spirit *before* we are in a state of grace, and *after*. Where this conviction and poverty is, a man sees an emptiness and vanity in all things in the world whatsoever, but in Christ. There is a desire for the grace and favour of God above all things. A wondrous earnestness after pardon and mercy, and after grace. It is always joined with a wondrous abasing of self. There is a continual frame and disposition of soul which is a poverty of spirit that accompanies God's children all the days of their life. In justification and in sanctification there must be poverty of spirit. III. THE CARRIAGE OF THESE POOR AND AFFLICTED PEOPLE. Naturally every man will have a trust in himself, or out of himself. God is the trust of the poor man. What he wants in himself he has in God. Learn, then, to know God: in His special attributes, and in His promises. (*R. Sibbes.*) *The condition and character of the people of God*.—I. THE CONDITION OF GOD'S PEOPLE IN THIS WORLD. "An afflicted and poor people." "A remnant." Though trouble, vanity, and vexation of spirit attend upon believers as the children of this world, yet there are trials, difficulties, and woes of a far more grievous nature, peculiar to them as the people of God. Sin is the greatest of the great troubles of the righteous. Then there is what Scripture calls, "the hiding of God's countenance." They are "poor" in the sense of being "poor in spirit." And the true Church of Christ has ever been a protesting minority. II. THEIR HOPE AND CHARACTER. Their hope is "a good hope." "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe." As to their character, God calls them to holiness, to purity, to love, to peace. The most devoted Christian cannot hope to be entirely free from sin until "mortality is swallowed up of life." But the believer does not love sin, or allow it to reign over him. III. THEIR PRIVILEGES. 1. Their wants shall be supplied. 2. They shall be free from terror and danger. (*C. Arthur Maginn, M.A.*) *God's people afflicted and poor*:—The Book of Providence is confessedly a difficult book. Perhaps there are few more mysterious things in it than the deep trials of the family of God. I. THE LORD HAS A PEOPLE. They are the Lord's witnesses. Yet they are but

a remnant. A remnant according to the election of grace. II. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF HIS PEOPLE. "Afflicted and poor." There is not an evil in life from which they are exempt. They have afflictions common to men, and afflictions peculiar to themselves. Oftentimes they are heavy afflictions. Many of God's people are literally poor, and certainly they are poor in the sense of being humble. III. WHAT ARE THE BLESSINGS OF THESE CIRCUMSTANCES? Affliction is the means of bringing them to think. And it is the means of drawing out the sympathies of the saints of God. (*J. Harington Evans, M.A.*)

Ver. 13. **The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity.**—*The saved remnant* :—The "remnant" is those who are left after the sifting out. God is ever sifting out, and the unworthy fall through the meshes of the mighty sieve. They are swept up and cast out, but the worthy remain. He sifted Israel. The Captivity tested them. He sifted the infant Church. Persecution proved its members. The text refers to the blessed privilege of those who shall endure. I. THEIR NUMBER. Only a "remnant." It was but a remnant of those people who left Egypt that entered Canaan—only two men. It was only a remnant returned from the Captivity. It is only a remnant of those who hear the Gospel who are saved. Still, there is a remnant. There are always some who fear God. God never leaves Himself without witness of some sort. II. THEIR CHARACTER. 1. They are holy—"Shall do no iniquity." But there must be great changes in our natures and circumstances before this promise is fulfilled. 2. They shall be faithful—"Not speak lies." This is one branch of holiness, but it is a very important one, and is mentioned particularly in order to show us the thoroughness of their piety. III. THEIR PRIVILEGES. There are three here specified. 1. Provision—"They shall feed." That is, have spiritual food. There is such a thing as spiritual starvation. 2. Rest—"They shall lie down." There shall be no care, no anxiety, no toil. 3. Protection—"None shall make them afraid." It is a blessed thing to endure the Lord's sifting. Those who do so shall live for ever. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 14-17. **Sing, O daughter of Zion.**—*Joy : human and Divine* :—Here is a call to the regenerated inhabitants of Jerusalem to exult in the mercy of God, who has wrought their deliverance. I. THE JOY OF THE REGENERATED MAN. 1. The joy of gratitude for the deliverance from evil. 2. The joy of conscious security. II. THE JOY OF THE REGENERATING GOD. The joy of infinite benevolence. In this joy the redeemed will participate. (*Homilist.*) *Exhortation to joy* :—These words form the basis of an exhortation to joy, and are given as the reason why the Church should rejoice for her salvation, accomplished by her Saviour. I. THE GREAT DELIVERANCE OF THE CHURCH. 1. The deliverer is God in Christ. 2. Her captivity, lying under judgment. 3. Imprisoned by her enemies. 4. The removal of her judgment by Christ. 5. And victory obtained over her foes. II. HER BLESSED STATE AFTER DELIVERANCE. 1. God is in the midst of the Church. 2. As a mighty king to protect her. 3. As a wise prince to govern her. 4. As the father of all His people, to provide for all their wants. Hence we naturally suppose that, being thus blessed, they will gather round Him, depend upon Him, fight for Him, and live and die with Him. III. HER PROMISED PROSPECTS. "Not see evil any more." 1. Sin shall not destroy her. 2. Satan shall not prevail against her. 3. The world shall not ruin her. 4. The law cannot condemn her. IV. HER APPOINTED PROCEEDINGS. "Let not thine hands be slack." 1. We are commanded not to fear, either Satan, the world, sin, the law, the anger of God, or wrath to come. 2. We are to be courageous. Inferences. See what encouragement—(1) For earnestness in prayer. (2) Diligence in reading. (3) Constancy in hearing. (4) Faithfulness in reproving. (5) Boldness in standing out for Christ, and the truth of His Gospel. (*T. B. Baker.*)

Ver. 10. **Let not thine hands be slack.**—*The Church of Christ exhorted to diligence* :—I. THESE WORDS SUGGEST TO THE CHURCH OF CHRIST THAT THERE IS A WORK TO BE PERFORMED. The caution "not to be slack" implies an injunction to be diligent, and is supposed to refer first to the rebuilding of the temple, and then to the spread of the Church of Christ in Gospel days. To ascertain the special work to be performed we have only to acquaint ourselves with the sacred character and required employment of the persons addressed. A people of holy character are called to exertion, and their work must be in unison

with their character. The work to be accomplished by the inhabitants of Zion is a work of grace. As such—1. The work to be performed is spiritual in its nature. Being a spiritual work, it has special regard to the interests of the souls of men, and embraces every duty calculated to promote the purity and happiness, the present and eternal salvation, of intelligent beings. The inhabitants of Zion, collectively or individually, if they would promote the happiness of men, must lead them to an acquaintance with that Saviour, "whom to know is life eternal." 2. The work to be performed is beneficial in its operations. Contemplate the effects in their immediate subjects. The dark mind is enlightened, the hard heart is softened, the perverse will is subjected, the drowsy conscience is roused, the inverted affections are rightly directed, the carnal nature regenerated, and the profligate life is changed into purity of deportment. Contemplate the effects in their direct tendency. The operations of grace are visible in all the kindred relations of life, and in all the relations of society. Contemplate the effects in their extended influence. 3. The work to be performed is important in its character. This is seen if we reflect on the exalted interest which it engages. The spiritual interest of man engages all the perfections of God, and all the persons of the sacred Trinity. Reflect also on the honour it secures to man. 4. The work to be performed is indispensable in its obligations. These are numerous, powerful, and binding. The obligation arises from man's misery, through sin, and should be felt and acknowledged by all who have found mercy in God. II. THE WORDS UNDER CONSIDERATION ALSO SUGGEST UNTO THE CHURCH A POWER TO BE EXERTED. Hands, in Scripture, signify power. They are also expressive of an agent employed. Zion should employ—1. The mighty power of truth. 2. The necessary power of union. 3. The extensive power of influence. 4. The consecrated power of wealth. 5. The prevailing power of prayer. III. BY THIS SCRIPTURE WE ARE FURTHER INSTRUCTED THAT SUPINENESS OF SPIRIT MUST BE AVOIDED. "Slackness of hands" indicates a disposition that is most enervating in its influence. 1. Supineness of spirit is unworthy of a work of grace. 2. It is unequal to a work of grace. 3. It would fail to accomplish the work of grace. 4. It is very offensive to the God of Grace. IV. FROM THESE WORDS WE ARE TAUGHT THAT AN EXHORTATION IS TO BE GIVEN. 1. This is the voice of God from His sovereign throne. 2. This is the voice of ministers from the towers of Zion. 3. This is the voice of thousands whose state demands assistance. In conclusion—(1) The work of grace is the work of Zion. 2. The members of Zion have a hand, a power for this work. 3. The members of Zion are called to unwearied exertions. (*William Naylor.*)

Ver. 17. *The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty.*—*God in the midst of His Church*:—Almost all the messages of the prophets to the ancient Church begin with the most awful threatenings and end with the most animating promises. I. WHAT IS HERE SAID TO THE CHURCH BY WAY OF ENCOURAGEMENT. 1. The Church is encouraged by the assurance that Jehovah is her God, her own covenant God. 2. By assurances of God's everlasting, unchanging love, and of His gracious designs respecting her. He has formed an unalterable determination to save her. 3. That God rejoices in His love, and in all its sanctifying, saving effects upon His people. 4. That her God is no less able than willing to effect her salvation. He is a God at hand, and not afar off. "The Lord Thy God is in the midst of thee." II. WHAT IS SAID BY WAY OF EXHORTATION. "Fear thou not." There are various kinds of fear mentioned in the Scriptures,—filial fear, reverential fear, humble fear, unbelieving fear, slavish fear, &c. The text forbids the Church—1. To indulge unbelieving fears; or 2. Slavish fear; or 3. A desponding, pusillanimous fear. The second exhortation is, "Let not thine hands be slack." Slackness is opposed to zeal and diligence. The remark is no less applicable to our spiritual than to our temporal concerns. Slackness or indolence is the principal cause why so few Christians are eminently pious or useful. Inferences—1. All the doctrines and promises of God's Word, and all the gracious assurances of His love, have a practical tendency, and are designed to produce holy zeal and activity. 2. Learn whether our belief of the Divine promises, and the hopes and consolations which we derive from them, are real and scriptural. 3. Is God in the midst of us, resting in His love to us, and rejoicing over us with joy? Then with what emotions does it become us to receive and embrace Him! (*E. Payson, D.D.*) *God's activity*:—This text is cast in the Gospel mould. It has the true evangelical mark. It discovers the revelation of God's character,

which the teaching of Christ and His apostles fully confirms. **I. GOD'S WORK UPON THE EARTH.** This is one of the fundamental facts of our religion,—God is in our very midst. Think of the unworthy conceptions the heathen formed of God, and the imperfect conceptions Jews formed. Christianity brought God in Christ to the homes of men, to the workshops; God became God with us in the very breath we breathe. But Christianity is more than teaching. It is not a school; it is a Church. Doctrine by itself might enlighten men's minds; the doctrine and Christ's presence together will conquer the heart. God is great in salvation; God is mighty to save. **II. HOW DOES GOD THINK ABOUT HIS WORK?** What is His attitude in it, His personal interest in it? The activities of man go into two great divisions—1. Those who labour for bread. 2. Those who find their wages in the work itself. The one is the labourer, the other the artist. God takes delight in His work. (*William Pierce.*) *The connection existing between God and His people*:—In religious concerns men are always prone to run into the opposite extremes of presumption and despair. Both these mistakes arise from defective or partial views of the character and design of Jehovah. **I. WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY CONCERNING GOD'S RELATION TO US?** "The Lord thy God." He is our Maker; the former of our bodies; and the former of our spirits within us. But as far as we are sinners we are not the work of His own hands. **II. WHAT DOES THE TEXT TELL US CONCERNING HIS RESIDENCE?** "In the midst of thee." God is everywhere, but not everywhere as Friend and Saviour. **III. WHAT SAYS OUR TEXT CONCERNING HIS SUFFICIENCY?** "Is mighty." "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" **IV. WHAT SAYS OUR TEXT CONCERNING HIS WORK?** "He will save." Save from what?—From our supreme calamity and peril. But some may say, We are saved already. But you may know more of this salvation, feel more of it, rejoice more in it, and communicate it more to others. **V. WHAT DOES THE TEXT TELL US CONCERNING HIS HEART?** Here is a love accompanied with three characters. 1. A character of Divine delight. 2. A character of Divine permanency. 3. A character of Divine expression. "With singing." (*William Jay.*) *The presence of God in the midst of His Church*:—A revelation of the Divine goodness is essential in proportion to human affliction and sorrow. This is true in personal and individual experience, and also in the general history of the Church. Where affliction is found, there consolation is found. **I. GOD IS IN THE MIDST OF THE CHURCH.** He is in the midst of them for gracious purposes. There He is to record His name; there He is by the sweet experience of His promises and there He is by the most abundant communications, beyond all they ask, of that grace which is requisite for their comfort. **II. GOD IS IN THE MIDST OF HIS PEOPLE TO SAVE THEM.** There He communicates the immense blessings of salvation. So gracious is God, so dependent and necessitous is man, that everything may be considered as coming to us in the way of salvation. All that we receive we receive from the hand of God freely. It is one thing to find a Helper, but another thing to find a Saviour. **III. HE IS MIGHTY TO ACCOMPLISH THAT SALVATION.** It is not every effort in favour of another that can be considered as salvation. Wherever salvation is wrought by one individual in favour of another it implies weakness on the part of the one, and power on the part of the other. Consider the "mightiness" of the Son of God as essential to qualify Him to become a Saviour. He must be mighty to save, so as to overcome the defects in our own strength, to satisfy the outstanding claims of justice against the sinner, to bring us with Divine approbation before God. **IV. HE IS RESOLVED ON THAT SALVATION.** "He will save." The declaration is so put as to pledge the will of God to the accomplishment of the work. It is not on our determination and resolves that the work is suspended, but on the resolution, the determination of Christ. **V. CHRIST OUR SAVIOUR DELIGHTS IN OUR SALVATION.** Though it has cost Him so much, there is nothing gives Him half the pleasure. He is said to "rest in His love." Infer from this subject two things—1. The nature of sin. 2. The danger of an unconverted state. (*Andrew Reed, B.A.*) *God and His people*:—God is everywhere. His special presence in His Church is the present theme. **I. GOD'S DWELLING AMONG HIS PEOPLE.** 1. Under the former dispensations of mercy. 2. Under the present administration of the kingdom of God, the dispensation of the fulness of times; the ministration of the Spirit. 3. In the heavenly world. **II. GOD'S DELIVERANCE OF HIS PEOPLE.** 1. The power of God. Including physical power, mental power, moral power. 2. God is mighty in the use of intellectual power to save His people. 3. God is mighty in moral and spiritual power to save His people. God is mighty—(1) To convert.

(2) To pardon. (3) To make His people holy. (4) To protect and secure His people. (5) To make His people peaceful, joyful, and happy. (6) To glorify His people. III. GOD'S DELIGHT IN HIS PEOPLE. He fills Himself with joy over His redeemed Church. 1. The presence of God in His Church is its glory. 2. The power of God is the strength of His people (*T. E. Thoresby.*) *A transfiguring presence* :—One of Goethe's tales is of a rude fisherman's hut which was changed to silver by the setting in it of a little silver lamp. The logs of which the hut was built, its floors, its doors, its roof, its furniture—all were changed to silver by this magic lamp. The story illustrates what takes place in the life when Christ comes into it. The character is transformed, but not the character only; all life is made new when one becomes a child of God. Everything after that is different. The outward conditions and circumstances may be the same, but they shine now with a new beauty. **He will save.**—*Mighty to save* :—These words are full of encouragement. I. THE EXHORTATION WHICH GOD HERE ADDRESSES TO HIS PEOPLE. They are called upon—1. To banish every alarming apprehension. There is much to excite their anxiety. 2. To prevent faint-heartedness and lukewarmness. They were to be up and doing. II. THE GROUNDS ON WHICH THE ABOVE EXHORTATION RESTS. 1. The deliverance they were to experience. Regarding the passage as applicable to our great and glorious salvation, we are shown—(1) His ability to save. (2) His purpose to save. (3) The feelings with which He saves. 2. The consolations they were to realise. 3. The honour they were to receive. It is only for the heirs of salvation that this honour is reserved, and it is by them alone that true consolation is enjoyed. (*Author of "Footsteps of Jesus."*) **He will rejoice over thee with joy.**—*God's joy in salvation* :—It is obvious, He can save—for He is in the midst of them, and mighty. Here is nearness and power. But He will save—He is inclined, He is engaged. He will save, He will rejoice over them with joy. What is this salvation? It does not exclude temporal preservation and deliverance. We are not to look for miracles, but we may look for Him who performed them. Temporal deliverances are promised conditionally. Salvation includes redemption from the curse of the law, deliverance from the powers of darkness, freedom from the sting of death, release from the dominion and being of sin. This salvation is ensured. This salvation is begun. (*William Jay.*) *Christ's joy in His people* :—In the time of Zephaniah the iniquity of the Jews was very great, and as a nation they were fast ripening for punishment. Battle and defeat, exile and slavery, were in store for them, but these would pass away, and days of rejoicing would come again. Referring to that time, the prophet calls for songs of hope. I. THE LORD GOD IN THE MIDST OF THEE IS MIGHTY. He doeth what He will with His own, and all things are His. The greatest feel His power, and the least are not exempt from His care. II. HE WILL SAVE—From all useless dread and alarm, from all unnecessary trials and assaults. There is no promise that a believer shall be saved from suffering and sorrow and temptation; what is promised is, that he shall not be overcome of these. Christ will show Himself as Saviour in the days to come, as truly as in days past. He has saved. He will save. III. HE WILL REJOICE OVER THEE WITH JOY. His people are His by creation, purchase, adoption, and by a begun and progressive sanctification. There is nought in the contemplation of the natural man to call forth the joy of the Saviour. IV. HE WILL REST IN HIS LOVE. Margin, "He will be silent," or "keep silence in His love." This suggests the idea of a love too great for utterance. V. HE WILL JOY OVER THEE WITH SINGING. If this is not an amplification of the preceding promises, rather than a new promise, it speaks of a time when the watchful care of the Saviour will be followed by a feeling of ecstatic joy—of a time when the silence of unutterable emotion will be broken in upon by the triumphant voice of Him whose voice is "as the sound of many waters." Then, if these things be so, let me say, "What manner of persons ought we to be, in all holy conversation and godliness?" (*J. B. Omond.*) *God's delight in saving souls* :—A knowledge of ourselves will show us how much need we have of repentance; and a knowledge of God will encourage us to repent. I. GOD'S POWER TO SAVE. We shall not speak of God's power in general, but as it is manifested in the salvation of His Church and people. II. HIS DETERMINATION TO SAVE. If He should leave us to ourselves none of us would be saved. He takes the matter into His own hands, and determines to save those whom He has given to His Son. He does not destroy our free agency; but He overcomes our reluctance, and draws us to Himself by an operation no less powerful than that which He exerted in

raising His Son, Jesus Christ, from the dead. III. HIS DELIGHT TO SAVE. Not merely will He feel an inward pleasure; but as a man, overjoyed at any event, involuntarily expresses his joy by singing, or some other outward token, so will God manifest His pleasure to the returning soul. IV. HIS IMMUTABILITY TOWARDS THOSE WHOM HE INTENDS TO SAVE. Man is often alienated from the object of his affections, either by means of some unexpected evil He has discovered, or through his own fickleness and inconstancy. But God changeth not. In this glorious character of God we may see—1. The evil of sin. Under whatever circumstances it may be committed, sin is directly levelled against Him. 2. The danger of dying in an unconverted state. Will it be no aggravation of our guilt in the day of judgment to have despised such a loving and gracious God? 3. The obligation that lies upon believers to serve the Lord. What should you render unto the Lord for all His benefits? Have no end, no aim, no wish, but to please and honour the God of your salvation. (*Skeletons of Sermons.*) *The joy of God over His own*:—This is one of those revelations of the character of God which are sometimes called anthropomorphic. And it is argued that to ascribe human attributes to God is to limit Him. But we may fearlessly rejoice in the inspiring revelation of the text, that society is necessary to the fulness of the Divine nature. God cannot do without His children; He finds His joy in them. I. IT IS THE JOY OF A STRONG BEING. "The Lord thy God is mighty." Little natures are capable of little happiness. In our gladder hours we can but dimly guess what is the bliss of an infinite Being. This joy God found in creation, in which His might was revealed. II. IT IS THE JOY OF A HELPFUL PRESENCE. "In the midst of thee." There is delight in being with and doing for those we love. This is God's joy in His providence. III. IT IS THE JOY OF GIVING. "He will save." Not in receiving, but in giving, is found the highest and deepest joy. God finds this blessedness in the work of redemption. The incarnation and atonement are but the self-giving of God. IV. IT IS A SILENT JOY. "He will rest in His love"; literally, "He will be silent in His love." Sometimes joy is too deep for speech. It is the unheard running of the still waters. V. IT IS AN EXCELLENT JOY. "He will joy over thee with singing." Not silent all the time. Sometimes He sings. What are some of the notes of God's song? We may make God glad. The sweetest words that can climb to heaven are, "God be merciful to me a sinner." He will stop the music of glory, and hush the converse of the angels, to hear it stealing up to His throne. (*George Elliott.*) *He will rest in His love.*—*The Almighty resting in His love*:—God rules in an unquiet world. Yet is He ever at rest. "He will rest in His love." The idea in the text is of Deity in repose—silent—looking calmly on all the disorders of the Church and the world, as knowing that there is one attribute of His nature which will suffice to rectify all things for the deliverance of His people. I. THE NATURE OF THIS REST. 1. It is the rest of a moral satisfaction with all the arrangements He had made for man's spiritual and everlasting happiness. In this sense God rested from His work of creation. But this contentment of God with the results of His own doings was to receive a yet higher illustration. It was great to make a soul like ours; how much greater to redeem! The Almighty has delight in the provisions made for the spiritual recovery of our race. Behold, then, the great Father of spirits reposing with delighted tranquillity on the appointments and provisions of Messiah's kingdom. 2. It is the rest of a Divine foreknowledge and purpose. The quietness of an Omniscient mind which, seeing the end from the beginning, will not allow itself to be moved from the fixed order of its determinations. This abstaining from interference is observable in the general order of earthly affairs, and in the lot of individual believers. To all human seeming things are left to take their course. This resting of God in His own moral determination is often remarkably illustrated in Scriptures as in our Lord's delay in going to sick Lazarus. II. IT IS DESCRIPTIVE OF THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST RESTING IN HIS LOVE AS THE GREAT MEANS FOR THE SALVATION OF MANKIND. It must be a sight of the goodness of God, if anything, that will lead a man to repentance. Then if God so rest in His love, how should we rest in it. How assured and tranquil should we feel in this, God loves me. There is always a firm footing there. (*Daniel Moore, M.A.*) *The unchangeable nature of God's love to man*:—God is not only lovely and loving, He is pure unmixed love itself. This love has numerous objects. Among these His own perfection is the chief. This is a theme so sublime that we are scarcely able to form any conception of it. A number taken from two classes of His own rational creatures are distinguished as the objects of His love,—elect angels and

elect men. In what of His love does God rest? I. IN THE PRINCIPLE OF HIS LOVE. It is as impossible that this love in itself, or in the essence of it, can ever be anything different from what it is, or hath been, as it is that God Himself can ever be anything different from what He is now, or hath been from eternity. Love, as it exists in Himself, is unchanging and ever-during II. IN THE OBJECTS OF HIS LOVE. God knows not only how many He has chosen, but knows also every individual object of His choice. There will be no voluntary transference of Divine love from one object, or one class of objects, to another. III. HE WILL REST IN THE DEGREE OF HIS WILL. As God's love always has been, so it will always continue to be, of the same extent and dimensions. God loves not His people more or less at one time than another. IV. IN THE FRUITS OF HIS LOVE. Cannot speak of the fruits of His love in detail. They embrace a mighty compass. They include everything, from the first particle of imparted grace to a seat with God the Lamb on His throne. Learn—1. That believers ought to love their God with the greatest ardour and constancy of which they are capable. 2. In whatever manner God may act by them, His love is neither changed nor diminished. 3. Believers may be encouraged to smile defiance at every attempt to separate them from the love of God. (*Robert Muter.*) *God's people comforted*:—No sooner had Zephaniah laid open the abounding wickedness of Judah than he pointed forward to brighter scenes—to the returning suppliants, under the power of the Spirit, ashamed of their doings, to the remnant of Israel, which shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies. The text is consolatory. 1. The consolation is addressed only to true Christians. No encouragement is therefore given here to open transgressors, or to persistent backsliders. It is necessary to make this distinction, because none are so prone to take to themselves the promises of the Gospel as those to whom they clearly do not belong. 2. The text is spoken on the supposition that the people of God will often be overwhelmed with anxiety—that they shall “fear,” and their “hands shall be slack.” No greater mistake can be made than that of supposing a Christian's life is a period of continual sunshine. Now illustrate the grounds of confidence which all Christians may have in the unchanging love of their Almighty Redeemer. I. WHAT ARE THE MARKS OF LOVE? 1. Our love toward an object may be known by the direction of our thoughts; for on the beloved object our thoughts chiefly dwell. 2. By our anxiety in regard to its welfare. 3. By the extent of suffering which we are willing to undergo for the person beloved. 4. By the prominence given to the object beloved. II. THIS LOVE, AND THE RELATIONSHIPS IMPLIED IN IT. There is a close relationship between God and His people. He is *their* God in a peculiar sense. Consider by what names He is called. Mediator, Advocate, Captain, Surety, Head, King of Saints, &c. III. CONSIDER WHAT CHRIST HAS ALREADY DONE FOR HIS PEOPLE. They are His by choice, by purchase, by a new creation, by covenant. And we have the whole past experience of the Christian Church to prove the truth of the text. (*James Begg, D.D.*) *A cluster of grapes*:—These words were primarily addressed to the daughter of Zion, to Israel the chosen people; and they undoubtedly foreshadow blessings which are yet to be realised. Ten times over in this chapter God assures His people of what He will most certainly do on their behalf. But a much wider circle than the chosen race may appropriate the blessed comfort of these words. Twice over in this paragraph we are told that the Lord, the King of Israel, is in the midst of His people. This is an indisputable fact. He is in the midst of His Church, so that it shall not be moved. Well would it be if each Christian were to devote some portion, however brief, in each day, to meditation upon this marvellous fact. “The mighty God, the King, is in the midst of me. I am God-tenanted, God-possessed. The High and Holy One who inhabiteth eternity has taken up His abode in my heart.” And this marvellous indwelling—more wonderful than if an angel were to indwell an emmet or a humming-bird—is not dependent on frames or feelings or aught in us; but endures through all our changes and fluctuations unto the eternal ages. But if the mighty God is indeed in us, why is there so much weakness and failure in our lives? Alas, the answer is not far to seek—we have limited the Holy One of Israel. What now shall hinder us ridding ourselves of all which has hindered Him from doing His mighty works, so that He may do that which He so much loves, and which we so much need? Then we may expect Him to accomplish the four blessed “I wills” of this precious verse. I. “HE WILL SAVE.” As God took the side of His people against their foes, and will do so again in the final struggle, when His feet shall stand upon the Mount of Olives, so will He take our side against our sins. He has saved us from the penalty of sin;

He will also save us from its power. Your foes may be numerous as the devils in hell, strong and wily; but He will save. Your temperament may be as susceptible to temptation as an aspen leaf is to the wind; but He will save. Your past years, by repeated acts of indulgence, may have formed habits strong as iron bands; but He will save. Your circumstances and companions may be most unfavourable to a life of victory; but He will save. Difficulties are nought to Him; the darkness shineth as the day. II. **HE "WILL REJOICE OVER THEE WITH JOY."** The great evangelic prophet gives the key to understand this promise when he says, "As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." Plato held that love is the attraction to each other of twin souls, made each for the other, and moving towards each other; until each finds in the other the complement and supply of the needs of its own nature. As we need God, so does God need us. There is something in us which satisfies Him, and without which His nature would not be perfectly content. We should have thought that our sin would alienate Him from us for ever. But His yearning for us is greater than His hatred of our sin. III. **"HE WILL REST IN HIS LOVE."** The margin suggests an exquisite alternative, "He will be silent in His love." Of old the Psalmist said that his soul was silent in its calm expectancy for God's salvation. Here we are told that God is silent in His brooding tenderness. All the deepest emotion is silent. When we are told, then, that God's love will be a silent one, we know that it is too intense, too deep, too infinite to find expression. It will break silence presently; but in the meanwhile be still, and know that God is love. IV. **"HE WILL JOY OVER THEE WITH SINGING."** It is much to hear a lark sing, as if its throat must be torn by the torrent of melody; more to hear a child sing as it comes down a woodland path in spring, chequered with sunlight falling on blue hyacinths and yellow primroses; more still to hear an angel sing, as the lone messenger of God breaks into melody to cheer himself on some distant journey from the Home of Song; more still to have heard our Saviour sing in the days of His earthly ministry, when He joined His disciples in the Jewish Hallel: but what will it not be when the great God Himself breaks into song, to celebrate an accomplished work, an emancipated world, a redeemed race, a Bride won for His Son! (F. B. Meyer, B.A.)

Ver. 18. **I will gather them that are sorrowful.** — *Comfort to mourners for the loss of solemn assemblies.* — I. **GOD DOETH SOMETIMES SUFFER THE SOLEMN ASSEMBLY TO LIE UNDER REPROACH.** 1. When does it lie under reproach? (1) When the presence of God is departed from the public ordinances. (2) When a reformation has been intended, and cannot be accomplished, but is stayed and hindered. (3) When the ways of Zion mourn and are unfrequented. (4) When the members are scattered and driven from one another, that they cannot meet together. (5) When its state and condition is such as that no man seeks it, or cares for it. 2. Why doth God suffer it to lie under reproach at any time? That He may roll away the reproach. There is a sinful reproach and a penal reproach of the solemn assembly. Sometimes the members are accessory to the reproach. Sometimes they are exceeding barren and unfruitful under the enjoyment of the solemn assembly. Sometimes the members do bear themselves out in their sins upon their enjoyment of the solemn assembly. There is a bearing of ourselves in opposition to false worshippers. II. **HOW SHOULD THE MEMBERS BE AFFECTED UNDER REPROACH?** There are two sorts of members, false and true. They will not be so affected as to be incapable of the teachings of God. Nor so as to be unthankful for what they have. Nor will they be so affected as if it were barely their own concernment. They look upon this as their great affliction. The saints and people of God will search into their own ways, and turn from the evil of those ways which have had a hand in bringing in this reproach. What is there in this reproach that the saints and people of God should be so much affected by it? 1. There is a darkness upon the greatest organ of light. 2. The name of the Lord is dishonoured. The whole generation of the righteous are afflicted. The world is scandalised. The devil gets up again. There is a certain presage of a famine of hearing the Word. And God is departed. When the members are sensible of the reproach and carry it as a burthen, the Lord will turn former sorrow into future comforts. He will cause their after comforts to run parallel with their former trouble. (W. Bridge, M.A.)