

THE
BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR:

OR

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

BY

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MALACHI.

London:

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

1905.

INTRODUCTION TO MALACHI.

I. FIRST of all, we are to look at THE WORLD IN WHICH THIS PROPHET'S LOT WAS CAST, the character of his contemporaries, the souls with which he had to deal. Let us suppose that more than ninety years, an entire century almost, have passed away since Haggai and Zechariah began to preach in Jerusalem to the captives who had returned from Babylon. Artaxerxes Longimanus sits now on the throne of Persia, and is the sovereign lord to whom the Hebrews in Judea pay allegiance and tribute. It is, we shall say, the year 425 B.C., for if that be not the exact date it cannot be very far removed from it. The second Temple has been finished long since. It was not in vain that Zechariah encouraged the restored exiles by visions and predictions to be up and doing. Haggai's declarations that there was an intimate union between liberal giving to the Lord and external prosperity were uttered to good purpose. At the call of God's ambassadors the people roused themselves from their unworthy and selfish lethargy. They built the sacred walls and courts and pinnacles with zeal and enthusiasm; before long the hill of Zion was crowned again with the sanctuary of Jehovah. There succeeded a brief season of spiritual life and earnestness and joy. The priests offered sacrifice anew, and made intercession for the citizens within the Holy House. But this genial summer was short-lived. The generation to which Haggai and Zechariah spoke with such effect, died out ere long; and their successors did not manifest their zealous devotion. They were remiss and negligent. The city which their fathers had begun to rebuild they left incomplete and half-ruinous; they took little delight in the Temple which their fathers had raised. They withheld from God those tithes and offerings which pertained to Him; and when they did bring animals for sacrifice on His altar, they were often the very poorest of the flock—sheep and lambs which they would have been utterly ashamed to present to their Persian governor. Their priests were men like themselves. They cared not how slovenly the Temple service might be. They came far short of realising the responsibilities of their office. They inflicted daily dishonour on the God whose servants they called themselves. Both priests and people intermarried freely with aliens, with those who were strangers to the commonwealth and the covenant, who were idolatrous in worship and sinful in life. Both were rapidly growing sceptical alike in thought and in speech, questioning many things which had hitherto been most surely believed, avowing their incredulity boldly and defiantly. It was a lamentable change. During these days of reaction and retrogression, two visitors came to Jerusalem from the Court of Persia—first one and then the other. They were Jews, full of patriotism, and anxious to see how it fared with their kinsfolk in the city of their fathers. The first of them was Ezra, the priest and the scribe. It was the midsummer of the year 459 when he arrived. He was prepared to find much that was disappointing; he knew the difficulties with which the Hebrew colonists had had to contend; and he did not expect to discover an ideal State or a Church without spot and stain. But the actual condition of affairs astonished and dismayed

him—those unholy marriages with the heathen most of all. When he learned the full extent of the evil, “he tore his outer cloak from top to bottom; he tore his inner garment no less; he plucked off the long tresses of his sacerdotal locks, the long flakes of his sacerdotal beard; and thus, with dishevelled hair and half-clothed limbs, he sank on the ground, crouched like one thunderstruck, through the whole of a day.”¹ Then, eager to usher in a better era, he devoted himself to the work of renovation; like the Baptist, he commanded all—the ministers of religion and the citizens as well—to repent of their sins; and his influence penetrated far and near. Fourteen years later, the second visitor came. This was Nehemiah, a young Jew of noble family, who had filled the high post of chamberlain to the Persian king. A deep and brooding anguish possessed him when he thought of the city of his ancestors in her desolation and shame. He begged of his royal master permission to return to his native country with power to rectify the disorders which vexed him so keenly. The request was granted, and he started with escort and authority to accomplish the desire that lay near his heart. Through twelve summers and winters he remained in Judea and acted as its governor. One much-needed reform after another was carried through. The fortifications of the town were raised from their ruins. The nobles were rebuked for their iniquitous exactions. The Levites and the singers were bidden resume their duties in the sacred courts. The gates were closed against the merchants who came with their laden asses on the Sabbath day. It seemed as if, through the efforts of these two—the aged scribe, full of passionate love for the ancient law, and the young noble, who was both soldier and statesman—a revival of a genuine and permanent kind had indeed been brought about. But the morning which had opened so clear and fair was destined to be overclouded soon. Nehemiah went back for a short time to the court of Artaxerxes. He was not long absent; but during the brief interval, when the strong hand of the ruler was withdrawn, the Jews reverted to their old misdemeanours and sins; “all his fences and their whole array” were blown to the ground. When he returned, matters were even worse than they had been on his first arrival. Within the family of the high priest himself an odious alliance with the heathen had been contracted; one of the young men of his house had taken to wife the daughter of Sanballat, the very ringleader of the enemies of Judah. The Temple service had fallen again into dishonour and neglect; God’s tithes were once more being denied Him; the Sabbath traffic which had been so sternly forbidden was prosecuted as vigorously and as unblushingly as ever. It was a sad relapse. This was the time in which Malachi was called to carry “the burden of the Word of the Lord.” We may believe that his solemn threats and condemnations rang through the streets of Jerusalem during that short absence of Nehemiah at the Persian Court. But before we glance at what he had to say to his erring countrymen, there is a question which confronts us of a fundamental sort: Was there any Malachi at all—any person who actually bore this name, and who was known by it among his fellow-citizens? The question has more than once been answered in the negative. “No,” it has been said, “there was no prophet called Malachi. For the Word simply means ‘the messenger of God’; and beyond doubt it was a kind of epithet, a kind of official title, by which one of the servants of Jehovah in that time chose to designate himself. Perhaps it was the venerable scribe Ezra;² or perhaps it was Nehemiah, the Tirshatha himself; or perhaps—who knows?—it was one of the angels of light come down from the heavenly places in the form of a man, to do God’s will and to proclaim His grave and heavy warnings. You may search as carefully as you please the lists which are given in the historical books of those who, for one reason or another, were notable in the Jerusalem of the day; and you will find no Malachi among them. Evidently there was none. The name indicates the work done by him who bore it; it is not a personal designation at all.” That has been the opinion of not a few both in older and more recent times. But we may at once set it aside. Malachi, like that greater preacher of a future age to whom he pointed his contemporaries forward, may be only a “voice” to us; of his career and history we know absolutely nothing; but he was unquestionably a real person, and this was his proper name. It is not the habit of the prophets to prefix descriptive titles to their

¹ Stanley, *The Jewish Church*.

² Calvin is disposed to identify Malachi with Ezra.

books, or to speak of themselves only by the office which they held, or to write under some *nom de plume*. Each of them tells us plainly and frankly his ordinary name by which he was greeted in the street and the market and the home. And Malachi, we may be certain, is no exception to the rule. He was distinct from Ezra and Nehemiah, less famous than they, but not a whit less solicitous about the glory of God and the reformation of Jerusalem. Unconsciously he paints for us, I think, a picture of himself in his book, when he speaks of the little companies of God-fearing Jews who were in the habit of meeting together in that wicked time to converse one with another about what was holy and spiritual, and so to keep their own souls aglow when all around them was cold and frozen and dead; if we could have entered the upper room where these few disciples assembled, we should certainly have found Malachi among them. These were his surroundings, then; this was the world to which he proclaimed the sorrow and indignation of the Lord, which were his own sorrow and indignation too.

II. But let us turn now to consider THE PROPHET'S MESSAGE TO THE MEN OF HIS DAY. Living when "the world was very evil," what had he to say to it? He sets out with the declaration that the conduct of Judah was without excuse. If God had been a hard taskmaster—if He had shown Himself strict to mark iniquity, and unmindful of loyal service when it was given Him—there might have been some justification for the ingratitude of Jerusalem. But it was not so. God had dealt with the Jews in sovereign and marvellous love. No doubt they questioned His compassion and grace. Where could be the Divine mercy towards them, they asked, when they were a people scattered and peeled, few in number, and held in contempt? The answer was a convincing one. Let them look across the borders of Judah, east and south to the blue mountains that rose beyond the Dead Sea—to Edom, a nation near of kin to themselves, sprung from Esau as they were sprung from Jacob. They might be poor and despised; but the condition of Edom was tenfold sadder and more hopeless. Its rock-hewn cities were desolate. Jackals and scorpions made them their home. No proud and warlike people dwelt in them any more. And what was the reason of the difference? Why should brother-races, starting from the same mother's knee, be separated by so wide a gulf, the one utterly destroyed, the other spared and blessed? The sole cause was the love of God. Jacob He had loved; Esau He had hated—and that was why Jerusalem survived, whilst Petra was waste and lonely, its pride abased, its glory departed. Freely and spontaneously—patiently and fervently—God had loved the Jewish people, and therefore the sons of Jacob were not consumed as the sons of Esau had been (i. 1-5). Having thus reminded the children of Israel how unreasonable and thankless their conduct was in rewarding God evil for His good, disobedience and neglect in return for His loving-kindness and tender mercy, Malachi brings against his nation an indictment which has three counts in it. First, he reproves the priests for their scandalous negligence in the management of the Temple worship. The sacrifices which they offered at the altar were despicable and worthless. They seemed to imagine that any animal was good enough for God—the lame or the blind that had become useless for work, the maimed or the torn, the beast that was dying of disease and could not be presented for sale in the market, that which had been stolen, and which they would have been afraid to sell. They grudged the best of their possessions to Him who had given them all. They dishonoured God openly in the sight of man. Would that there were someone to shut the doors, he exclaimed, that this profane and fruitless worship might be carried on no longer! He takes no pleasure in those who do not come with alacrity to His house. He loveth a cheerful giver; but souls to whom His service is a weary burden—souls that grudge Him their best and richest treasures, and can spare Him only that which costs them nothing—what delight can He take in them? The second accusation which Malachi pronounces against his countrymen deals with a flagrant sin both of priests and people—the sin of intermarriage with aliens. These alliances between the sons of Judah and heathen women awakened in the prophet, as they had awakened in Ezra and Nehemiah, the intensest repugnance and alarm. He recognised clearly the crime of Jerusalem in contracting wedlock with "the daughter of a strange god." He felt that the offenders had profaned the covenant of Jehovah. His sentence went forth against them sharp and strong, "The Lord will cut off the man that doeth this, the master and the scholar." Do we wonder that His anger should be so hot

and fierce? Do we say that alien blood ran in the veins of David himself, the very darling of Israel; and that Ruth the Moabitess, who became the ancestress of the king and of One greater and diviner than he, is pictured to us in Scripture as fair and sweet and holy, "a perfect woman nobly planned"? But therein lies the difference. She gave up her heathenism when she entered a Jewish home; "thy people shall be my people," she told Naomi in those musical words of hers, "and thy God shall be my God." It was otherwise with the wives of the men to whom Malachi spoke. They continued idolatresses, reverencing Moloch and Chemosh and Baal rather than Jehovah. The prophet saw that those who wedded them exposed themselves to subtle temptation and ran fearful risk. He denounced their conduct as unpatriotic. They were bringing down to the common earthly level the holy people whom God loved. They were endangering the separate existence of the race which was meant to be a living witness against polytheism and sin. They were destroying the barriers which divided it from the ungodly world. God, he declared, was full of pity for the Hebrew wives, who had been driven from hearth and home in order that outsiders might step into their prerogatives and privileges. The poor, forsaken Jewish women had covered His altar "with tears, with weeping, and with crying out." Ah, surely sin is an evil thing and a bitter. It had already led many a Jew to inflict this sore anguish on the wife of his youth; and it must end in more trouble still. For, much as the God of Israel hated putting away, the strange women must go. They might plead with clinging entreaties, with wild reproaches, to be allowed to remain; it might break the hearts of those who loved them only too well to part with them; but in this way alone could the sin of Jerusalem be removed and cleansed. Men cannot have the friendship both of God and of transgressors; they must choose between the two. Unless we are putting away from us everything that is of the earth earthy, as Malachi bade the Jews put away their heathen consorts, we may well doubt whether we are true sons and daughters of the Lord (ii. 9-16). The prophet's third charge against his countrymen, is that they had fallen into a scepticism which questioned moral distinctions and scoffed at God's threatenings. Living so long in Babylon, meeting so habitually with men of other ways of thinking than their own, they had learned to cavil and doubt where they ought to have believed. "Where is the God of judgment?" they said. The very form into which the sentences of the Book are thrown indicates the infidelity that was prevalent. The preacher is continually repeating the questions which he heard among the people. "Wherein has God loved us?" and "Wherein have we despised His name?" and "To what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?" Where their fathers had been content to exercise a childlike faith, the Jews of Malachi's time were ready to point to this stumbling-block and to that contradiction. Intellectually they were more active than their fathers; morally they were more distrustful and more presumptuous; in their case, as in many others, the reason had been developed at the expense of the heart. But the prophet assures them that the God of judgment, about whose existence and power they were so dubious, would manifest Himself soon in a way they could not mistake. His servant Nehemiah would come suddenly to the Temple to cleanse it; he would be a swift witness against the wrongdoers of the city; he would appear in the spirit of Elijah—the stern spirit which made an end of idolaters and transgressors; he would enforce the broken law of Moses. And, beyond Nehemiah, Malachi beholds a greater still, the New Testament Elijah, John the Baptist; and, beyond John, One nobler even than he—One who could fitly be named the Sun of Righteousness, who should deal in integrity with His own true people, and should trample the wicked under foot. Then, by the confession of all, it would be well with the godly; then, when they could find no place for repentance, those who were so faithless now would discover their error and foolishness. But these doubts, which the men of the prophet's age raised and cherished—do they not linger among us to-day? Are not we inclined sometimes to question in our hearts whether there can be a God, because He hides Himself, and leaves His people in trouble, and allows their enemies and His to enjoy a time of prosperity and success? We overlook the disciplinary value of adversity and pain and loss—how they are often a hundredfold better for us than an easy and pleasant life. There are bright touches in the prevailing dark of Malachi's prophecy; in his chapters gloom and glory meet together. Over against the hireling priests he places the likeness of a true priest and

servant of Jehovah (ii. 5-7). A beautiful miniature it is, and doubtless it was drawn from the life. Then, too, although in his time the evil far outweighs the good, the prophet discovers here and there a spot of heavenly brightness. He speaks of brotherhoods of congenial souls, bearing a silent witness for God by lives of consecration, linked by bonds of prayer and love, handing down to their successors the truth which heals and blesses and saves. "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another," &c. We should be thankful that never, even in the worst days, has the King wanted such quiet and brave and steadfast servants. They are the very salt of the earth; they are the light of the world. (*Original Secession Magazine.*)

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MALACHI.

CHAPTER I.

VER. 1. *The burden of the Word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi.*—*A Divine burden*.—Some burdens are self-imposed; some laid upon us by our fellow-men; some by God. The prophets felt that the Word of God was a burden upon their souls. I. IT WAS A BURDEN OF DIVINE REVELATION. Words reveal. A true word is a manifestation of the soul. God was known by the utterances of these inspired men. His Word is now His choicest revelation. His Word is true, faithful, precious, enlightening, saving, eternal. II. IT IS A BURDEN BORNE BY THE HOLIEST OF MEN. God speaks through men. Many holy men now feel that the Word of God is in them. This burden should be borne by these holy men, humbly, prayerfully, thankfully, and conscientiously. III. IT IS A BURDEN BORNE FOR THE WORLD. God's Word must not be hidden. Truth heard in the inner sanctuary of the soul must be proclaimed upon the housetops. God's Word is for all nations. Whoever has it, has this burden for the world. He must carry it fearfully, distinctly, honestly, and unadulteratedly. Let the churches pray much for those who bear the burden of the Word. Often they are oppressed with their responsibilities. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*) *The burden of the Word of the Lord*.—The prophets of old were no triflers. They carried a burden. The servants of God mean business; they have something to carry, worth carrying. Those who speak for God must not speak lightly. God's true servants, who are burdened with His Word, right willingly and cheerfully carry that burden. We bear a burden indeed, but we should be sorry not to bear it. I. WHY IS THE WORD OF THE LORD A BURDEN TO HIM THAT SPEAKETH IT? It is a burden because it is the Word of the Lord. 1. The Word of the Lord becomes a burden in the reception of it. No man can preach the Gospel aright until he has had it borne into his own soul with overwhelming energy. True preaching is artesian, it wells up from the great depths of the soul. 2. The Word of God is a burden in the delivery of it. He that finds it easy to preach, will find it hard work to give an account of his preaching at the last great day. To speak aright, God's Word beneath the Divine influence is, in the speaking as well as in the getting of the message, the burden of the Lord. 3. When we have preached, the Gospel becomes a burden in after consideration. If God sends any of us to do good to our fellow-men, and to speak in His name, the souls of men will be a perpetual burden to us. II. IT IS A BURDEN BECAUSE OF WHAT IT IS. What is it that the true servant of God has to bear and preach? 1. It is the rebuke of sin. If a man bears the burden of the Word of the Lord, he speaks most to his people upon the evil of which they are most guilty. Every true preacher must be careless of man's esteem, and speak faithfully; but this is a burden to one of a tender spirit. 2. The Word of the Lord gives a rebuff to human pride. The doctrines of the Gospel seem shaped on purpose, among other objects, to bring into contempt all human glory. So human nature does not like our message. And such preaching becomes the burden of the Lord. 3. The true preacher has to come into contact with the vanity of human intellect. The things of God are hidden from the wise and prudent, but revealed unto babes; and the wise and prudent are indignant at this act of Divine sovereignty. To

face false science with the "polishness of preaching," and to set up the Cross in the teeth of learned self-sufficiency, is a burden from the Lord. 4. The most heavy burden is that which concerns the future. We are heavy at heart for the many who will not turn to God, but persist in destroying their own souls for ever. III. IT IS A BURDEN BECAUSE OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF OUR BEARING IT TO YOU. Suppose that we do not preach the Gospel, and warn the wicked man, so that he turn not from his iniquity, what then? "He shall perish, but his blood will I require at thy hand." What will my Lord say to me if I am unfaithful to you? Then it becomes a great burden to me to preach the Gospel when I think of what those lose who will not have it. IV. IT IS OFTEN THE BURDEN OF THE LORD, BECAUSE OF THE WAY IN WHICH MEN TREAT THE WORD OF GOD. Some trifle with it. The preoccupation of human minds makes it such a burden when we are in earnest to reach the heart and win the soul. Quite a number hear with considerable attention, but forget all that they hear. The sermon is all done with when they have done hearing it. There are even some that hear to ridicule. The preacher is in anguish to save a soul, and they are thinking about how he pronounces a word. V. IT IS A BURDEN WHEN THE PREACHER REMEMBERS THAT HE WILL HAVE TO GIVE AN ACCOUNT. There will come a time when it will be said, "Preacher, give an account of your stewardship." Remember the great Lord of all true Gospel preachers bore a far heavier burden than we. Since it is a burden in itself, I ask you not to make it any heavier. You add to my burden, if you do not aid me in the Lord's work. But the greatest increase of my burden comes from those who do not receive the Gospel at all. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 2, 3. Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness.—*Jacob*:—From the fate of the hunter Esau, we learn the peril of life's low ideals; the power of life's crucial moments; the continuity of life's irrevocable retributions; the anguish of life's fruitless tears. The fortunes of Jacob are indeed too eventful, his character too complex, to allow any attempt at exhaustive analysis. But we may learn something which will aid us in our daily difficult endeavour to choose the good and not the evil, and to give our hearts and lives to God. 1. "I loved Jacob, and hated Esau." Does not our first instinct almost rebel against this appeal? Do we not incline to prefer the elder, for all his frank earthliness, to the younger, with his mean servilities and subterranean shifts? Yet there the sentence stands; and all Scripture, and the long centuries of human history, set the seal of confirmation to the sacred verdict. The Aryan has prevailed in war and civilisation, but in all other things the Semite conquered his conqueror. More than any other nation, the Hebrew realised the intense grandeur and infinite supremacy of the moral law, and saw that the greatest and most awful aim for human life is not culture, but conduct. Let us see why Jacob, who seems to concentrate all the worst faults which we associate with the lowest type of Jewish character, is yet preferred to his more gallant and manly brother. 2. Let me reject at once two solutions of it. Some would settle it on the broad grounds of predestinated election and arbitrary decree, and would confuse our understanding with reasonings high of freedom and foreknowledge, will and fate. Others think it sufficient to silence us with the triumphant assertion, that we are but clay in the hands of the potter, that God may treat us as He wills. Others, again, argue that we must not judge Jacob's sins as though they were sinful, because Scripture records them without distinct condemnation, and because he may have been acting under Divine directions. I do not only reject all such solutions, I declare the first to be blasphemous, and the second deplorable. God is no arbitrary tyrant, but a merciful, loving, righteous Father. And the moral law, in its inviolable majesty, infinitely transcends the wretched "idols of the theatre" which men have called theories of inspiration. If God chose Jacob, it was because the true nature of Jacob was intrinsically worthy of that choice. 3. According to the Hebrew idiom, the strong antithesis of the text connotes less than it asserts, being but a more intense way of saying that, in comparison with his brother, Esau neither deserved nor received the approval of God. A second abatement—though not removal—of the difficulty lies in the fact that Jacob seems worse to us because his faults were essentially those of an Oriental, and are therefore peculiarly offensive to the heart of a true Englishman. And long may falseness and mean-

ness be utterly abhorrent to our Northern character ! But our special national scorn of Jacob's deceitfulness does not make it one whit more contemptible than Esau's animalism. 4. Herein lies the first great moral of these two lives. That which is holy is not to be cast to the dogs. Esau lost the blessing because he recked not of it. Jacob gained it, because his whole soul yearned for its loftiest hopes. Men, on the whole, do win what they will : they do achieve that at which they resolutely aim. This is perfectly true in worldly things. But there is one ambition which is worth the absorbing devotion of a human being. It is the ambition of holiness, the treasure of eternity, the object of seeing the face of God. 5. What a difference is made by different ideals. Each of these twin-brothers lost and gained much more beside their immediate wish. Esau the rough becomes by scornful memorial Edom the red ; Jacob the supplanter becomes Israel the prince with God. 6. Another lesson is, that however lofty be our aims, we must not, in order to hasten them, defect, were it but one hair's breadth, from the path of perfect rectitude. Jacob inherited the blessing because his faith yearned for its spiritual promises ; but because he compassed its immediate achievement by a crime, therefore, with the blessing there fell on him a retribution so heavy, so unremitted, as made his look back over life a bitter pain. 7. In spite of all which stained his life, Jacob was still a patriarch and a saint. You must not judge of him as a whole by the instances, so faithfully recorded, of his guilty plottings. In two main respects Jacob was certainly greater, better, and worthier than Esau. The sins of Esau's life were, so to speak, the very narrative ; the sins of Jacob's life were but the episode of his career. 8. There is this further difference. There is not the faintest sign that Esau ever repented of his sin. But in Jacob's life there was many a moment when he would have forfeited the very blessing to purchase back the innocence by which it had been gained. Learn lastly, that the continuity of godliness is the choicest gift of all, and innocence is better than repentance. And we see in the case of Esau's red pottage and ravenous hour, that one failure under sudden temptation may be alike the ruin and epitome of a man's career, because the impulse of the hour is nothing less than the momentum of the life. (*Dean Farrar.*)

The sovereignty of God in relation to man's secular condition of life :—1. Some men on this earth seem to be more favoured by providence than others, yet they are often unconscious of it. This is true of individuals, and of nations. 2. This difference in the privileges of men is to be ascribed to the sovereignty of God. That sovereignty does not imply either partiality on His part, or irresponsibleness on man's part. 3. Those whom the sovereignty of God does not favour are left in a secularly unenviable condition. They will—(1) Have their possessions destroyed. (2) Their efforts frustrated. (3) Their enemies prospering. (*Homilist.*) *God's love to His Church* :—The first fault reproved in this people is their ingratitude, and not observing or esteeming of God's love toward them, which therefore He demonstrates, from His choosing of Jacob their father, and preferring him to Esau the elder brother ; not only in the matter of election to eternal life, but in that God had chosen Jacob to be the root out of whom the blessed seed should come, and the Church propagated in his posterity ; and accordingly (as an eternal evidence of this rejection of Esau and his posterity) the Lord had given to him but a hilly, barren country, and had now cast them out of it, and laid it desolate, as a habitation for wild beasts ; whereas the seed of Jacob had gotten a fruitful land, and were now restored to it again after their captivity. *Doctrine*—1. The chief and principal study of the visible Church, and the godly in it, ought to be the love of God manifested toward them, as being that which God will not allow to be suspected, and which ought to oblige them to Him ; that which will be the sad ground of a process when it is forgotten and undervalued ; and that which, being looked on when God reproves, will encourage and strengthen to take with it, and make use of it. Therefore doth He begin this doctrine, and the sad challenges with this, "I have loved you, saith the Lord," that is, all of you in general have tasted of respects suitable, and becoming My Bride and the visible Church ; and particularly the elect among you have tasted of My special love. 2. God's love to His Church is often met with great ingratitude, in not being seen and acknowledged as becomes, especially under cross dispensations, in undervaluing the effects of it, when they sit not out our mould, and in deeds denying it, while thoughts of it do not beget love to Him again ; for "yet ye say, wherein hast Thou loved us ?" 3. Election unto eternal life is a sufficient testimony of God's love, to be acknowledged and commended, although all things

else went cross, and seemed to speak disrespect: for in this—"The Lord loved Jacob, and hated Esau," as is expounded (Rom. ix. 13); and this is sufficient to answer their quarrelling. 4. To be chosen and selected to be the Lord's Church and people, speaks so much respect from God unto a nation, as may counter-balance many other hard lots. 5. The Lord's love will not be so clearly seen and acknowledged, when we compare some dispensations with the privileges bestowed upon us, but when we consider our own original, and wherein we are dealt favourably with beyond others, as good as ourselves, if not better: for however Israel, looking on their many privileges, could not see God's love in their low condition, yet it would better appear when they looked back that "Esau was Jacob's brother" (and the elder too), yet "I loved Jacob and hated Esau." 6. The grace of God is not dispensed differently in the world, upon any difference in the point of worth among men: but grace itself makes the difference in choosing out one, and leaving another, as good in himself, to his own ways, according to His pleasure, who hath mercy on whom He will have mercy, for Jacob and Esau are equal, till love makes the difference. 7. However, no man can know love or hatred by outward dispensations, simply considered in themselves, yet afflictions are to wicked men real testimonies of God's displeasure, and God's people, being at peace with Him, may look on external mercies as speaking special love; for Esau's hilly land, and the desolation thereof, speaks "hating of Esau," not only as rejection from Canaan was a type of the rejection from the Church and heaven, but as it was a judgment inflicted on a nation unreconciled, whereas (at least) the godly in Israel might look otherwise on their land and restitution. (*George Hutcheson.*) *The love of God undiscerned*:—God is love. This is true even when He afflicts, for whom He loveth He chasteneth. We must not therefore infer that He does not love because He afflicts. The gardener prunes the grape which he values, not the thistle which he hates. The fruit-tree that is highly prized is trimmed that it may bear more fruit: the forest tree that is designed for the flames is left to grow in unpruned luxuriance. God still addresses us with the same touching appeal, "I have loved you," and He still meets the same hard, ungrateful response, "Wherein hast Thou loved us?" Men suffer many forms of outward evil and inward grief because of their sins; but instead of referring them to the proper cause—their own wickedness—they impiously accuse God in their hearts of being indifferent to their welfare. They refuse to look at the tokens of love strewed all along their history, and dwell in obstinate ingratitude on the evils that their own sin has entailed upon them. And yet that history is crowded with such tokens. (*T. V. Moore, D.D.*) *A remonstrance*:—I. THE PROPHET'S BEPROOF. He is, in the name of God, taxing the people with ingratitude. There is no sin more hateful to God than the sin of ingratitude. Another charge is that of neglect. They offer a polluted sacrifice. All they want is a cheap religion. They are willing to make some offering, but not the best offering. They would be glad to do something for God, but it must cost them nothing. II. THE THREAT. There should, in consequence, be the rejection of their prayers, the rejection of their persons, and the rejection of their services, and a transfer of their privileges to others. III. PRACTICAL LESSONS. 1. God's service is a real service, not a nominal service. Formality is not enough. 2. It is a sure sign of want of grace in your hearts, when God's service is a weariness. 3. Confidence in God is a necessary part of acceptable prayer and acceptable service. (*Montagu Villiers, M.A.*) *God's declared hatred of Edom*:—The two nations, Israel and Edom, were utterly opposed in genius and character. Edom was a people of an unspiritual and self-sufficient temper as ever cursed any of God's human creatures. Like their ancestor they were "profane," without repentance, humility, or ideals, and almost without religion. Apart, therefore, from the long history of war between the two peoples, it was a true instinct which led Israel to regard their brother as representative of that heathendom against which they had to realise their destiny in the world as God's own nation. In choosing the contrast of Edom's fate to illustrate God's love for Israel, "Malachi" was not only choosing what would appeal to the passions of his contemporaries, but what is the most striking and constant antithesis in the whole history of Israel: the absolutely diverse genius and destiny of these two Semitic nations who were nearest neighbours, and, according to their traditions, twin brethren after the flesh. If we keep this in mind we shall understand Paul's use of the antithesis in the passage in which he clenches it by a quotation from Malachi: "as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau

have I hated." In these words the doctrine of the Divine election of individuals appears to be expressed as absolutely as possible. But it would be unfair to read the passage except in the light of Israel's history. In the Old Testament it is a matter of fact that the doctrine of the Divine preference of Israel to Esau appeared only after the respective characters of the nations were manifested in history, and that it grew more defined and absolute only as history discovered more of the fundamental contrast between the two in genius and destiny. In the Old Testament, therefore, the doctrine is the result, not of an arbitrary belief in God's bare fiat, but of historical experience; although, of course, the distinction which experience proves is traced back, with everything else of good or evil that happens, to the sovereign will and purpose of God. Nor let us forget that the Old Testament doctrine of election is of election to service only. That is to say, the Divine intention in electing covers not the elect individual or nation only, but the whole world, and its need of God and His truth. The event to which "Malachi" appeals as evidence for God's rejection of Edom is the desolation of the latter's ancient heritage, and the abandonment to the "jackals of the desert." (*Geo. Adam Smith, D.D.*) *Election*:—Why should God say, Jacob I loved, Esau I hated? Why should He choose one nation of the earth to favour beyond all others? Is not that an arbitrary and unfair exercise of His will? Now, no doubt that is the case if we only put on election the interpretation common among the later Jews, and the one most familiar to ourselves. We need to correct it by the larger ideas which St. Paul suggests to us, and which are, at least, latent in the Old Testament. For one thing, let us remember that God's purposes are wider than anything we can conceive of, and that we have to make allowances for that, whenever we seek to understand or criticise His providential dealings. As St. Paul tried to teach the Christians in Rome, God chose Israel not for the sake of Israel alone, but for the sake of the world. To him this explains at once the apparent arbitrariness of the choice, and the narrowness of the groove within which Israel had moved. God elected and trained the people for a certain special end. It was not that by nature they were specially fitted for that end, but rather that they were made to fit it by His grace. Here is one Semitic people out of many showing a peculiar temperament and genius for religion, and subjected to influences all of which tended to emphasise its peculiarities and fit it for its destiny among mankind. And its history can only be read aright in the light of some larger and even world-wide scheme, which it was being prepared to fulfil. But, of course, it is not only in Israel, or, indeed, in any of the nations of the world, that this apparent arbitrariness of Providence is to be seen. It runs through human life. Take the story of Jacob and Esau, as only referring to the men themselves, and we find that it is one that is constantly repeated in our experience. The inequality of human destinies is one of the stock themes of the pessimist; one man is chosen and another rejected, and it is certainly not of works but of Him that calleth. One of the most disconcerting things in all our experience is the apparent failure of goodness to secure its reward. Sometimes it is the most unworthy who is selected for the crown, while the saint is passed by or made to stoop under the cross. Then men enter for the race of life strangely and even unfairly handicapped. One man inherits a physique and a nervous system which means a happy temperament and unusual strength of character; another is the victim of congenital weakness, which dooms him to much misery and possibly to sin. One man is elected to conditions altogether favourable to the development of his higher self, while another's circumstances tend constantly to drag him down. We have all experienced at times the baffling and tragic sense of wrong to which such thoughts as these give rise. But do we remember that most of our perplexity is due to the fact that we confine our views to the earthly and material side of life? We have to take much else into account before we can hope to face the prospect which God's providence presents with anything like equanimity. His purposes are surely not confined in their scope either to the lives of individuals or to this world in which we now live in the flesh. Nor is the supreme object of His dealing with us the happiness of many or of most. If we are to trust all the indications of natural and revealed religion, God's purpose is supremely ethical. In His eyes goodness is as far above happiness as heaven is above the earth; and that even happiness should be sacrificed that high moral ends may be secured is something which should cause us no concern. Then, again, if we have read our Bibles to any purpose, or even studied intelligently the average experiences of men, we shall

know that no view of life which leaves out of account its spiritual aspect can be either just or sane. We cannot, gaze as we will, see the end from the beginning. Events that seem most contrary and cruel in our experience have in them a soul of goodness for those that have eyes to see. The wicked may flourish like a green bay-tree, but he perishes like the green bay-tree too when his time comes; and the righteous may obtain no reward but that of a good conscience, yet in the end he is received into everlasting habitations. There is more being done all round us to redress the balance than we have any conception of, but it is not until we come to look at life from a higher standpoint than that of mere earthly interests that we can see it. The work of Providence in a man's life is not finished when the man himself has passed away; sometimes it is only just begun. But we need to bear in mind that God's election of a man or of a race is not always, as we think, an election to favour or privilege alone. Under Providence special privilege means special responsibilities, and election is election to service. Men and nations alike are instruments in God's hands, and He makes them serve His ends. Where there is a special endowment or fitness, there is a special function to be fulfilled, and this function is one in which many have an interest outside the individual. We must learn to judge therefore in the light, not only of the special endowment given, but of the special ends to be served by it. The history of Israel, for example, were almost inexplicable apart from its results on the religion of mankind. The key to it is to be found not in Moses or the prophets or the rabbis, but in Christ. The people had been fitted for a particular work, and it was their fitness which constituted their election. This helps to explain the strange one-sidedness there is in national life. It is a question of selection as well as election, the power or faculty most regularly employed growing at the expense of the rest. And to the religious mind each nation alike is an instrument of Providence, and in them all is to be seen something of the grand purpose of God working itself out slowly but surely, through difficulty and apparent defeat, towards that best which is yet to be. But we need to come a little closer to the subject yet. All that has been said may be quite true, but it does not dispose of the difficulty in our text. There may be a great deal to be said for the doctrine of election in the abstract; but when it is couched in such language as this, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated," it is difficult to avoid a sense of undue favouritism, and the thought that God is, after all, a respecter of persons, in the sense of having personal preferences. And yet we have only to look behind the words to see that the conclusion is unwarranted. As it is, we see behind the words a law or principle which we must not ignore. If we may argue from human analogies, it is but natural and just to say that God loves those who love Him. One of the things we learn most surely from Bible history is that God does not look for moral perfection in those to whom He grants His favours, and whom He chooses to do His work. Jacob was far from being a perfect character; but with all his faults he had the supreme virtue of religion, he had learned to take God into account in his actions, and to work and think with reference to His will. Esau, on the other hand, is the type of those who are without God in the world—profane persons, who are blind to their highest interests, and live wilfully on the lower side of life. What wonder that from such God's face should be turned away! God loves those who love Him, and the shadow cast by His love is His hatred of all that would lead men away from Him and keep them in the dark of selfishness and sin. As has been said already, we have to reckon with man's will as well as God's. He compels no man to be either righteous or sinful, and the fact that we are free adds a brighter halo to our goodness, and deepens immeasurably the stain of our guilt. We are always working either with God or against Him, and this fact, while it adds a new hope and assurance to our efforts after righteousness, makes the evil that is in us point only to despair. Judged by the only standards we can use, we have to lay the blame on man and not on God for whatever is dark and terrible in the words, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." A subject like this brings vividly home to us the supreme needs of the religious man—faith in God and co-operation with Him. It is often cruelly enough revealed to us that in this life—in spite of the light of reason—we are as those that grope in the dark. After all, the world is only in the making as yet, and we have to learn to judge not by the intricate mass of scaffolding, rubbish heaps, and half-built walls that we see, but by the Architect's plans. In spite of all the perplexities and inconsistencies which puzzle us here, we have to learn to look at the design which runs through them all, and the purpose which by

them is being slowly evolved. Sometimes all we can do is to trust and wait, to be sure that there is a secret to this mystery and a solution to that riddle, but that we have not yet eyes to see them; and we must remember, too, that faith will never sit with folded hands doing nothing, but that true faith always works. The greater the trouble and the difficulty the more need there is for work, and the effort to do God's will as far as it is known is the only means by which that will can be more clearly understood. (*W. B. Selbie, M.A.*) **The dragons of the wilderness.**—*The dragons*:—Ancient history is full of legends concerning the deadly power of dragons. The Bible has many references to these imaginary monsters. In Church history they are represented as winged crocodiles, and regarded as emblems of sin and the devil. There are spiritual dragons now. Consider—I. **THESE DRAGONS.** They are besetting sins, turbulent passions, sinful customs, fascinating vices, evil spirits, &c. II. **WHERE THEY DWELL.** The wilderness. The world, though beautiful, is yet cursed by sin. To the saintly heart it is often a wilderness—1. For its loneliness. 2. For its barrenness. 3. For its dangers. Dragons lurk there. They may pour forth their fire and fury upon us there at any time. Application. Be watchful. Seek the help of the great dragon-slayer—Christ. In all legends of the slaying of dragons it was one hero that did it—Hercules, Perseus, Siegfried, St. Michael, St. George—these slew the dragons, and delivered the people. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*)

Ver. 4. **They shall build, but I will throw down.**—*Foolish builders*:—To separate our lives from God is folly; to live in opposition to Him is madness. Many not only disregard Him, but also oppose Him. I. **WHO ARE THESE FOOLISH BUILDERS?** 1. Those who seek to build up a reputation with deceptions. 2. Those who build up the fortunes of their houses with unrighteousness. 3. Those who build up a religious life without faith in Christ, the only foundation. 4. Those who build up their characters with evil principles and deeds. 5. Those who build up high positions by treachery and tyranny. II. **CONSIDER THE CERTAINTY OF THEIR OVERTHROW.** Woe be to the work that has God against it. It cannot stand. Think of His power, knowledge, and absolute control of all things. Everything that He does not smile upon must perish. History confirms this. Kingdoms created with great magnificence and might, but built in defiance of His laws, have, like Edom, fallen. Theological systems, and ecclesiastical despotisms that have been built up in opposition to Him, have been overthrown. Biography also confirms this. No life that has been spent in opposition to Him, however apparently influential, but has crumbled away like a falling tower. When God says, "I will throw down," none can save. Experience also confirms it. Learn not to lay a stone in life without God. We should enter upon no work without first securing His aid and blessing. We can only erect a structure that will stand for ever, as we build in God's way, and under the influence of the Spirit of Jesus. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*)

Ver. 5. **The Lord will be magnified from (or upon) the border of Israel.**—Each nation had its God. The deities were made to rival each other in the protection and blessing which they afforded to the nations that worshipped them. I. **THIS PROPHETIC UTTERANCE.** Evils abounded when the prophet lived. The sins of the people were eclipsing God's glory; but the prophet knew that it would shine forth as the sun. It is therefore an utterance—(1) Of holy faith; (2) of firm assurance; (3) of exultant expectation. God must be magnified. It is necessary—1. For the furtherance of His purposes. 2. For the vindication of His righteousness. 3. For the good of the universe. II. **HOW THIS UTTERANCE WAS, AND MAY BE FULFILLED.** The history of the Israelites abounds with confirmations of the prophet's words. His faith would be strengthened as he remembered past dispensations. Though God's ancient people were dispersed, the spiritual Israel remains. He has been magnified. 1. In the redemption of the cross. 2. In the interposition of providence in behalf of His Church. 3. In the holy lives and sufferings of His people. 4. In the missionary enterprises of His Church. III. **WHERE THIS SHOULD BE FULFILLED.** In "the border of Israel." The spiritual Israel must ever magnify God. This is the duty of the Church. 1. The Church should interpret all events so as to do this. 2. It should do it under all circumstances. 3. It should seek this first in all its organisations and evangelistic efforts. Application. Let this be our aim continually—to magnify

God. We often seek to magnify ourselves. Our truest greatness is in making Him great. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*)

Ver. 6. A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master.—*Christian reverence*.:—There is a sin common among us, which we may be unwilling to recognise, the sin of irreverence; a want of respect for the presence, power, and majesty of God, arising from thoughtlessness or practical unbelief. We need not attempt to prove that God has a right to expect from us the fullest tribute of veneration which we can offer, for this truth is a self-evident one. He is the Creator; we are the creatures. He is the Redeemer; we are they whom He has purchased to Himself. He is the Sanctifier; we are they who need sanctification. He is Eternal, Almighty, Infinite; we are mortal, weak, finite. As His mercy claims our love, so do His power and goodness claim our reverence. This conclusion we must have arrived at, if we had only the light of nature; it is fully sustained by revelation. In order to serve God acceptably, we must serve Him "with reverence and godly fear." But on this point we are lamentably defective, so that the reproof addressed to Israel in the days of Malachi may, with as great, or even greater, appropriateness, be applied to ourselves. Malachi's censure was, in the first instance, applied to the priests. But as it was with the priests, so is it now with all. We do not deny that God is our Father and Master. With our lips we acknowledge Him, but our hearts are far from Him. We do not consider the force of our words when we confess Him, or what they involve. We speak of Him as our Father and Master, but we tacitly persuade ourselves that in His case the paternal and domestic relation is something different from what it is among ourselves; that we are not His servants and children in the same sense as we are with regard to such of our fellow-creatures as hold such a connection with us. And it is true God has this further claim upon us, that He is our God. But this is a consideration from which we shrink, and so endeavour to persuade ourselves that His Godhead rather diminishes than enhances His claims upon us on other grounds. Irreverence in Malachi's days was shown by the character of the offerings made to God. Instead of bringing the best and most perfect, men thought it sufficient to sacrifice what was torn and crippled, what was cheap and paltry, what was of no value in the market. They offered to God of that which cost them nothing. Have we no temptation to commit precisely the same kind of sin? Look at the state of our churches; and negligence in church-repairs. It may be said, "so as our hearts be right, it matters little under what external circumstances we worship." The Israelites might have offered a similar plea. But let us examine whether our hearts are right, and whether we have as much reverence for God's presence in His house as we ought to have. It is not in God's own house only that we show our indifference to Him. The manner in which we treat His name, His day, His Word, His ministers, His sacraments, all is so much evidence against us that we have not that abiding awe of Him which is due to Him. From what causes such a spirit of irreverence has grown, and spread till it has taken possession of us; in what was its origin, and how it has been fostered, I cannot now stop to express an opinion. The fact is before us, and the bitter fruits of our profaneness and irreverence are ripening day by day. I do not say that our national and individual irreverence will end in open apostasy, but the tendency is, of course, that way; and we are in the greater peril, because the infection has spread both silently and universally. What then must be done? Let each endeavour to realise to himself more fully than he has yet done, the presence of God among us. He is present in His Church, in His sacraments, in His ministers, in His poor; present among us everywhere, and at all seasons. We must watch ourselves in little things, and reflect continually before whom they are done. We must avoid speaking of religious subjects before those who are likely to ridicule them. As a Father, we must pay God the honour that is due. We must not forget that, as our Master, He claims our fear as well as our love. (*F. E. Paget, M.A.*) *The honour due to God*.:—This text is identified with general and permanent principles, and it admits of a general and permanent application, to be interpreted as a just pleading by Jehovah on behalf of His own glory, with the whole family of man. **I. WHENCE THE CLAIM OF GOD UPON THE YOUNG ARISES.** From His character as Father. The reason why the Most High is thus represented is, because from His creative will and power men derive their being, and because by His providential arrangements and care their being is supplied and preserved. Hence His paternal

character is extensive as the world and permanent as time. It is designed to be recognised by us as involving the two great attributes of authority and kindness—authority which is supreme and unimpeachable, kindness which is unfailing and unbounded. II. WHAT THE CLAIM OF GOD UPON YOU INVOLVES. He claims a Father's right to be honoured. The mode of address here implies the guilty omission of men to render to God what is His due. "Where is Mine honour?" A vast proportion of the human family have attempted to banish God as an alien from the universe He has made. 1. The honour which your Father requires is your adoring reverence of His perfections. 2. Your practical obedience of His law. 3. Your zealous devotedness to His cause. III. HOW IS THE CLAIM OF GOD UPON YOU COMMENDED? He whom you are summoned to honour possesses an absolute right to you. 1. Your compliance with the claim of God as your Father will secure your dignity. 2. It will secure your usefulness. 3. It will secure your happiness. Your consciences will be perturbed by no agitations. Your happiness will be that arising from gratitude and from benevolence. The knowledge that you have imparted happiness to others will be delightful. (*James Parsons.*) *The Father's honour*:—The claim of God upon the confidence and obedience of man is based upon the unalterable fact that man is the son of God. For the answer to this ceaseless appeal to the filial instinct of humanity the world's Father stands waiting with tireless patience and unspeakable compassion at the door of every heart. There is a stage in the spiritual development of most lives when this transcendent truth passes from a dim instinct into a radiant certainty, it is the stage of "knowing the Lord." The instinct of sonship has never been absent from the race. The ancient Aryans spoke of the Eternal as "Dyaus Pitar"; the Greeks as "Zeus Pater"; the Latins as "Jupiter"; the Norsemen as "Thor," each word foreshadowing with stammering lips the Pater-noster—our heaven Father. Christ alone revealed the truth in perfection, and taught it in power. He, the revealer of the Father's moral and affectional nature in the limitations of a human body. This new element infused into the thought of the world possesses individual hearts but slowly. The mind perceives that as the self-existent primal cause of all has conditioned Himself in natural phenomena that all thinkers might recognise Him as an Intelligence; so Almighty Fatherhood has conditioned His moral attributes, His love, tenderness, and sacrifice in the workings of a human mind, and the words of a human voice, and the actions of a human life, in the Incarnation. As he looks on Jesus he sees Him as the great Sacrament of the Fatherhood, the visible embodiment of the all-pervading Father-Spirit. Just here comes in the searching power of the individual application of the appeal of God for the spiritual evolution of man. "If I be a Father, where is Mine honour?" The test of knowing the Lord is hearing the voice: ears that are deafened by the din of second causes hear not the voice. The conscious moral act whereby a son of God accepted the challenge, is deliberate mental disentanglement from second causes, and the recognition of God in every concern of life. The Father's demand, "Where is Mine honour?" is not satisfied without witness, enthusiasm, and loyalty. The duty of witness is clear and inalienable. No son of God can claim exemption. As to enthusiasm; one characteristic of the civilised heathenism of the age is the undisguised contempt ever poured upon enthusiasm. The Archetypal Man was an enthusiast; He loved the people with passion, and He turned the world upside down. And loyalty to the heavenly citizenship, and the guidance of the Eternal Spirit. (*Canon Wülberforce, D.D.*) *A Fatherly exhortation*:—Every relationship has its rights and duties. God's claims are paramount. As our Father He has a right to our veneration and love. He requires us to possess the filial spirit. I. CONSIDER THE TRUTH ASSUMED. "If then I be a Father." God's Fatherhood has been generally recognised. He has always acted as a Father towards men—1. In bringing them into existence. 2. In stamping upon them His own image. 3. In providing for their needs in the bounties of nature. 4. In redeeming them from sin. 5. In adopting them into His heavenly family. 6. In arranging life so as to discipline them. II. GOD'S APPEAL IN VIEW OF THIS TRUTH. "Where is Mine honour?" This appeal is just and right. It is our duty to render honour to God. This involves—1. Reverence toward Him. Always to speak of Him with respect and love; revering His ordinances; worshipping in His sanctuary. 2. Obedience to His commandments. Making them the rule of our lives, and delighting in them as the expression of His will. 3. Trust in His goodness. Believing that He will never err in the arrangements of His providence, but

that all things will work together for our good. 4. Submission to His chastisements. Bearing affliction as from His hand. 5. By revealing His image. Showing in our dispositions and deeds that we are His children. III. How THIS APPEAL SHOULD BE RESPONDED TO. 1. By serious reflection. 2. By true repentance. 3. By earnest prayer for the possession of the spirit of sonship promised in Christ. 4. By constant efforts to honour God in the future. (IV. *Osborne Lilley*.)

*Of God's being the Father and Master of mankind:—Consider—*I. HOW TRULY GOD IS THE FATHER, AND THE MASTER OF MANKIND. 1. The Father. God gave being to the world and all things in it. St. Paul styles Him "the Father, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named," the Head of the rational system, the Father both of angels and men, who all derive their being from Him, and in the constitution of their nature bear some features and resemblances of the great original from whence they sprung. God created man in His own image. It is evident from our consciousness and experience, that we have such powers of perception and understanding, such a sense of good and evil, right and wrong, and such principles of honesty and goodness in our nature as ally and unite us to the Father of spirits, and give us a striking resemblance of Him, in some of His most glorious attributes and qualities. God is also to be considered the Father of mankind, as He has made an ample provision for the improvement and happiness of the excellent nature which He has given them. 2. The Master. As God hath all power in Himself, and as by this alone the universe subsists, all creatures whatsoever are necessarily in a state of subjection to Him. There is something implied in the notion of God's being the Master of men, more than His merely exercising an uncontrollable dominion over them. But God is a perfectly holy, righteous, and good Potentate, governing rational agents according to the dictates of the highest sanctity and justice, and consulting their happiness in all His administrations towards them. That He is the righteous Governor of men is evident from His having laid us under the law of righteousness in the constitution of our being. The foundation of God's moral government over men is firmly laid in His own nature and in ours. A just order is plainly prevalent in the conduct of human affairs, notwithstanding the irregularities and confusions which are to be observed in them. II. WHAT IS THAT DUTY WHICH WE OWE TO GOD AS FATHER AND MASTER? Expressed in the terms *honour and fear*.

1. Honour. No sentiments are made universal and better known to the mind than those of respect, duty, and submission, which children entertain for their parents in this world. If this be the temper which becomes us with respect to the fathers of our flesh, how much more must we cultivate the same temper towards the Father of our spirits. Surely the devotion of our minds towards Him must rise into a perfect adoration of His goodness, accompanied with the sincerest gratitude and love, the firmest affiance in Him, the most absolute resignation to His will, and the most earnest endeavours to obey His laws and to imitate His purity and benignity in our whole conversation. 2. Fear. As the masters of this world are of different tempers and characters, so the fear of their subjects or servants in regard to them is of very different kinds. God has nothing in His nature resembling the qualities of the arbitrary or oppressive masters and rulers of this world. His government is founded on the maxims of perfect wisdom, goodness, and righteousness, therefore a slavish fear of Him can be no part of the homage which His worshippers and servants are to pay to Him. The only fear of God which it becomes us to entertain, is a mixed affection of mind, made up of a high reverence of His perfections, particularly His wisdom, justice, purity, goodness, and power; an affectionate esteem of His laws, an earnest solicitude to obey those laws, and a great dread of transgressing them, from a sense of the baseness and odiousness of trampling upon the authority of our rightful and most gracious Lord and Saviour. The cultivation of these principles, the honour and fear of God, should be earnestly commended. Let us not, upon any pretences, excuse ourselves from the cultivation of a becoming temper towards the Deity, but cheerfully pay Him all that honour and love, that obedience and submission which, as our most compassionate and indulgent Father, and our most gracious and righteous King and Lawgiver, He claims and demands from us. (*J. Orr, D.D.*)

*Truth learned from our human relations:—*As we form our notions of the Divine character and perfections from our consciousness of similar affections in our own minds, so all our ideas of the relations in which we stand to Deity are derived from the relations in which we are placed to our brethren of mankind. We could have no ideas or conceptions of the perfections of God

unless we had some corresponding and similar powers in our own minds. Man was formed after the image of God; and, although that image has been tarnished and defaced by his fall and his transgression, he retains those capacities and susceptibilities of soul, which remind him of the moral glory from which he has fallen. He knows, from reflection on his own nature, and capacities, what is meant by wisdom, power, justice, truth, goodness. When he views these qualities as attributes of Divinity, he regards them as free from every imperfection, uninterrupted in their operation, and incapable of change or decay. In a similar manner we form our notions of the relations in which we stand to Deity, and of the affections and duties which these relations imply and demand. As we know of the relation of a father to his children, the Scriptures do not explain the nature of the relation, but urge the duties which it implies. In the very forcible and touching appeal of the text, we are reminded of that honour and obedience which we owe to God as His children and servants, and are pointedly charged with having withheld them. Endeavour to state the nature and reasonableness of that claim which God, as our Father and Master, has to our honour and fear, and urge the inquiry, whether the claim has been recognised and obeyed. The first characteristic of that honour and fear which a son and servant show to a father and master, is delight in his presence and society. Wherever the filial relation is felt and sustained with the affection which it implies, it prompts the child to seek the presence and company of his parent. A servant, too, that fears his master with sincere regard, delights in his presence. Similar to this is that honour and fear which God requires of those who profess to be His sons and His servants. If our relation to God be anything more than a name, His presence will be the object of our most ardent desire, and communion with Him the highest happiness we shall seek to know. But can this be said to be the experience or the taste of many who call God their Father and Master? In the second place, obedience to the Divine commandments is another indication of that honour and fear which God, as a Father and Master, demands of those who profess to be His sons and His servants. An implicit confidence in the wisdom of his parents is one of the earliest instincts which nature has implanted in the bosom of a child; and to merit parental approbation and love is one of the most amiable and powerful desires that influence his conduct. Every expression of a father's will commands respect, and the sweetest music that falls upon the ear is the voice of paternal applause. It is this cheerful, childlike, and affectionate obedience which our heavenly Father claims from those who profess to be His sons and servants. We say, He is our Father—let Him have our filial love and obedience. We profess to bow to Him as our Master and Lord—let us devote ourselves unreservedly to His service and honour. In the third place, the relation should prompt a desire after resemblance of God in His moral excellence. The principle of imitation is one of the earliest and most active tendencies of our nature. As reason advances, the principle of imitation retains its power, and exerts its influence. Its power and influence are chiefly discernible in the resemblance which it generates in the temper and affections of the child to those of the parent. It is true that the tendency may be very strikingly modified by counteracting circumstances. But the truth holds good, that there is a strong and ever-operating tendency in a son to imitate his father; and where this imitating tendency is exercised by virtue in the parent, it is the source of the highest reciprocal satisfaction and delight. What the Father of our spirits requires of us is to elevate and ennoble this tendency to imitation by directing it to Himself. In the New Testament this imitation or resemblance of God is repeatedly pointed out as the prominent and characteristic distinction of His children. The moral excellences of the Divine character are presented as at once the sources of our comfort and the objects of our imitation. Only at an infinite distance from the moral glory of the Divine character the sons of mortality must for ever remain. In every renewed heart there is the ardent and ceaseless, and ever active desire to grow in resemblance to the moral grandeur which it adores and loves. In the fourth place, acquiescence in the appointments of His providence, and submission to His chastisement, distinguish those who are the sons and servants of God. In the exercise of his authority, and to promote the happiness and preserve the virtue of his children, the father must sometimes insist on privation and restraint, and give inflictions which he administers with reluctance and pain. Our Heavenly Father, who knows our waywardness and frailty, puts forth His hand in chastisement upon us. He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children

of men. Then what is the state of mind in which they should be met and endured? Have the visitations of Providence always been met in a right spirit? Have we not often, by the fretfulness of our temper in the hour of visitation, evinced the absence of the childlike spirit that becomes those who profess themselves the sons of God? (*J. Johnston.*) *Obedience the practical test of affection*.—This address was made to the priests of the Lord, at a very corrupt age of the Jewish Church. The whole Church was exceedingly polluted. Every precept of the law was violated and every rite of the sanctuary perverted. It will be no violation of the spirit of the text if we apply it to an impenitent world, embracing those who have no show of godliness, as well as the whole family of false professors. We find in the lips of many who make no pretensions to a change of heart, high professions of respect for the character and government of God. They claim Him as their Father, and would have us believe that they respect and obey His laws. We inquire whether men of this character yield Him that filial esteem, that dutiful subjection, which are due to a Father and a Master. I CONTEMPLATE THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD, AND SEE IF WE CAN DISCOVER HIM DEALING WITH ALL HIS RATIONAL CREATURES AS A FATHER AND A MASTER. 1. As a Father and Master He protects them. This the son and servant expect. God keeps His eye on all His intelligent creatures, and puts underneath them His arm of mercy. 2. He provides for all His creatures. No man could make his seed vegetate, or render his fields fertile, or ensure success in trade independently of his Maker. 3. He makes us know His will. We have some lessons from the broad sheet of nature; but in His Word He has opened all His heart; has made every duty plain, and placed it in the power of every son and servant of His to do His pleasure. 4. He has made our duties light. The service He requires is pleasant and easy. 5. He provides for our future happiness. II. HOW WILL A KIND AND DUTIFUL SON OR SERVANT TREAT A FATHER OR MASTER? 1. The son loves his father, and the good servant his master. If we have any love to God, we must love His whole character, and must learn His character from the Bible. The question is, do that class of men who speak so highly of their Maker, love the whole of the Divine character? They are pleased with only a part of the Divine character. Hence they will deny such doctrines as clash with their views of God. If they loved God they would believe what He says. 2. The good child loves the society of his father; and the faithful servant loves to be with his master. 3. A good son and a faithful servant will be cheerfully obedient. A dutiful temper is indispensable in either of these stations. Will the class of men addressed in the text stand this test? Are they uniform in regard to their duty? Have they a tender conscience which fears to do wrong, fears to neglect a duty, fears to violate an obligation, dreads the least deviation from the most perfect rectitude? 4. The son and servant will each be attached to his father's or his master's family. Do these people attach themselves to the family of Christ? Do they love His disciples and choose them as their intimates? 5. The servant and son are very jealous of the honour of their father and master. But do we discover this delicacy of feeling in that class of men who would be esteemed religious, but who have no pretensions to a change of heart? 6. The kind son and the dutiful servant will wish to have others acquainted with their father and their master. (*D. A. Clark.*) *Devotion to a master*.—Admiral Sir George Tryon, to whose fatal error of judgment (his only mistake as a commander, it is said) the loss of the *Victoria* was due, was much beloved and trusted by his subordinates. As he stood on the bridge of the fast sinking ship, he was heard to say to a midshipman standing beside him, "Go, my lad. Save yourself while there's time." But the midshipman answered, "I'd rather stay with you, sir." And he did. Christian! The duties and trials of life are daily testing your devotion to a Master who makes no mistakes. (*S. S. Chronicle.*) *Honour shown in conduct and in sentiment*.—A young man who occupies pleasant rooms in a large city was entertaining a guest from his country home. "You see I honour my father and my mother," he said, pointing to two portraits which hung in prominent positions on the walls of his sitting-room. "You do in sentiment, Frank," answered his visitor; "but if you will forgive an old friend speaking plainly, your principles do not honour them to the same degree. Those portraits have looked down on a good many card parties and wine suppers and wasted hours. They have seen neglected the work which you came to the city to do, and your old habits of 'plain living and high thinking' forgotten very often. Think it over, won't you?" The young man, it may be said, did think it over,

and he did not need another such reminder. Instances of inconsistency between sentiment and rules of conduct can be discovered by everyone in persons around him easily, in himself not quite so easily perhaps, but pretty surely. (*Christian Age*.) *A life expected worthy of the Divine Master*.—A former queen of Madagascar, gathering some of the palace officers together, said to them, "I am aware that many of you are numbered among the praying people; I have no objection to you joining them if you think it right, but remember, if you do so, I shall expect from you a life worthy of that profession." **O priests, that despise My name.**—*The priests challenged*.—"And ye say, Wherein have we despised Thy Name?" This is the worst kind of impiety, because it displays utter ignorance of one's self. The caution is not against open or violent hostility; there may be simple ignorance, or unconscious contempt, or that sort of passivity and indifference which amounts to positive neglect. We go down not by a plunge, but by an inclined plane. The plane is lubricated, is well-oiled, so that we slip down little by little, and hardly know that we are slipping. "Ye offer polluted bread upon Mine altar." The retort is, "Wherein have we polluted Thee?" In this way. "Ye say, The table of the Lord is contemptible." There the error was fundamental. This is the charge that is levelled against all men to-day. Why patter with incidental errors, why not lift up the impeachment to its proper dignity, and charge men with having left the Lord, with having turned their backs upon the Lord? (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 7. Ye offer polluted bread upon Mine altar.—*The sacrament polluted*.—What closeness of attention, what concentration of thought does it not require of us, if we consider the great and comprehensive views, which animated the Saviour of the world when He instituted the sacrament of the Supper! Behold Him prepared to finish the great work, which heaven has given Him to do. He comes to substitute Himself in the room of those victims whose blood could do nothing towards the purification of guilty man. What shall He do to support Himself in the prospect of such tremendous arrangements? Love formed the generous design of the sacrifice which He is ready to offer up; and love will carry Him through the arduous undertaking. He says to Himself, that the memory of this death, which He is going to endure, shall be perpetuated in the churches, even to the end of the world. He Himself institutes the memorial of it. Malachi severely censures the priests of his day, because called, as they were, to maintain good order in the Church, they calmly overlooked, or avowedly countenanced, the open violation of it. He reproaches them for this misconduct, by the example of what a son owes to his father, and a servant to his master. (*James Saurin*.) *The table of the Lord profaned*.—1. Let us state the parallel between the altar of burnt-offerings, the table of the shew-bread, and the sacramental table of the Lord's Supper; the offerings which were presented to God on the first, and those which we still present to him on the second. The viands presented on both the one and the other are the meat of God, or the bread of God. The sacred ceremonies are destined to the same end, and represent the same mysteries, namely, the intimate union which God wishes to maintain with His Church and people. The august ceremony of the holy sacrament is a mystery of reconciliation between the penitent sinner and the God of mercy. What made the ancient Jews profane the table of the Lord? How came they to say, "The table of the Lord is contemptible"? It was—(1) Because they formed not just ideas of the end which God proposed to Himself, when He enjoined the observance of these solemnities. (2) It arose from their unwillingness to fulfil the moral engagements which the ceremonial observance imposed. (3) It proceeded from their wanting a just sense of the value of the blessings communicated by these. The sources of unworthy communicating in the Christian world are the same—want of illumination; want of virtue; want of feeling. Apply to those who, on reviewing their former communion services, see cause to consider themselves as chargeable with the guilt which God imputed to the Jews who lived in the days of Malachi. Reflect on the shortness of the time usually devoted to preparation for partaking of the Lord's Supper. And on the slightness of the changes which these solemnities produce. Do not deceive yourselves. Study to know and feel the whole extent of your felicity, and let a sense of the benefits with which God hath loaded thee, kindle the hallowed flame of gratitude in your hearts. (*Ibid.*) *The profession and the practice of religion*.—1. These should always be in accord. Any

discrepancy between them is morally unnatural. Our conduct should accord with our creed, our deeds with our doctrines. These priests showed—(1) A lawless spirit. (2) A niggardly spirit. (3) A captious spirit. (4) A thoughtless spirit. (*Homilist*.)

Ver. 8. If ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil?—*Imperfect sacrifice*:—The old law demanded that God should be honoured with the sacrifice of a man's best. Every oblation was to be free from spot or blemish. Such laws had their symbolic and spiritual meaning. They asserted God's right as first and supreme. They embodied the law of sacrifice, which is the law of all holy beings, and they formed a test of the faith and love of those who professed to be worshippers of God. The reality of the test was manifest in the fact that there were those who sought to escape the demand. In their view, anything would do for sacrifice. Are there not multitudes still whose professed worship is nothing more than a mere miserable pretence? Surely our temptations to disobey are just as powerful as ever. Our business now is not with the blasphemous or the infidel, but with those who either render, or fancy that they render, God some service. 1. The appeal of the text may be addressed to all whose service does not include the sacrifice of the heart. Many give their souls to the world,—to what remains God is welcome. They are found in God's house, but though they are present there they do not render any spiritual worship. What is this but offering the blind and lame and sick for sacrifice; and is it not evil? Can it be that it is thus God is content to be served? Not thus would even man be satisfied. It is God only whom we expect to please by a service that lacks every element of thorough heartiness, and is nothing more than a piece of mechanism. Yet is there no other whom it is so utterly hopeless to deceive. He asks the heart, and He knows that, despite all the beauty of our outward rites, the heart is what we absolutely refuse. But such religion is no religion at all. 2. The language may be applied to those who purpose to render to God the service of their last hours. They will take thought for the present life, and the soul, with all its immortal interests, they will leave to the uncertain contingencies of a future which may never be theirs. This is bringing the blind, the lame, the sick for sacrifice; and is it not evil? We need not deny the possibility of death-bed repentance; we may not limit the grace of God. But if not impossible, it is in every way improbable that the sacrifice of life's last hour is what God will accept. 3. These words may be addressed to the secret disciple. You will do just so much as is necessary to ensure your salvation, but beyond this nothing more,—there is no love to Jesus constraining devotion, making you rejoice even in the cross which you bear for Him, teaching you, as with a holy ingenuity, to find out modes in which you may glorify Him. And is not this evil? 4. The question may be directed to the half-hearted professor. There are many sharing in our worship who are lacking in all heartiness and fervour. They do not disgrace their profession: they observe with a certain regularity the ordinances; but in all generous, noble, devoted consecration they are found wanting. Let me address myself earnestly to you. Does not the text describe your sacrifice? Everywhere else, if the heart is interested at all, you are full of intense zeal. In religion you are cold and indifferent. Review your own service; compare it with what you do for other lords, and say, does it not correspond with the description of the text? (*J. G. Rogers, B.A.*) *The Divine appeal*:—I. THE APPEAL. 1. To the dictates of conscience. 2. To the usages of human life. II. THE LESSONS THE APPEAL SUGGESTS. 1. We have all failed in the discharge of our duty to God. 2. Our failure in the discharge of our duty to God is incapable of defence. 3. We need a Saviour. 4. Our services can be accepted by God only through the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ. (*G. Brooks.*) *A strange test*:—They performed solemn duties hypocritically. Malachi would show them their folly by asking them to test their conduct by the way in which the (Persian) governor of the land would regard it. I. MEN OFTEN ACT TOWARDS GOD AS THEY WOULD NOT ACT TOWARDS AN EARTHLY RULER. Men generally respect human authorities. If gifts are presented to them they are of the best. They humble themselves before human majesty, and fear to insult it. But men act differently towards God. 1. How many stand in His presence and profane His name. Let them offer that to their governor. 2. How men treat His authority and disregard His commands. 3. How many pretend to make sacrifices for His cause, and yet give only that which is worthless, or what they think will

bring the man equivalent in temporal good. 4. How many render heartless homage and selfish service. Men act in these ways sometimes through (1) Spiritual insensibility; (2) self-deception; (3) erroneous conceptions of God; or (4) covetousness. God has a right to all that we possess. No earthly governor has such a claim upon us. To act towards Him deceitfully is foolish, ungrateful, and ruinous. II. OUR CONDUCT TOWARDS GOD MAY BE TESTED BY THE WAY IN WHICH IT WOULD BE RECEIVED BY AN EARTHLY RULER. Such rulers are not always just. This is a test that is—1. Easily applied. 2. One that the humblest can comprehend. 3. One that may reveal much. 4. One that should be applied honestly. III. THE DISPLEASURE OF AN EARTHLY GOVERNOR MAY REFLECT THE DISPLEASURE OF GOD. This is not always the case. Rulers have been displeased with and persecuted the most holy. But the honest displeasure of a ruler against hypocritical pretensions and deceitful gifts is a reflection of the Divine displeasure. Would thy “governor” be “pleased with thee”? If not, there is—1. Just cause to fear. 2. Need of reformation. 3. And of a truer consecration of yourselves and your property to God. Learn—Our holiest acts need examination. Our sacrifices may be worthless. It is a great sin to act negligently towards God. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*) *Anything good enough for God*:—In Malachi’s time the people seem to have been utterly indifferent as to God, and openly insolent. “Behold,” said they, “what a weariness it is!” They thought anything was good enough for God, and offered Him the refuse of their households. Even the priests had become a set of mercenary hirelings, refusing to do anything without reward. This state of things was a result of living so long in the idolatrous land of Babylon. The people had lost their habits of devotion, and had become accustomed to a life of listlessness and carelessness, and now they found it difficult to submit to the restraints of religion. And these of ours are worldly days. The general idea is that anything is good enough for God. A spare minute, an hour, when we can do nothing else, is all we can devote to God. Notice—I. THE CHRISTIAN SACRIFICE. Times have changed, but circumstances have not. God does not demand expiatory sacrifice, but He requires spiritual. We are to render Him certain services, and these services are the New Testament sacrifices. 1. There is the heart—penitent, repentant, soft. 2. There is the body—a living sacrifice; for use, for work. 3. Worship. 4. Alms. II. THE IMPERFECTIONS BY WHICH THESE SERVICES ARE BLEMISHED. 1. Spiritless worship. The form without the spirit. 2. Blind sacrifice. How many crimes have been committed in the name of zeal. 3. Lame offerings. Professors of religion who live in conformity to the world. 4. Sick gifts. Half-hearted prayers, languid attendance at His house, the hand working without the heart, songs without melody. There are preachers who preach ill and sickly sermons. There are Sunday school teachers who offer sickly lessons. It is a terrible thing to offer to God that which is diseased. (*W. R. F.*) *The true sacrifice*:—Malachi begins with rebuking the unthankfulness of Israel, and ends with a threat of coming and smiting the earth with a curse. Israel gave, indeed, a melancholy example of the unthankful heart of man. God’s law was, “If there be any blemish therein, as if it be lame, or blind, or have any ill blemish, thou shalt not sacrifice it unto the Lord thy God.” Yet they offered the blind, the lame, the sick for sacrifice, and thought to be accepted of God, though they durst not have offered such things to their governor. But this conduct of Israel is only a lively representation of the way in which God, the giver of all good things, is commonly treated by the receivers of His bounty. Men have found Him so overflowing in kindness, so long-suffering, that they have come to think He will take up with anything. They think not, that though God does not speak out He is watching, and preparing to reckon with them. And, however slow He may be, He will set all right on the great day when He will separate the chaff from the wheat, and the tares from the corn. Applying to ourselves, let us remember what the Lord commands us to offer. Paul says, in His name, “Present your bodies a living sacrifice.” We are to serve in “newness of the spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.” The living sacrifice of our body is not only keeping its members in all purity, as we would be members of Christ’s body, but also giving to the Lord that from which all purity must come, a heart devoted to His service, and well instructed for that purpose in all heavenly knowledge and spiritual wisdom. See the particulars of the text. 1. “If ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil?” They had plenty of cattle without blemish to offer to the Lord. But they wanted these for themselves. The Christian has a body given him which he may present a

living sacrifice unto the Lord, without blemish of sight. In it he has an eye to read the Word of God, an understanding to receive it: an eye to lift up to heaven in prayer, an understanding to offer prayer and praise in the name of the Lord. The eye should be withdrawn from all unholy sights; it should be single and pure. Instead of this, to what service is the eye and understanding commonly devoted! The true and living sacrifice of the body in this particular is the growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Never forget that growth in grace and growth in knowledge go together. Instead of using their eye and understanding in the spiritual service of the Lord, men waste their light in the pursuit of vanity and sin, until at last there comes the appointed hour of their departure from earth. Then at length—and often in vain—they turn their eye and their thoughts unto God. 2. “If ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil?” The Christian is compared to a runner, and his life to a course. He is to run well, so that he may obtain. But when do men generally begin to set themselves to this race? Just as their course in this world is finishing; when their strength has been wasted in running for earthly prizes. Is not health the season for serving the Lord on every account? Yet many think they have nothing to do with the Lord but in the day of sickness. 3. “Offer it now to thy governor.” Men will treat God, their heavenly Sovereign, as they dare not treat man, their earthly sovereign. Some go through life with a fixed purpose of giving to the Lord only the refuse. The man who bows to the ground, and anxiously seeks favour in the sight of his sovereign, and keeps himself continually in his view by doing something which may please, and make his person accepted, will think it a great thing if he kneel in the house of God for a short time once a week. Men who are most particular in wording a petition to be delivered at the throne of their sovereign, and endeavour to turn and polish every sentence, these very men will not trouble themselves to prepare a prayer to be delivered at the footstool of the throne of heaven. Let us all be wise in this, that we fully recognise the high claims of God, and loyally, lovingly, worthily try to meet them. (*R. W. Evans, B.D.*)

Ver. 9. This hath been by your means.—A solemn charge:—Irreligion is the cause of social chaos and national ruin. Calamities frequently arise from spiritual conditions. Outward circumstances are often very closely linked with the inner life. **I. MEN HAVE POWER TO BRING EVILS UPON THEMSELVES AND OTHERS.** Man is a centre of causation. Deeds do not end in the doing of them. We may meet them in the results of after years. More than half the evils that afflict men are self-wrought. God seldom interferes with the sequences that follow our action. Man is not the creature of circumstances, but the creator of them. He is treated as being responsible for his own happiness or misery. Man cannot keep the results of his actions from affecting others. One man has ruined thousands. Godless parents ruin families; hypocritical pastors destroy their flocks; depraved senators overthrow a nation. **II. EVIL-DOERS SELDOM ADMIT THIS POINTED CHARGE.** There is a disposition in men to look for the cause of their afflictions anywhere rather than in themselves. They have come from fate, from misfortune, from accident, from the errors of others, from the vindictive anger of God. Honest confession is rare. Not to admit this charge is—1. Unwise. 2. It will only increase our guilt. 3. It will hinder our reception of mercy. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*)

Vers. 10–14. Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? —*Wrong worship:—*1. Wrong worship is worse than no worship at all. 2. Wrong worship will one day be practically repudiated. 3. Wrong worship is sometimes rendered even by the religious teachers of mankind. These priests made worship appear contemptible and burdensome. 4. Wrong worship evermore incurs the just displeasure of heaven. (*Homilist.*) *A sordid religion:—*1. It is common. “Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought?” 2. It is GOD-DISPLEASING. “I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand.” It is displeasing to Him—1. Because it is repugnant to love. Something like this a noble father would say to his son who paid him attention only for what he could get, a true husband would say to the wife who did the same. Genuine love sickens at such service, disdains and refuses it. Pure love in man is the same as pure love in God. It is displeasing to Him—2. Because it is opposed to happiness. It is an eternal law of mind,

that it can never be happy in self-seeking. He who searches for happiness as an end will never find it. It will always be to him a mirage; as he thinks he approaches it, it will vanish into thin air. God's great law in His spiritual universe is this—that souls shall only get happiness as they pursue goodness. When goodness is pursued as an end, full happiness gushes up at every step in the march. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 11. *My name shall be great among the Gentiles.—God's name shall be great:*—Prophecy has a double sense—or rather, an inferior and a higher designation: not only to keep the faith and the hope of the Church in exercise by the presentation of a grand consummation, but to edify, to warn, to comfort, and to instruct the Church. The prophets were the ordinary preachers of righteousness. Though their lessons of morality and religion were conveyed in the figured strains of poetry, they were highly conspicuous and impressive. We behold, in the discourses of those holy men, a faithful and fearless statement of the principles of pure theology. Malachi closes the prophetic dispensation. He appears in the worst part of the Jewish history. Darkness came upon them, and for four hundred years that darkness seemed to increase in depth. Malachi gives a revelation of the coming of the Lord. Here he declares that God shall be magnified and honoured and worshipped by all nations. I. THE PROPHECY EMBRACED THE REVELATION OF GOD'S NAME AMONGST THE GENTILES. God cannot be magnified or revered or worshipped unless He is known. God can only be known as He is pleased to reveal Himself. He has given us a revelation of Himself, clear and full, so that we may know God. The name of God denotes Himself, His nature, His moral character, and all that can be made known of Him to the mind of man. 1. It denotes His self-existence. That existence is absolutely eternal, immortal, invisible. As He thus exists, He exists independently. All existence, however varied and modified, must be an emanation from Himself. And thus He appears to us, arrayed in the awful attributes of the Creator and Governor of all things. He is the parent of all; and on Him all depends. 2. It denotes the spirituality of His nature. This would follow from the infinite perfection of His nature. God is capable, as Spirit, of occupying immensity without displacing matter. A real Christian carries about with him a solemn sense of the spiritual presence of God; and he connects with that the presence of all His attributes—of power and purity and love. Wherever we go we have a present God. 3. It denotes the mysterious existence of the Trinity in the unity of the godhead. 4. It denotes the harmony of His attributes. II. THE MAJESTY OF GOD'S GOVERNMENT. "My name shall be great among the Gentiles." It shall be magnified—it shall be a name of weight, of authority; before it every name shall bow. Wherever the name of Jesus is published, that name becomes dominant. The majesty of the Redeemer's kingdom is demonstrated by its interior and intellectual design. Human beings under no other government are ruled by truth, by interior influences, which bring the mind and the affections to God. And the Lord's government is demonstrated by the silent but irresistible agency employed. III. THE CELEBRATION OF HIS WORSHIP. The worship will be spiritual, but it will be offered "in every place." Spiritual worship is enlightened: it is the result of knowledge; it perceives its object, and rejoices in its object; it takes hold of a promise, or fixes on a precept; it must be the result of faith, for faith sees the great Invisible; it must be the kindling of the Holy Spirit. There will be living offerings; it will not be a cold, irrational service, but the service of a warm heart; each man will offer himself to God, and each man will be a holy and a purified oblation, kindled by the fire of God. And thus myriads of spirits everywhere, all over the world, shall be ascending in flames of pure devotion to God. (*Theophilus Lessey.*) *The name of Jesus among the Gentiles:*—The Rev. Mr. Broadhead, returned missionary from India, related a beautiful incident when preaching foreign missionary sermons in the county of Durham. Whilst in India it was made known to him that not far from his residence there was an extraordinary piece of architectural work in the shape of a temple, most luxuriously designed in white marble. This edifice was erected in memory of some female, but one of the things that specially attracted the notice of the missionary was the great number of arches which it contained. On nearing the entrance the attendants told him that if he whispered a word inside the building it would be re-echoed from every arch proceeding into the interior. The missionary breathed out the word "Jesus," and instantly the echoes were resounding from

every part of the building. The effect was magnificent. The desire of every Christian heart is—

“Let the echo fly
The spacious earth around.”

Christ's influence increasing:—Speaking on the day of Mr. Gladstone's funeral, the Rev. F. B. Meyer said: “One of the marks which distinguishes Jesus Christ from every human teacher and reformer is the fact that His influence is ever increasing. The influence of Gladstone, to-day so great, will diminish year by year, but Jesus Christ's influence was never so great as it is now.” *Of the meaning of the name of God*:—I. THE PRINCIPAL SCRIPTURAL ACCEPTATIONS OF THE “NAME.” 1. Sometimes it signifies God Himself. Praising or blessing the name of God is praising God Himself. By His name being “great” is meant their acknowledging or professing Him to be the true God, and their adhering to the worship of Him only, in opposition to all idolatry and false religions. 2. Sometimes it is used to signify His true religion and worship. “The place which the Lord your God shall choose, . . . to put His name there,” means the place where He shall appoint His servants to appear before Him with the external tokens of their homage and worship. 3. In other places of Scripture the “name” expresses those adorable perfections or attributes which are, as it were, the proper denomination and character of the Divine nature. See Exod. xxxiv. 5. 4. Once more, the “name” signifies the authority of God, or His Divine commission. II. THE EVENT PREDICTED. In it is evidently contained—1. To the Jews, something comminatory. 2. In relation to the Gentiles, a particular promise; joined with a general declaration concerning the state and condition of the universal Church in the future and latter ages of the world. Whatever be the true meaning of these and the like prophecies; whether there be a time still to come, wherein they shall be accomplished literally, or whether they are intended only to express the natural tendency of the universal and sincere practice of Christianity in the present world, and the real effect which shall be obtained by it in the world to come, we must not be too curious about particular times and seasons. Learn—(1) Our duty to promote the knowledge of God, and interest of true virtue among men. (2) To justify to ourselves the various methods in which the wisdom of God has chosen to reveal itself to the world. (3) If we, under the clearer light of the everlasting Gospel, still live corruptly, how much heavier must be our punishment than that of the Jews. (*S. Clarke, D.D.*) And in every place incense shall be offered unto My name.—*The future glory of Messiah's kingdom*:—Two phenomena of the moral world severely task the faith of religious persons. One is, that so large a portion of the globe should not even be nominally Christian. The other is, that Christendom itself should be so corrupt and so scantily imbued with vital godliness. Attempts may be made to reconcile our minds to this difficulty in the moral administration of the world, by urging that the scheme of nature lies open to similar objections, and that much physical energy runs to waste in abortive efforts and through counteracting forces. But analogies of this kind are more ingenious than conclusive; they silence rather than satisfy. We may find comfort in such reflections as these—1. It is the prerogative of an infinite Being to be deliberate and slow, whereas haste and precipitation are the characteristics of a limited nature. 2. Much may be going forward by secret and unnoticed processes, conducive and preparatory to the development of Messiah's kingdom. 3. God has consulted His own glory in thus far contracting the supply of His Spirit; since He has thereby made apparent the insufficiency of moral means, and the strongest objective inducements, although accompanied with common grace, to overcome the repugnance of the human heart to the humbling doctrines and self-denying precepts of the Gospel. 4. Contrasted with the stage of thick darkness or glimmering twilight between which the world has been so long divided, the glory of that unclouded day will be the more conspicuous, when “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.” But the prophecies have a special virtue, reviving our drooping faith. This text contains a sublime announcement of that triumphant era when Messiah “shall have dominion from sea to sea.” It is usual with the prophets to describe the dispensation of the Gospel by terms and analogies taken from the Mosaic ritual. I. THE PREDICTION THAT “INCENSE SHALL BE OFFERED UNTO THE NAME” OF JEHOVAH. The “incense” denotes primarily the intercession of the Saviour. He hath given Himself for us, “an offering of a sweet-smelling savour.” The Word is,

in the original, the past participle of a verb which means to fume, and may properly denote any sacrifice which, being consumed by fire, was carried up in smoke. Its spiritual meaning should not be restricted to proper acts of worship, but should be held to comprise all those holy works which are the produce of a spiritual nature—those “sacrifices of righteousness” with which God is well-pleased. Then translate the passage, “In every place whatever is fumed shall be brought near unto Thy name,”—then what else is represented to the mind save the universal reign of evangelical righteousness? What is meant by the phrase, “offered unto Thy name”? There is strong presumptive evidence for believing that this denomination of Jehovah is no meagre expletive, but carries a direct and explicit allusion to Christ the Mediator. This appellation of God is strictly associated with the character He sustains in redemption. The elder patriarchs appear to have understood the “name” as a sacramental term, by which Jehovah exhibited Himself conversing with guilty men through the promised Intercessor, the Word made flesh.

II. THE PREDICTION THAT A PURE OFFERING SHOULD BE EVERYWHERE PRESENTED TO JEHOVAH. We have considered the offering of incense to imply the benign effect of our Lord’s pacification, in rendering the worship and service of mankind acceptable to Jehovah, and surely the “pure offering” will express the sanctification of the Church, and of each individual believer, and the consequent purity of those offerings which are brought near to Jehovah by His spiritual household. In this pure “offering” see—1. The extraordinary extension and purity of the Church. Contemplate the entire extermination of the lewd and sanguinary rites of paganism, and the abolition of all bloody sacrifices, through the oblation of one great victim, who by actually putting away sin has annulled all symbolical immolations. Henceforth we are to render only unbloody offerings—the sacrifice of thanksgivings. We are warranted to contemplate the Catholic Church as one magnificent offering to Immanuel. The Church, indeed, teems with nominal Christians, self-deceivers, and hypocritical pretenders. But from this it shall hereafter, even in its visible pale, be wholly or extensively purged. Another thing constituting the adult Church “a pure offering” will be this—that its worship will be no longer debased with fiction and mummery. The doctrines of transubstantiation, indulgences, masses, penances, purgatory, and supererogation will fall to the ground, and with them will expire the adoration of images, saints, and angels. And the universal Church will be free from sectarian distinctions. We may also anticipate a considerable abridgment of ecclesiastical ordinances.

2. The religious worship of that brilliant age will have a peculiar purity, owing to the improved character of the individual Christians. They will have attained a much higher illumination. The conscience will then be thoroughly pure and undefiled. There will be none of that double-mindedness and self-delusion with which the purest minds of this silver age are more or less alloyed. We are even led to expect a state of perfect exemption from the dross of earthliness. The kingdom of Christ will be developed in their bosoms in all its purity and fulness; and to them it will be not less easy than delightful to have “their conversation in heaven.” The promise of the text is most encouraging. What manner of persons, then, ought we to be? If the blessed Trinity is incessantly employed in this work of regeneration, shall we not help it forward as humble but zealous instruments, with the best faculties that we have? (*J. N. Pearson, M.A.*)

A worshipping world.—I. THE GLORIOUS PREDICTION OF A WORSHIPPING WORLD. We accept any promise according to the known worth or truthfulness or power of him who gives it. Here is the very highest authority, even that of God Himself. The image is very significant; it is taken from the wide circuit and prevalence of solar light which visits every portion of the globe. There can be no vividly more glowing nor general promise of the widespread power of the Gospel than this.

II. THIS DIVINE TIME OF GENERAL HAPPINESS INCLUDES MILLENNIAL GLORY FOR THE WORLD. The second image employed indicates the glorious season of true religion possessing the hearts of men in all its Divine purity and hallowed devotions. The contrast is lovely between the two figures used. Light, the most beautiful element in nature; perfume, the sweetest of elements; the incense of most precious odours represents the purity of soul-worship presented to God, whether in public devotions or from private hearts. We need not enter on the question, whether this Divine time shall be before or after the second advent in glory. The sweet incense and pure offering which Jehovah now demands and loves are spiritual devotions, true prayers, praise, obedience, love, and charity. These are to be found “in every place.” The coming glory of Christ in the conversion of the

world is the earnest prayer of faith now; it is the glowing object of Divine hope now; it is often the warm pulse and action of Christian love and charity.

III. OUR IMPERATIVE DUTY TO EXTEND THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST IN ALL LANDS.

1. This is the Christian's duty of obligation. 2. Efforts for the conversion of the heathen always bring down rich blessings on the soul. (*J. Angley, M.A.*)

Acceptable worship.—I. THE WORSHIP WHICH GOD ORDAINS. All true worshippers "worship the Father in spirit and in truth." The first idea relative to God's ordination of worship is, that human inventions in the worship of God are rejected as hateful to Him. Open vice is not more evil in the sight of God than the mockery which is offered in human inventions. There is one offering that is pure, and that is the offering of God in Christ for us, and that alone God will accept. Its purity constitutes its value. We must keep an eye upon the two natures of Christ, and the purity of both, in order to get at the pure offering. II. THE EXALTATION OF THE NAME OF JEHOVAH. In Scripture the one prominent object the Lord has in view everywhere is the glory of His own name. The honour of Jehovah's name is to be constantly eyed, in doctrines received, in experience enjoyed, and in practice manifested; and the interests of the living Church are involved therein. (*Joseph Irons.*)

The universal spread of the Gospel.—For our Lord's obedience unto death His Father appointed unto Him a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve Him. The world-wide spread of Christ's Gospel is the truth announced here. I. THE SCRIPTURE TESTIMONY TO THE ULTIMATE UNIVERSAL SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL. This testimony is full, clear, and decisive. It is given alive under patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian dispensations. II. THE SAME TRUTH IS EVIDENT FROM THE NATURE OF THE CASE. 1. The need of redemption is universal. All false religions bear testimony to the need. And to their own insufficiency to satisfy this need. 2. The Gospel alone can satisfy this craving of mankind. It proclaims the one oblation by which Christ hath for ever perfected, &c. It shows the chains of evil broken by the great Deliverer. 3. The Gospel is fitted for universal diffusion. All other religions are adapted only for local influence; even the Jewish religion was suited only to Palestine. But the Gospel is at home under every clime, and with every race of man. 4. The Gospel implants the instinct of universal diffusion. It produces hatred of sin, and love to God and man. It impels the Christian to say to his brother, "Know the Lord." It finds a brother where the Samaritan found a neighbour. It brings us to our knees to pray, "Thy kingdom come." 5. The kingdoms of providence and grace are united under the same sceptre. The revolutions of nations ultimately further the Gospel. III. THE VOICE OF HISTORY CONFIRMS THE CONCLUSIONS. Here we have God's works confirming His words. The witness of history is to the point, whether we consider—1. The importance of the conquests hitherto won by the Gospel. Christianity has conquered every religion with which it fairly came in contact—Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Persian, Scandinavian, Celtic, Phœnician, Polynesian. 2. The proved weakness of the only weapons with which it can be assailed. Persecution, false philosophy, and priestcraft. Then—(1) Let us submit ourselves to Christ's authority. (2) Let us fervently pray for the advancement of the kingdom. (3) Let us cherish and promote the missionary spirit. (4) Let us contribute liberally and cheerfully of our substance to this good end. (*Evangelical Preacher.*)

A pure offering.—*An acceptable sacrifice*.—The world rose in vision before Malachi, as one great altar, burning everywhere with the incense of devout hearts, and covered with its myriad races, offering themselves to God as a "pure offering." The vision must have comforted him. The glorious era which Malachi gazed on for a moment has not yet come. We may, however, offer unto God "a pure offering." I. THE DUTY SUGGESTED. From the earliest ages the custom of presenting offerings to God has prevailed. It might have arisen from instructions given to our first parents, or from the natural instinct of gratitude or of fear. The first family presented their offerings. Christianity does not remove from us this obligation, though Christ has offered Himself without spot for us. He offered Himself that we may be able to offer ourselves through Him. Ourselves are the best offerings we can give. If we had no sense of possession in ourselves we could not consecrate ourselves to God. Every sacrifice, sincerely made for the world's advancement, is an offering presented to God. II. WHAT A PURE OFFERING IS. Many offerings are not pure. Men defile their offerings by their own impurity. How can man present an offering that shall be pure in God's sight? 1. It must come from a purified heart. Men's hearts may be purified and yearn after God. Holy love may prompt the gift,

Cleansing fountains abound on this polluted earth. Angelic ministries, the sanctifying spirit, the purging flame of God's truth, the fountain of forgiving love opened at the Cross, are all ours to take away our guilt, as we seek to present our offerings to God. 2. It must proceed from a penitent and obedient spirit. The disposition of the offerer will be regarded more than the offering. Gifts separated from the inner life are of no value to God. 3. It must emanate from a spirit of entire consecration to God. Entire consecration purifies. To devote ourselves to God is to separate ourselves from sinful defilements. Offerings ever derive their value from the devoted spirit of the offerer. Entire consecration is difficult to our depraved hearts. All lingering covetousness must be conquered. III. HOW IT SHOULD BE PRESENTED. We should seek not to mar our offering by the way in which we present it. It should be—1. In faith. Which will lay hold of God's willingness to accept our gifts, however lowly and insignificant they may be. Faith will lead us away from the altar, rejoicing in the assurance that God has accepted our offerings. 2. By Jesus Christ. He is the High Priest of humanity. He presents prayers, praises, works for us. He presents the saints themselves as an offering without blemish to God. 3. With sincerity. God looks into the heart of the offerer. Some offerings are presented only for the eyes of men. 4. With grateful eagerness. All lukewarmness should be banished. Grateful love should animate us. IV. BLESSINGS ATTEND THE PRESENTATION OF A PURE OFFERING. We have a consciousness of Divine approval. Every time we present ourselves as a pure offering to God we receive ourselves back again from His hands with every spiritual power quickened and enlarged. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*) *The Christian sacrifice* :—I. A DEFINITION OF THE CHRISTIAN SACRIFICE. As the ancient Church meant it. Not the mere sacrament of the body and blood of Christ; but the whole sacred action or solemn service of the Church assembled. The sacrifice of praise and prayer through Jesus Christ, mystically represented in the creatures of bread and wine. This is the sacrifice which Malachi foretold the Gentiles should one day offer unto God. Incense denotes the rational part of the sacrifice. Mincha the material part of it. The rational part is prayer, thanksgiving, and commemoration. Mincha, the material part, is a present of bread and wine. It is called a pure offering—*mincha purum*; wherein does this "purity" consist? Some think the meaning is purely or spiritually offered. Others say pure, by reason of the disposition and affection of the offerer. I prefer to understand, pure in respect of Christ, whom it signifies and represents a sacrifice without spot or blemish. Six particulars contained in the definition of the Christian sacrifice. 1. That this Christian service is an oblation. 2. That it is an oblation of thanksgiving and prayer. 3. An oblation through Jesus Christ commemorated in the creatures of bread and wine. 4. This commemoration of Christ is also a sacrifice. 5. The body and blood of Christ, in this mystical service, was made of bread and wine which had been first offered unto God, to agnize Him the Lord of the creature. 6. This sacrifice was placed in commemoration only of Christ's sacrifice upon the Cross, and not in a real offering of His body and blood anew. The sacrifice of Christians is nothing but that one sacrifice of Christ once offered upon the Cross again and again commemorated. (*Joseph Mede, B.D.*)

Vers. 13, 14. Should I accept this of your hand? saith the Lord.—*Vain oblations* (taken with Isa. i. 13):—Each age has its characteristic. No two are just alike; and though history repeats itself, yet there is progress. Its processes are those of a spiral. 1. In the age of Isaiah the Jews were full of religiosity. Sacrifices were not neglected—a multitude were offered. They brought the best of all kinds, not as in the days of Malachi, the lean and the poor, but abundantly they brought the blood of bullocks, of lambs, and of he-goats. Clouds of incense arose; they carefully kept the new moons, the Sabbaths, the assemblies, and the solemn meeting, not only all appointed feasts, but even others they observed in an intense devotion to the forms of religion. Why were their oblations vain? Why were they not regarded in their sacrifices and accepted in their persons? 1. As in the days of the Saviour, so now, whilst they were careful to tithe, mint, anise and cummin, they omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith. 2. They were offered without faith. This whole chapter shows such to be the case. This was just what made the difference between Abel's sacrifice and Cain's offering. 3. Their offerings were unaccompanied with repentance; for repentance implies confession of sin, the forsaking it, and

the reformation of life. II. THIS POSITIVE SINFULNESS IS CLEARLY MADE OUT. 1. They were laden with iniquity. 2. There was no soundness in them, from the sole of the foot even unto the head. 3. Their rulers were like the princes of Sodom, and themselves like the men of Gomorrah. 4. Their hands were full of blood. The rulers did not punish the people, and reciprocally the people abetted their rulers in their blood-guiltiness. 5. The times were full of evils, unredressed and unavenged. Their princes had become companions of thieves and bribe-takers. III. ON THE OTHER HAND, GOD STILL REMEMBERS GRACE AND MERCY. 1. There was still a remnant left (ver. 9). 2. All are called to repentance (vers. 16, 17). 3. Those that repent shall obtain mercy, but the contumacious shall not be spared (vers. 18-24). 4. And still further, God holds up the gracious promise to send times of reformation and refreshing (vers. 25-27). Reflections—1. Do we preach and pray, and is there no answering fruit—no conversions, and no increase of piety? 2. Can the reason be found in devotion to the forms of religion and the neglect of its spirit? 3. Are our people characterised by an absorbing devotion to the world? 4. Then to us as to Israel is the call to repentance; to us as to them, the hope of forgiveness; to us as to them, the promise of revival upon repentance and reformation. God forbid that we should merely possess the forms of religion and be destitute of its life-giving power. (*L. O. Thomson.*) *Hypocrisy in public worship*:—All that wears the appearance of religion is not sincere piety. This remark will particularly apply to those acts which constitute what we call public worship. For in privacy, where no eye is upon us but that of the Omniscient, there is less temptation to, and less danger of insincerity. Malachi is here remonstrating with the people for the “iniquity of their holy things.” I. THE CRIMINAL CHARGE HE FIXES ON THIS PROFESSING COMMUNITY. It is aggravated by three things. 1. By the salutary discipline to which they had recently been subjected for their backslidings and rebellions against God. 2. By the fact that they thus sinned against the clearest knowledge. 3. By the majesty of the object against whom their offence was directed. We censure and condemn the Jews, but “are we better than they”? II. THE USES TO BE MADE OF THIS REMONSTRANCE. 1. Here are materials for your deepest humiliation and penitence. 2. How incompetent are all the rites and ceremonies of religion to save the soul! 3. See the fallacy of pharisaism. 4. How welcome, then, is the evangelical intelligence which is brought to us, to awaken a hope of the acceptance of our persons and services in the sight of a holy God. (*J. Clayton.*)

Ver. 14. *But cursed be the deceiver.*—*A cursed one*:—Curses are the echoes that sin awakens. All deceivers are cursed. I. THE DECEIVER. He may be a self-deceiver, or a deceiver of others, or both. Some may unconsciously deceive; others intentionally. It is the intentional deceiver that is cursed; he who aims to deceive others. These abound in—1. Religious communities. The wily priest, the glib teacher of error, the hypocrite. 2. In the social circle. The liar, the seducer, the false friend. 3. In commerce. The unreliable employee, the concocter of lying prospectuses, the swindling merchant. 4. In political movements. The bribing agent, the self-seeking adventurer, the unscrupulous statesman. Men sometimes turn themselves into incarnate falsehoods for the sake of worldly success. The advantages gained are only seeming, not real. The deceiver is—(1) Foolish. He injures himself for the sake of uncertain good. (2) Despicable. Society treats the exposed deceiver with contempt. All honest men shun him. (3) Treacherous. He is like a splintered staff, a rotten cable, a sandy foundation, a spider's web, a wrecker's beacon, a flower-covered bog, a desert mirage, &c. (4) Mischievous. He lays traps for the innocent. He destroys social confidence. (5) Diabolical. Like Lucifer, he “sins in wily guise.” He is a true son of the father of lies. II. HIS CURSE. This may be suspicion, discredit, fear of discovery, exposure, stings of conscience, spiritual blindness, the execrations of his victims; the contempt of all good men; the displeasure of the Almighty, hell-fires, &c. His curse is certain. In a universe where a God of truth and righteousness reigns, the deceiver is sure to be punished. The curse is terrible and eternal. Application—1. Let us guard ourselves against all deceivers. 2. Let us beware of deceit. 3. Better be deceived than deceive. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*) *And sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing.*—*The service of God an unblemished offering*:—The prophets were God's messengers, commissioned to witness in His name against the sins of the people. To under-

stand this remonstrance aright, we must remember what were the laws respecting the offerings. The *prime* of each offering was to be presented to God. But these profane priests thought that anything would serve for a sacrifice, though never so coarse and mean. They picked out the worst they had, that which was neither fit for the market nor for their own tables, and offered that at God's altar. With every sacrifice the law commanded them to bring a meat-offering of "fine flour, mingled with bread": but they brought "polluted bread," of coarse and refuse material. The principle illustrated is—that the service of God admits of nothing short of the most perfect offering that can be presented; and everything below this affixes upon the offerers the character of "deceivers," and the condemnation of being "cursed." I. THE SERVICE OF RELIGIOUS WORSHIP. 1. It is profane service whenever it is not intelligent, whenever it is not founded on a right understanding of the object of worship. You, who have watched the movements or the torpidity of your minds at the time of supposed prayer, will bear me witness how often you have failed to recognise the simple being of the God before whom you bow down. 2. No offering of worship is acceptable which is not also solemn and reverential. This it could not fail to be if we were possessed by a just sense of the transcendent greatness of Him to whom prayer is presented. His majesty is infinite and ineffable, and therefore we stand at an immeasurable distance from Him. And yet to such a Being we address ourselves in prayer. Do any of us detect in ourselves the vacant gaze, the roving thought? 3. Acceptable worship must be spiritual. Why so? "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." They must so worship Him, because it is not possible that He should receive any other. Do you assert that "God is a Spirit," then you contract Him into the narrow dimensions of your own being if you give Him no more than the devotions of the body, if you give Him not the ardent services of your soul. 4. If our worship be genuine, it will be marked by intentness of mind. Languor and laxness of the spirit are sure tokens that it is not a glad offering, but an irksome task. In all these cases what is the sin which we charge home but that very sin for which the prophet utters his rebuke? They have a better offering which they might offer. They are capable of a worship more worthy of God. Instead, they bring the lame, and the sick, and the torn, they "sacrifice unto the Lord a corrupt thing." II. THE HABITUAL SERVICE OF THE LIFE. Here too the service of God admits of nothing short of the most perfect offering that can be presented. Our baptismal covenant, made for us in our unconscious infancy, when our own reason was not privy to the engagement, is sealed and confirmed in maturer age; and then it is that we deliberately and personally "vow" to give the choice thing in our flock. But where is he to be found that fully recognises and performs the baptismal oath? The baptised man, the communicant, and the parent for his child, and he who is in near danger, has *vowed*, deliberately, unto God, the male that is in his flock; but he leaves off with sacrificing unto the Lord "a corrupt thing." (R. Eden, M.A.) I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts.—*Jehovah a king*:—What God is Himself, what constitutes His essence no language can describe. What God is to His creatures, and what relations He sustains with respect to them, may without difficulty be stated in language sufficiently intelligible. Sometimes God styles Himself a father, sometimes a master, and sometimes a king. I. JEHOVAH IS A KING. A king is the political head or supreme ruler of a kingdom. There are kings by right, and kings in fact. The king by right has claim to the throne, though he may not possess it. The king in fact actually possesses the throne, though he may have no right to it. He alone who has both the right and the possession can properly be called a king. And such a king is Jehovah. His kingdom is the whole created universe, and of this kingdom He is in actual and full possession. And He is the rightful sovereign of the universe. All men were born into the dominions of Jehovah. Men cannot cease to be His subjects without ceasing to exist. He possesses all the insignia of royalty. He has a throne, a crown, royal robes, &c. II. JEHOVAH IS A GREAT KING. Great is the Lord, and His greatness is unsearchable. See the greatness, duration, and stability of His empire. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. 1. If God is a king, He is under obligations to make laws for His subjects. When He assumes any office He binds Himself to perform all the duties of that office. The first and most indispensable duty of an absolute sovereign is to make laws for his subjects. It is as much his duty to make laws, as it is their duty to obey them when made. 2. He is under obligations to make

the wisest and best laws possible. It was incumbent on him to consult, not the private wishes and inclinations of individuals, but the great interests of his whole kingdom. 3. He is under obligations to annex some penalty to every violation of his law. A law without a penalty annexed is not a law, that is, it cannot answer the purpose of a law. 4. He is bound to enforce his laws, and to inflict the threatened punishment on all who transgress them. He must not bear the sword in vain, but be a terror to evil-doers. Justice in a sovereign ruler consists in treating his subjects according to their deserts. He may be guilty of injustice by treating them better than they deserve, as well as by treating them worse than they deserve. But God cannot act unjustly. 5. We may learn the necessity of an atonement for sin. Something which shall maintain the authority of God's law, secure the great interests of His kingdom, and answer all the ends of government, no less effectually than the infliction of merited punishment upon transgressors. Without such an atonement God cannot consistently with justice, or His obligations as a sovereign, pardon a single offender. 6. If Jehovah is king, sin is treason and rebellion, and every impenitent sinner is a traitor and a rebel. 7. If Jehovah is king, it is requisite that He should have ambassadors, in order that His will should be communicated to His subjects. God's inspired messengers, the prophets and apostles, were ambassadors extraordinary. His ministers are His ambassadors to-day. (*E. Payson, D.D.*) *God a great king* :—Men reveal their conceptions of God by the kind of homage they render to Him. God was dishonoured by the hypocritical worship of His own people; they were representing Jehovah as a senseless idol. To reprove them He here declares His greatness. I. THIS DECLARATION WHICH JEHOVAH MAKES RESPECTING HIMSELF. God places Himself towards us in various aspects. He is a king. He has in Himself all the qualities of kingly greatness. Kings should be the greatest of men. He has all the attributes of a great king. His power, authority, majesty, &c. His dominions are great. His kingdom is eternal. II. WHAT LESSONS MAY BE LEARNT FROM THIS DECLARATION. Learn—1. To reverence Him. 2. The importance of securing His favour. He has shown us the way to secure it—by repentance, faith, and obedience. 3. To trust implicitly in His overruling providence. 4. To submit ourselves to His government. 5. To expect great blessings from His hands. Great expectancy in His creatures pleases Him. Great expectations from Him are never disappointed. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*) *God is a great king* :—In one country abroad, much plagued by invasions from heathens, a grand old custom sprang up in their churches. When the Apostles' Creed was repeated the noblemen and men-at-arms drew their swords, and did not sheathe them again until the creed was over. They meant it as a sign that "God was their king," and that they would show their earnestness in saying so, if need be, by fighting and dying for that God to whom they owed all, and that Church of God to which they belonged. (*C. Kingsley.*)

CHAPTER II.

VERS. 1-3. And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you.—*Spiritual reformation* :—1. The nature of the spiritual reformation required. It involves two things, a practical application of the Word of God: and an entire dedication to the glory of God. 2. The urgency of the spiritual reformation required. The neglect thereof incurs a curse, and a rebuke, and contempt. (*Homilist.*) *To give glory unto My name.*—*Duty and threatening* :—I. THE DUTY ENJOINED. 1. Repentance glorifies God as an omnipresent and omniscient God. 2. Repentance glorifies God as a just and holy God. 3. Repentance glorifies God as a merciful and gracious God. 4. Repentance glorifies God as a true and faithful God. II. THE EVIL THREATENED. 1. He will curse the personal blessings of the impenitent. 2. He will curse their domestic blessings. 3. He will curse their national blessings. 4. He will curse their religious blessings. (*G. Brooks.*)

Ver. 2. I will curse your blessings.—*Blessings abused become a curse* :—Taking into view the whole of the intelligent creation, and the extent of the

duration to which it is destined, the curse of God on those who wantonly brave His love and benevolence, will be seen to be a necessary result of His goodness, as well as a declaration of the righteousness of His character. It is the same Word of heaven which shows us—now the Cross of Christ, and now the flaming sword of justice. God does not lift up His voice to say, “I will curse your blessings,” till men have first abused those blessings, and provoked Him to interpose His vengeance. A reason is given for the curse—disobedience. A warning of its approach is likewise given; and every successive threatening is a new mercy, for its tendency is to arrest the sinner ere it be too late, and is an interposition which justice did not require. A captious mind may refuse to call those things blessings, which in the result shall only augment the wretchedness and accumulate the perdition of the sinner. But objects which are in themselves capable of benefiting the person on whom they descend, though an evil heart may, by wilful misapplication, turn them to the most serious and fatal injury, are, nevertheless, blessings. God can curse the blessings He bestows in a variety of ways. He can remove them; He can render them ineffectual and powerless; He can make them turn to our hurt. The curse consists in continuing unaltered the blessings He bestows, and in leaving the individual who receives them to himself. In point of fact, the sinner inflicts the curse upon himself. The only part which God takes in the visitation is that He suffers it to be so. 1. Among the blessings which God confers upon sinful men, the first in nature, and among the foremost in importance is time. The days and years which God may add to man’s forfeited life are of inestimable price. They are the seed-time for eternity. If it be not used for its intended purpose, God will turn it into an awful curse. And does it not prove so, when, as time moves on, the heart becomes harder, the conscience less impressive, love of the world more vehemently impetuous, and when moments accumulate not so fast as sins, which shall go to fan the flames of the unquenchable fire? 2. Another of the blessings from the hand of God is health. This gives a zest to every other gift of heaven, and the want of it takes away the charm of every other enjoyment. It is an unspeakable aid in the pursuit of every good work incumbent upon us. Beware then lest this blessing be presumed upon and misused, and God may give up the disobedient to their own curse. Talents and education are blessings from the hand of God; they place the individuals who possess them higher in the scale of being. But if they are perverted from their lawful ends,—if they should be found enlisted on the side of infidelity or worldliness,—the blessing will become a curse. 3. I might proceed to speak of other blessings, of which the misimprovement will fatally transmute into the curse. Riches, honour, friends, rank, influences, and the various interferences which deliver men from evil, or avert its approach, are all the good gifts of God. They are capable of a use of the most important nature both to ourselves and others. The perversion of them will be as ruinous in aggravating the misery of the future. Refer especially to this richest of blessings, the glorious Gospel. Even this crowning gift may, by the wilful unbelief and worldliness of the heart, become hurtful as it might have been beneficial. Can there be a more dreadful curse than when the very means employed for the soul’s conversion, place it further and still further from that necessary issue? (*T. Kennion, M.A.*) *Cursed blessings*:—There is no accommodation in Divine righteousness. We never read that to-day we may intermit a little, the law shall no longer be so rigorous and ruthless, the law shall be oiled down into smoothness so that it shall be easy, and the spirit of disobedience shall be less exasperated; never. The law never changes. The moral tone of the Bible is never lowered in accommodation to human weakness or human selfishness. Nor is judgment lessened that a man may feel the more comfortable with himself. There is wondrous originality in the way of putting the Divine judgment before the consideration of men. Probably the judgment was never more vividly and powerfully depicted than in this instance:—“I will curse your blessings”: what to you is a blessing shall cease to be such and shall become a curse: I will make your health the worst disease you ever had; I will make you poor through your very wealth; I will send upon the richest results of your labour such a darkness that you will flee away from the very image of your own success. How terrible is God! but always how terrible in righteousness. Why does this punishment fall upon the priestly race or house? Simply because the priest has been unfaithful, self-considering, base in heart, forgetful of his duty to God and his service to man. The Lord does not make priests for nothing; whatever

the priest may be, if he fail in his function, God plagues him by blighting his blessings. The priest may be a poet, gifted with fine fancy, able to sing to the world's comforting and inspiration, and if he palter with his gift, if he prostitute it, God's judgment will fall heavily upon him. We do not limit the word "priest" to religious functions or exercises or responsibilities: every man has his own call of God, and by so much may be regarded as sustaining a priestly relation to the throne of God. A man may be a merchant, a counsellor, a man of great sagacity, a person qualified to exercise large and useful influence, and if he fail to work out his mission in life this punishment falls upon him: he has more anxiety over his wealth than he ever had over his poverty, and his very health is a plague and a temptation to him all the day. How God tightens His hands upon the reins! how He tugs! how He rules! We think sometimes He has given us full head, and we go at our own pace, and suddenly the jaw is torn, and we begin to feel that we are servants, not masters; that we are under providential guidance, not under selfish inspiration: the Lord reigneth, and He is as loving in judgment as He is in redemption. How will the Lord curse the blessings of the priests? "Behold, I will corrupt your seed." Now, the house of Aaron had nothing to do with ploughing and with sowing: why then corrupt or spoil or mar the seed that was to be sown in the fields? why take the juice out of it? why deplete its vitality? The house of Levi is by law exempted from agricultural pursuits. True: but not from agricultural tithes. The priests lived upon the land, as certainly as the farmers did, and the Lord punished the priests where they would most feel it. After they had gone in that direction they should feel the weight of the rule of God where they could most sensitively respond to the imposition. It is easy to sow seed: but are we quite sure that no operation has been performed upon the seed before we have sown it? God is invisible, the hand of God is intangible, the ministry of God is impalpable. The seed looks the same as in the healthiest years and the most abundant harvesting. The farmer says, The seed is good: sow it! If we had been gifted with the piercing eyesight that sees the spiritual we should have known that only yesternight the Spirit of God was in the granary, spoiling every seed garnered against seed-time. Why will we be befooled always by the eyes of our bodies? as if they could see anything. We do not live the faith-life that believes that all things are under the touch as they are under the ownership of God. God makes the wine vinegar; God makes us drink our own etymology. If we call for wine, sharp wine, we shall have enough of it; and God will make the wine sharp and sour in the palate. Why not believe that all things are under the government and benediction of God? Behold the fowls of the air: consider the lilies of the field: see God everywhere. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *Blessings made curses*:—There is a text which is the counterpart of this, "I will turn the curse into a blessing." God does not willingly afflict. He never takes a blessing away without bestowing a better one in its place, unless any of His blessings have been abused, and then, when His love has been trampled on, when in their headstrong wickedness His creatures turn against Him and abuse His blessings, then He puts a curse upon them. Consider some illustrations.—1. What the world calls wealth, goods. There is a solemn irony in that word "goods." By what men call "goods," they do not mean truth, things spiritual and eternal, but they mean boxes, bales, and bundles of things kept in stores. We need not disparage wealth. It is not a sin for man to toil for it, to plan for it; and yet though it be a blessing, how easily can God blast it. How easily the Lord can plant thorns in the rich man's pathway. 2. Home and domestic relations. No sweeter blessing on earth than the encompassment of love. Yet how many miserable homes there are. Just one prodigal son will spoil it: just one vicious habit: some stain of sin: some skeleton of disgrace. 3. The blessings of the Gospel. This Gospel comes to be the savour of death unto death unless we obey God's laws, and follow Him in humble love. (*P. S. Henson, D.D.*) *Blessings cursed*:—God only has an absolute right to curse. Men curse each other wrongfully; God's curses are merciful and righteous. He blesses readily; He curses reluctantly. The Jews deserved more evil than that which befell them. I. MEN POSSESS MANY BLESSINGS. 1. Natural. Abundance of the fruits of the earth. Refreshing variations of the seasons. Gratification of our senses with beauty, fragrance, and music. Stores of useful minerals, and medicinal herbs. 2. National. Subjection to rightly constituted authority. Freedom of speech. Commercial prosperity. Progressive legislation. Well-stored marts. Liberty of conscience. Wise distribution of wealth in the creation

of labour. 3. Domestic. Love of kindred. Sympathy of friendship. A quiet and peaceable habitation. A bountiful supply of the necessities of life. 4. Personal. Health. Wisdom. Honour. Success. Wealth. 5. Religious. Pious associations. Spiritual enlightenment. The worship of the sanctuary. Divine pardon and purification. The instruction of men and books. The hope of eternal glory. II. THESE BLESSINGS MAY BE CURSED. 1. God does this by permitting the blessings themselves to become a curse. Abounding luxuriance in nature has engendered idolatry, sensuality, and sloth. 2. God sometimes inflicts a curse upon the blessings. The fruitful land becomes barrenness. God may curse our blessings—(1) That we may recognise His hand in their bestowment. (2) That we may seek our blessedness in Him. (3) That we may rightly appreciate their value. (4) That we may be sanctified by the affliction which their loss or abuse may occasion. (5) That we may illustrate His holiness by the punishment of our sins. III. THESE BLESSINGS ARE CURSED BECAUSE OF MEN'S INDIFFERENCE TO GOD'S GLORY. Persistent indifference to God will ever bring His curse. Let us, in order that what we regard as blessings may continue to bless us, lay God's glory to heart—1. By pondering God's claims until our hearts are moved. 2. By fixing our warmest affections upon His glory. 3. By living a life of ardent devotion to its furtherance in the world. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*) *The blessing cursed* :—God does not say that He will take their blessings away ; He will let them remain, only with His ban upon them, and see what they will be worth then. The blessings shall remain, but they shall remain scathed and blighted. They tell us that there is an Eastern fruit which sometimes undergoes a curious process of decay. It looks as blooming and fresh as ever to the eye, but when you take it in your hand it crumbles into dust. Now, a like process was to pass upon all the comforts and advantages, all the treasures and delights of these doomed men. Though nothing would be changed, all things should become new. The soul would be gone from all comforts and enjoyments. What are commonly called good things should communicate no happiness, and tend to no good. A tree may be withered without being cut down. 1. Blessings may be said to be cursed, if God deprives us of the power of enjoying them. When a blind man looks at the most beautiful scene, he sees nothing of it. As our outward senses are aware of sights and sounds, in like manner our souls have their senses (so to speak) which take note of pleasure and pain. In the natural state of a healthy mind, it feels pleasure and happiness when it is surrounded with those things we call blessings. But in one moment God can end all this. Without changing in the least our outward aspect, or our outward circumstances, God can make our souls as incapable of feeling happiness in the possession of our outward blessings, as the blind man's eyes are of discerning the light of day. Amid our earthly blessings He can make us moody, depressed, thankless, miserable beings. And how often God does do this ! A rich man's wealth is cursed, when it remains as entire and well-invested as ever ; but cannot keep its owner's heart from being racked by fears that he is to end in the workhouse. And such a case has many a time been. It is a bitterer thing, it is a sorer punishment, a thousandfold, to curse a blessing than to take it away. Illustrate by Lord Byron. 2. If God suffers them to have an evil tendency on our souls. St. Paul says, "The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance." The blessings God bestows have a natural tendency, generally expressed, to lead men to think seriously about their souls, and earnestly to turn to Christ—to benefit us spiritually. But it is possible they may have quite an opposite effect : they may do us harm spiritually. They may make it more and more unlikely that we should find our home in heaven at last. Illustrate from the mass of earthly blessings implied by the words "wealth and comfort." What is the right and healthy tendency of all these ? They should make us deeply thankful to Him who gave us them all. They should fill us with an earnest desire to employ all that has so kindly been given to us for God's glory and the good of our fellow-creatures. But wealth often tends to make its possessor proud, arrogant, overbearing, or idle and useless, selfish and vicious. Think of the blessing of dear friends and of a happy family circle. But even such pure blessings may become cursed. The erring heart may make an idol of the creature. Even spiritual blessings may be cursed. The "means of grace" may have their tendency so completely reversed, as to become means of condemnation, of guilt, of perdition. Their natural and healthful tendency may in all cases be reversed, so that they shall turn to means of hardening and of destruction. Our subject even applies to the regenerating, comforting, sanctifying Holy Spirit of God. If the influences

of the Spirit are resisted; if we harden ourselves against His gentle working, and determinedly grieve Him away and quench Him; then this influence, that God gave to work out our salvation, turns to something that not only tends to our final ruin, but (awful to think) actually makes sure of it. The same Spirit that melts one man's heart hardens another man's, as the self-same fire melts wax, but hardens clay. There are just two things, one of which Christ must be to each of us. He must either be our Saviour or our condemnation. Now that we know of redemption through Him, we must either accept or reject Him. He must either be an unspeakable blessing, or a blessing cursed. (*A. K. H. Boyd, D.D.*) *Cursing the blessing*.—Instead of Divine justice being a violation of Divine goodness, it is a necessary part thereof. This God Himself taught man by that mysterious disclosure of His character to Moses. God "merciful and gracious," but "by no means clearing the guilty." A lack of justice would be a lack of goodness. Love without equity would be effeminate indulgence. To mark His disapproval of what is sinful is as much to be expected of an infinitely Holy Being, as that He will signify His approval of what is righteous. But in the exercise of His justice how conspicuous is His mercy. He does not visit men with punishment till He has striven to recover them from their evils, and not then till they have been distinctly warned of approaching wrath. In the context Malachi is directed to warn the priests, who had grieved God by their disobedience to His commandments, that unless they reformed, and faithfully did the will of God, they should be visited with a curse. Thus a condition is interposed before the curse is announced. The nature of the judgment here referred to deserves attention. The Divine Ruler sometimes removes that which was a blessing. He frustrates their plans; shatters their ideals; scatters their wealth; removes their friends, &c. But here is the continuation of a blessing with a curse upon it, so that it cannot bless. The very blessings which have been possessed and enjoyed for years become the fruitful sources of untold sorrow. We cannot impugn the dealings of God. There is a "need's be" for every such mark of His displeasure. 1. For His own sake He curses the blessing. He will be glorified by man. When by kind, gentle, wooing measures He fails to produce in us the fruits of righteousness, He uses severer means. 2. God curses our blessings for our sakes. Outward misfortunes direct man's attention to his inward necessities. Calamity and sorrow humble the proud heart, subdue the stubborn will, and bring the wandering spirit to the bosom of Jesus. (*J. Hiles Hitchens.*) *Blessings changed into a curse*.—Blessings of high and inestimable value had been bestowed upon the children of Israel. Had they faithfully improved the blessings bestowed upon them, to what a height might not their prosperity and their happiness have risen! But they were unfaithful stewards of the grace of God. Their inordinate selfishness and their restless love of change betrayed them continually into transgression. No sooner were they established in the promised land, than they forsook the Lord, and followed strange gods. Therefore did the vengeance of the Highest fall upon them. Terrible chastisements were often inflicted, and they sank at last in utter ruin. A "curse" was sent upon them that cursed even the blessings in which they were accustomed to glory. Their spiritual light, which had been their chiefest glory, was perverted to inflame their pride. Their distinction as the peculiar people of God embittered their contempt and hatred for other nations. By habitual transgression their hearts became so hardened in the end that they received not when He came, the hope of Israel. They crucified and slew the Lord of Life. The counsels of Divine providence are the same in every age. In every age they punish national guilt with national suffering. When the transgressions of any people provoke the Divine vengeance against them, even the blessings which they have enjoyed are changed into a curse. The words of the text are capable of individual application. In the fate of the individual may be traced the great principle of retribution which the text announces. It is not indeed seen so clearly and so uniformly,—because for individuals there is provided hereafter a recompense of reward. Observe the accomplishment of the threatening of the text in regard to the advantages by which the lot of one individual is distinguished from that of another. How often, when he layeth not the Divine commandments to heart, the very blessing in which its possessor rejoiced the most, becomes the most a curse to him. Apply to the misuse of health, wealth, power, intellectual gifts, fame, worldly prosperity in general. Spiritual light is a benefit more valuable far than worldly prosperity. Yet, even spiritual light, when wo

use not the benefit as we ought, may be changed into a curse for the punishment of our sin. Who can arraign the justice of the dispensation which thus bringeth evil out of good? These benefits belong to the Lord alone. They were given us at first of His free and unmerited mercy. When we are worse than unprofitable, can we complain if those joys are no longer ours which are intended for the faithful servants of God? Can we complain if the objects around us, changing, as we ourselves have done, their original purpose, minister to us evil instead of good, whilst we wilfully persevere in the road to destruction? Even the chastisements of the Lord are sent in mercy to rouse the sinner from his fatal security, to save him from an anguish more dreadful and more lasting. Let us give glory to the name of God, from whom all our blessings come. Let us keep ever in view that only for purposes of wisdom and beneficence He hath entrusted to us any part of His own fulness. Let us keep ever upon the imagination of our hearts, that He, who is the giver of every good and perfect gift, is righteous, and will demand from us a strict account of the manner in which we employ the talents committed to us, and "will render unto every man according to his deeds." (*Alex. Bruntton, D.D.*) *Transformations* :—"I will curse your blessings"—what a weird and mysterious threat that is! What does it mean? Well, I think we may get at the truth suggested by it by recalling three miracles performed on water at three widely separate dates in sacred history. The first of the three was that gruesome miracle wrought in Egypt by Moses, one of the plagues, when he turned the waters of Egypt into blood. It was a ghastly transformation—one of the best blessings of life turned into a curse. The next miracle to which I will refer, performed on the same element of water, was the first miracle of our Lord's ministry, the miracle at Cana of Galilee, when He turned the water into wine. I say it was changing that which is in itself a blessing into a still higher blessing. Then the third instance to which I refer is an incident in the life of Elisha. "The situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth, but the water is nought," they said to him. Well, the young prophet accepted the challenge, and cast a handful of salt into the wells of Jericho, with the result that the water, which was salt before, became sweet and pleasant. That was an instance of a curse being turned into a blessing. Now, you see, these were three transformations, and they were all symbolical. Similar transformations are taking place still in human experience. Now I think you begin to see what is the drift of the teaching of this text. 1. The blessings and the curse of life. 2. Blessings cursed. 3. Blessings blessed; and 4. The curse changed into a blessing. I. THE BLESSINGS AND THE CURSE OF LIFE. Life has its blessings and it has its curse. Now, what are the blessings of human life? Well, the blessings of human life are simply the things that tend to make it blessed or happy. When God created man at the beginning, we read that He blessed him, and said, "Be fruitful, and multiply," &c. In these words the Creator indicated that man had been made for happiness, and He mentioned several of the principal sources of that happiness, such as the food with which he was to be regaled; his dominion over the inferior creatures; and above all, his social instincts, which were to cause to rise about him the charities of home. Of course, there has been a great change since that sketch was made by the Creator of man's happy lot, and yet the world is still full of things that are intended and fitted to make life blessed or happy. Then higher than the pleasure of the senses is the pleasure of the affections, and of the intellect, and those are ministered to by all the objects of love—parents, children, husband and wife, and so on, the Lord's day, the Lord's Word, the privilege of prayer, the Great Salvation, such are some of what you might call the blessings of life. Then what is the curse of life? You remember when man had fallen, how God pronounced upon him the curse; and what was it? To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." There is the curse; it is pain and sorrow and subjection and ill-usage. II. BLESSINGS CURSED. Let us look at this as the first transformation, because it is the one mentioned in the text. The blessings of life may be cursed. When does that happen? Well, I should say that the blessings of life are cursed when they fail to yield the happiness which they are naturally fitted to yield. Sometimes I am sure you have all noticed it. There may be food in the house; there may be money; there may be all that money can buy, and yet somehow happiness is not there. I think it might almost be said that those ages in which the means of happiness have been most numerous have been the least happy epochs. Now, take, for

instance, the period of Rome's decay. That was a period when wealth was flowing into Rome on every hand, and when in the Romans there was the keenest appetite for pleasure, and yet pleasure fled from the Romans. Do you remember how one of our poets describes it in ever memorable words ?

"On that hard pagan world disgust and secret loathing fell,
 Deep weariness and sated lust made human life a hell.
 In his cool hall, with haggard eyes the Roman noble lay ;
 He drove abroad, in various guise, along the Appian way ;
 He made a boast, drank fierce and fast, and crowned his hair with flowers ;
 No easier, nor no quicker passed the impracticable hours."

That is a description of how the blessings of the world may be turned into a curse. But perhaps the commonest way in which the blessings of life are transformed into a curse is when the satisfaction of the inferior happiness prevents the soul from desiring to enjoy the superior kinds of happiness. That often happens. The glut of the soul with the happiness of the senses may prevent it from appreciating the happiness of the heart or the intellect or the spirit. Now, have you never seen this ? A man who has been enjoying life in a humble way becomes suddenly and immensely rich. Well, he and his wife and daughters begin to dream of society, and with great efforts they get their feet into society, which despises them. The daughters come to no good ; the sons become thriftless and dissipated. That is an instance of the blessings of life being turned into a curse. Yes, and even so sweet a thing as human affection may become a curse in this way. It may become so satisfying that we have no desire left for anything higher. Oh, unhappy transformation, when the very thing that our Creator has given us for our enjoyment through human perverseness is changed into a disadvantage and a loss. III. BLESSINGS BLESSED. We have just seen that what we call the blessings of life are not in themselves able to make us happy, unless with the blessing there be given a second blessing. Those things which naturally tend to be blessings only really are so when there is a certain correspondence between them and the constitution of those who receive them. Now, for instance, food is one of the blessings of life. It has a natural tendency to make us happy, but in certain states of the body it does not do so. It may even poison the whole frame. But when food is received into a healthy body, then it is a blessing. Or, in the same way, we may say that knowledge is a blessing ; but it is not a blessing to everybody. What is the most golden page of great eloquence or wisdom to an ignorant man ? Even the highest blessings require a certain correspondence in us before they issue in what the Creator intended them for. O my people, it is a sad fact that even the Gospel may be a savour of death unto death. And let us bring this down to our own experience. The Word itself is a blessing, but it is only blessed to those who are in the right state of mind to receive it. Wealth ministers only to an inferior kind of happiness, and, as I have just shown, it is many a man's ruin, and the ruin of many a family ; and yet wealth may be used in such a way as to produce in the home an order and elegance in the midst of which love easily and naturally flourishes, and intelligence and culture are drawn in almost with the breath. Do you not think that in this way the life of a true Christian is a wonderful thing ? The commonest mercies when received from the hand of the Heavenly Father as His gifts, become at the same time spiritual mercies. A true Christian enjoys from the blessings of life all the happiness which others receive, but at the same time he derives a happiness which is peculiar to himself alone, because to Him the blessings of life are doubly and trebly blessed. IV. THE CURSE CHANGED INTO A BLESSING. What is the curse of life ? What was the primary curse ? It was toil, and that has been a terrible curse in this world. Millennium after millennium the slave has shed tears of blood under the rod of the oppressive master. And yet how many cases might be adduced in which this primary curse has been changed into a blessing ! I am sure I am speaking to many who, if they were asked to say what is their greatest blessing, would feel inclined to answer, "My work." Your work has kept off your soul those birds of evil which fall on the souls of the indolent and slay them. It has developed your faculties ; it has filled your home with comforts. I do not know any happiness that rivals the happiness of work well and honestly done. That is the primary curse changed into a blessing. And if you look over the face of the world you will find the same thing on a large scale. The happiest nations are not those living in places where everything is done for them, where they can spend their time in

sloth, and yet get plenty to eat and drink. Those are the happiest nations who have had to wring their substance out of a grudging soil, and assert the dignity of man in the face of adverse nature. But I think the curse turned into a blessing is most easily seen in those cases where the loss of the inferior happiness has caused the soul to seek the superior happiness. Ill-health has sometimes made men famous who would have been nothing of the kind had not the arrow drinking their life-blood caused them to retire from the general herd of men. It is a very significant fact that two of the five greatest poets of the world have been blind, and there is no reason to doubt that both Homer and Milton had the inner vision sharpened by the withdrawal of the outer vision. It is chiefly in the region of religion that we see this principle at work. I know there are many here who love God and follow Christ, and if I asked them to say how this has come into their lives I am sure a very large proportion would say that it was through loss, sorrow, bereavement, affliction. And so the curse of life has turned out to be its greatest blessing. Do you not think that when on the evening of the first day of his existence the first man saw the sun setting, and the darkness coming over the earth, the fear invaded his mind that the whole frame of things was about to be dissolved, and that he was about to be struck back into the nothingness out of which he had just emerged? But, lo! as the night enveloped the sky, the hosts of God came forth, the evening star leading the way, and with it suns and systems rolling into light. That spectacle would never have been seen had not the darkness supervened. And in the same way, some of you may remember that when the darkness of your first great disappointment or sorrow came, it seemed to you as if the universe were dissolving, and you yourself were being struck back into a nonentity. But you found day by day that there had risen to you a glory and a hope as much greater than the happiness you had previously experienced as the united light of all the suns that burn in the midnight heaven is greater than the single light of the lamp that lights the system to which we belong. The lesson is this: that nothing in this world is either in itself absolutely a blessing or a curse. There are those things which we call the blessings of life because they have the tendency to happiness; and there are those things which we call the curses of life because they have a tendency to unhappiness. But I say nothing in itself is absolutely either a blessing or a curse. Therefore, if the blessings of life are multiplied in your lot, if you are at present experiencing prosperity, do not be too much uplifted; and, on the other hand, if what is called the curse of life has been sent upon you, if things are going against you, and misfortune is dogging your steps, do not be too much downcast. The blessings of life may be cursed, and the curse of life may be made a blessing, the blessing of the Lord that maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it. (*J. Stalker, D.D.*)

Vers. 4-17. **That My covenant might be with Levi.**—*The minister of Divine truth*:—I. AS HE ALWAYS SHOULD BE. 1. A man divinely called. 2. A man of profound reverence. 3. A man of moral truthfulness. 4. A man of practical devotion. 5. A man of the highest usefulness. 6. A man of the highest intelligence. II. AS HE OFTEN IS. The false minister is here represented—1. As swerving from the right. 2. As leading the people astray. 3. As perverting the truth. 4. As becoming contemptible. Gracious heaven raise up men for our pulpits, so high in culture, so gifted in faculty, so Christly in love, so invincible in duty, so independent in action as shall not only counteract the downward tendency to ruin, but shall attract to it with reverence the intellect of the age. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 5-7. **My covenant was with him of life and peace.**—*Unspeakable blessings*:—The covenant which God made with Levi now belongs to all men. The benign purposes in every ancient covenant find their fulfilment and enlargement in Christ. I. THE BLESSINGS HERE SPOKEN OF. 1. Life. Physical life is a great possession. Physical life should not be wasted nor abused, but used as the basis of a higher life. Man has a higher life—the intellectual and the spiritual, in which the moral faculties and the consciousness of God reside. The spiritual life must be—(1) Quickened by the Holy Ghost. (2) Stimulated to struggle against the body of sin and death. (3) Grow in Christly beauty and symmetrical fulness. (4) Find its sustenance and satisfaction in God. (5) Untouched by physical decay and death, and perfected in heaven. 2. Peace. There is much that is called "peace" that does not come from God; as the

apathy of religious indifference, the forced calmness of self-deceit, the spiritual death of absorbed sensuality. Divine peace is preceded by conviction, repentance, and prayer. True peace arises from—(1) A consciousness of God's favour. (2) An approving conscience. (3) Firm reliance upon the promises of God. This peace "passeth understanding," for it comes from the depths of God's infinite love, is unshaken by the varied incidents of life, and is eternal. II. HOW MEN MAY POSSESS THE BLESSINGS HERE SPOKEN OF. Men fail to obtain these blessings because of their wrong conceptions of them; or, if they have right conceptions, they seek them in wrong directions. They try to find them in carnal pleasures, secular pursuits, circumstantial creations, and delusive virtues. These blessings can only be found in God through Jesus Christ. He is "the life," and "our peace." 1. Men must accept the view which Christ gives of the folly of seeking "life and peace" in fleshly indulgence and worldly good. He discloses to men's visions those life-giving energies and solid resting-places which the natural eye does not perceive. He stands as the living fountain of invisible realities. The great facts in the universe are the soul and God. 2. Men must accept of Christ as a living presence in their inner life. The Spirit of Christ was in God's ancient saints. He must dwell in men now if they are to be blessed in Him. He enters every willing heart, bringing "life and peace." 3. They must obey the voice of Christ's Spirit within them. Obedience will stimulate vitality and consolidate peace. Many suffer spiritual paralysis and unrest because they do not follow the leadings of Christ's Spirit. We must not only receive Christ, but live under the influence of His presence. To have a spiritual life glowing with energy, and a peace flowing like a river—broad and deep—through our souls, we must listen for the voice of Christ's Spirit and follow it. III. THE IMPORTANCE OF POSSESSING THE BLESSINGS HERE SPOKEN OF. 1. Because of their intrinsic value. 2. Of their adaptation to our condition and needs. 3. Because they are freely offered by a Being who understands our necessities, and who has made great sacrifices to bestow them upon us. 4. Because they have been eagerly sought for by the wise in all ages. 5. Because, without them, we shall wander in the realms of death and disquietude for ever. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*)

The covenant of life and peace:—Most commentators refer this statement to Levi, as the head of his tribe. I shall take the liberty of differing from them. It is our great and glorious High Priest, the true Melchisedek, with whom the covenant of life and peace was made. I. THE HEAD OF THE COVENANT. "Him," the Lord Jesus Christ. Mark the station He occupies in this character. He stands as the representative of His people, to covenant with the Father on their behalf, in their name. In their law-place, Jesus stood before all the perfections of Deity, accountable, responsible for them all, and holding all their interests dear as His own. Vain mortals are accustomed to talk about terms of salvation *now*; as if they were left to the creature to perform. But what were the terms of the covenant of salvation? Perfect obedience, infinite satisfaction. Where was the use of leaving these to a fallen creature? Our glorious Head alone is capable of rendering infinite satisfaction. Look at His affinity. For whom was He covenanting? His brethren, His "jewels." These were the persons; and why? Because they stood in everlasting affinity to Him—eternal relation to Him. II. THE INTERESTS OF THIS COVENANT. What is it all about? What is it for? "Life and peace." "Sin entered into the world and death by sin." Death, the sentence of death, the first and second death, is pronounced upon the soul of the sinner. The covenant of life is with Christ,—life spiritual, life Divine, life eternal. "This is the record—this life is in His Son." All the terms of this "life" were in that covenant, which He entered into on behalf of His Church. "Peace," amity, concord, agreement, between God and the soul; terms adjusted in such wise, that the parties are perfectly agreed. Tranquillity of mind, a holy calmness. A settled, composed serenity of spirit,—a believing satisfaction that God and my soul have come to terms, and can never be separated any more. III. THE SECURITIES OF THIS COVENANT. What is a deed worth without any seal or signature? Mark what the security of this covenant is. It ensures salvation entire and perfect. It is safely deposited, with Christ Himself. Mark the blessedness which pertains to this assurance. (*Joseph Irons.*) *Making a covenant with God:*—Doddridge, in his "Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul," suggested a solemn covenant being entered into with God. Samuel Pearce acted upon it by writing it with blood drawn from his own body. But he soon afterwards fell into sin, and thus broke his covenant. Driven into more close examina-

tion of the question he was led to see that it was not his own blood that was needed, but that of Jesus. Carrying the blood-stained covenant to the top of his father's house, he tore it in pieces and scattered them to the winds, resolved henceforth to depend on the peace-making and peace-keeping blood of Jesus. (*W. Adamson.*) *The blessings of God's ministry in His Church*:—At first the tribe of Levi officiated in the tabernacle, afterwards in the temple, with purity and profit; but, in the days of Malachi, they had sadly degenerated. I. **THE COVENANT MADE BY GOD WITH LEVI.** A covenant of life. It endured to the time when the Gospel-dispensation began. 2. A covenant of peace; of temporal prosperity and happiness. A due and fitting sustenance was provided for the Levites, without menial toil or care of theirs. 3. A covenant of spiritual life and peace. The Levites were distributed throughout the whole of the country to instruct and guide the people; they were to show in all their religious services that, without sacrifice, the sinner could never obtain pardon; that, without mediation, guilty man could never approach his God. It was their special business and care to show to the polluted and unclean how life and peace could be procured, how God could be pacified toward them, how holiness of heart could be secured, and eternal glory obtained. The Levitical priesthood, and the Levitical covenant, were typical of the eternal priesthood of Christ and the covenant of grace, and were introductory to them. II. **THE REASON OF HIS BEING SELECTED FOR THE SACRED OFFICE.** "For the fear wherewith he feared Me." 1. He feared God in a salutary manner, and thus he was always ready to do His commands. 2. "The law of truth was in his mouth." Levi was pious and reverential. He had a rich acquaintance with the law given by Moses. 3. "Iniquity was not found in his lips." Levi was prudent and discreet in his speech as well as in his actions. 4. "He walked with Me in peace and equity." Like Enoch and Noah, he took God for his constant companion: he acted uprightly before men. 5. "I gave them to him," says God. Levi taught the way of righteousness most diligently, by his significant services and typical ceremonies; and many became obedient to the Lord their God. Such should be our clergy. How exemplary should be the conduct, how pure the morals, how disinterested the acts, how heavenly the motives, of those who have to watch for souls and to win them for Christ. III. **THE RECIPROCAL DUTIES OF MINISTER AND PEOPLE.** 1. "The priest's lips should keep knowledge." The priests were the guardians of the sacred deposit; this was one chief cause of their influence. It was their duty to instruct the people in the moral laws, the judicial precepts, and the ceremonial rites, in all that Israel was bound to know and believe. 2. "They (the people) should seek the law at his (the priest's) mouth." He was the living witness to the power of Divine truth in his own soul, and the authorised expounder of God's Word to the assembled congregation. 3. "He is the messenger of the Lord of hosts," and as such should be attended to and obeyed. A combination of many excellences was requisite for the due execution of the "priest's office"; and so it is now with regard to the Christian minister. He needs a double portion of the Spirit. Happy is that country where the clergy minister for the glory of the Lord their God, and where they strive in all things to be examples to their flocks. (*Emanuel Strickland, M.A.*) *The secret of success in the ministry*:—A parishioner asked a clergyman why the congregation had filled up, and why the church was now so prosperous above what it had ever been before. "Well," said the clergyman, "I will tell you the secret. I met a tragedian some time ago, and I said to him, 'How is it you get along so well in your profession?' The tragedian replied, 'The secret is, I always do my best; when stormy days come, and the theatre is not more than half or a fourth occupied, I always do my best, and that has been the secret of my getting on.'" And the clergyman reciting it, said, "I have remembered that, and ever since then I have always done my best." And I say to you, in whatever occupation or profession God has put you, do your best; whether the world appreciates it or not, do your best; always do your best. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *The character and work of God's ministers*:—1. It concerns those who stand under any particular obligation to God to be much in studying the encouragements allowed upon them, that they faint not in His service, and of their duty, that they delude not themselves, expecting privileges when they mind not their work, for this end is the covenant of Levi so clearly laid before the priests. 2. Faithful priests have especial need of a covenant of preservation from God, being exposed to much hazard many times; and of the hope of eternal life, being often exercised with sad times here; and in

outward things to have the Lord securing their portion to them. And for all these may faithful ministers trust God, for "My covenant was with him of life" (that is, preservation here, and hope of a better life hereafter), "and peace and prosperity." 3. It is a special qualification of faithful ministers, and an evidence that they are to receive a blessing, when much familiarity with holy things doth not breed contempt, but their heart is filled with awe and reverence of God, and they go about His worship with holy reverence and trembling, and do testify much tenderness and zeal against any wrong done to God. 4. The practice of those who have gone before, and by walking in the ways of God, have inherited the promised blessing, will be a ditty against them who decline, and look upon their duty as intolerable, or their encouragements as hopeless; for, the practice and blessing on former priests are recorded, to condemn the present unfaithful ones. 5. It is incumbent to faithful ministers, that they be neither dumb nor liars, that they oppose themselves faithfully against error, and be faithful publishers of truth, for "the law of truth was in his mouth." 6. Albeit no mortal man can be so faithful, but that if God search him, he will not be able to stand; yet it is not sufficient for a minister, that he do not greatly debord in his calling, but he ought to carry himself so as he may abide a trial, for endeavoured holiness, singleness, and integrity, in revealing the counsel of God; for, "Iniquity was not found in his lips." 7. Albeit people are to look to the word carried by ministers, and obey God speaking it, whatever the messenger be; yet it is the duty of faithful ministers, to take heed that their carriage do not belie their doctrine, or minister occasion to bring it into contempt; but that their practice may prove their own believing in the doctrine, and that they shine in their private conversation, as well as in their public station; for therefore is the "walking" of honest priests marked as well as their doctrine. 8. As it is the duty of all Christians, so especially of ministers, to be constant in the ways of godliness, and walk in them, to be sincere in them, as in the sight of God, and to be on His side in all the controversies of their time, which is to "walk with Him," to make peace with God their great aim, and for that end to be humble in their obedience, and not rebellious to occasion quarrels, which is "to walk with Him in peace," and to follow the rule of righteousness, and "walk in equity," or "righteousness," in all their ways. 9. Albeit the Lord's most faithful servants may often see cause to complain of the ill success of their labours (Isa. xlix. 4); partly, in that they are sometimes sent out to harden the generality of a people against God's justice (Isa. vi. 9); partly, while they see not the fruit that is, as it was with Elijah (1 Kings xix. 14, 18); and partly, because the seasons of the appearing of fruits are in God's hands, yet honest and faithful ministers will not want such fruit of their labours, as may testify God's approbation of them; for, "They turned many away from iniquity." (*George Hutcheson.*) **The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips.**—*The eloquence of unobtrusive piety*.—I. A GOOD MAN'S CONVERSATION IS MARKED BY A STRICT REGARD FOR THE TRUTH. "The law of truth was in his mouth." 1. Slander is a violation of the law of truth. 2. Exaggeration is a violation of the law of truth. Some never speak but in the superlative. Exaggeration may spring from (1) an enthusiastic temperament; or (2) a morbid desire to say startling things; or (3) wilful wantonness. 3. Flattery is a violation of the law of truth. 4. The habit of making excuses is often a violation of the law of truth. 5. Equivocation and dissimulation are violations of the law of truth. II. A GOOD MAN'S CONVERSATION IS MARKED BY THE ABSENCE OF EVERY FORM OF EVIL. "Iniquity was not found in his lips." 1. Idle conversation is a form of evil condemned by the text. 2. Profane conversation is a form of evil condemned by the text. 3. Censorious conversation is a form of evil condemned by the text. 4. Impure conversation is a form of evil condemned by the text. III. A GOOD MAN'S LIFE IS MARKED BY CLOSE AND PEACEFUL COMMUNION WITH HIS MAKER. "He walked with Me in peace and equity." 1. There is intimate fellowship. "He walked with Me." This figure always implies close friendship. Enoch, Abraham, Noah, &c., walked with God. (1) This walk implies reconciliation. (2) This walk indicates progress. (3) This walk suggests constant intercourse. 2. This fellowship is productive of peace. "He walked with Me in peace." (1) Subjectively, peacefulness. The inward disposition of peace. (2) Objectively, peaceableness. The outward manifestation of peace. If there were more peace in human hearts there would be more in the home, the Church, and the world. 3. This fellowship is productive of moral integrity. "He walked with Me in peace and equity." There can be no sustained com-

munion with the Holy One if there be moral obliquity in the heart, or dissimulation or dishonesty in the life. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." This moral equity is very searching and comprehensive. (1) It governs the relation between master and servant (Col. iv. 1). (2) It governs the relation between buyer and seller (Prov. xx. 14). IV. THE GOOD MAN'S LIFE AND CONVERSATION WILL EXERT A SAVING INFLUENCE ON OTHERS. "And did turn many away from iniquity." 1. It will act as a restraint upon evil-doers. This is the heaven which preserves the whole from corruption. 2. It will act as an incentive to the well-disposed. Union is strength. The view of unfaltering piety will encourage the Nicodemuses to avow their principles. 3. It will prove to the world the genuineness of religion. (*Homiletic Magazine.*) **He walked with Me.**—*The pastor's walk with God*.—Here the degenerate ministers of Malachi's time are reminded of the bright ideal of the priesthood in an older time. They had left the path of Divine communion. But Levi had walked with God. The whole passage refers to the teaching side of the Jewish priest's office. We may therefore safely use it with reference to the Christian ministry. In Bunyan's allegory, this passage is nobly adapted to form the portrait of a minister of the Gospel. In the House of the Interpreter, the pilgrim sees a picture hung against the wall; "and this was the fashion of it. It had eyes lifted up to heaven; the best of books was in its hands, the law of truth was upon its lips, and it stood as if it pleaded with men." "He walked with Me." Here is a gift that can never come amiss. No circumstances, no temperament, no path of duty or trial, in the case of a Christian pastor, can ever dispense with this—the personal walk with God. None will forget the other side of the pastor's call—that he must *walk with men*. Times there have been in the history of the Christian Church when it was needful to enforce it; but, it is hardly so now. The danger is, that the pastor should mistake his commonplace activities for the main power, as well as the main work, of his ministry. It is a grievous danger. God connects two things: "He walked with Me"; "He did turn many from iniquity." As I read these words, a fair and beautiful ideal rises up before me, a vision at once delightful and saddening. It is an ideal blent of the elements of real lives. Saints and servants of the Lord, in the ministry of our Church, pastors whom I have seen and known, combine to form it. Men in whose shelves and surroundings there were countless differences, but who were all alike in carrying with them this indefinable impression, that they walked with God. Men I mean of very various ages at the time of observation, some crowned with blessed old age, that evening with no night to follow; some in the full vigour of ripe experience; others young, and in the first efforts of their life. But all were alike in a pure and chastened cheerfulness, most open and natural, yet never out of time with the peace of God. And all were alike in this, that it needed no long acquaintance to make it known that their dearest friend was their Master; their truest happiness, His work; and their deepest study, His Word. Surely, if we will to walk with God, the Lord will not be absent from our right hand. Point out two ways in which such a walk will tell on a pastor's work, apart from its duty and joy for himself. 1. It will give him width and calmness of view, and reach of hope, better than any other means. The pastor who walks with God will, on the one side, be as keenly alive as possible to the reality of evil in himself and those around him; on the other side, he will be able to trust mystery and failure in the eternal hand, in a way that otherwise could not be—without moral laxity. 2. This walk with God will give the pastor a power to influence others which he cannot otherwise have. Such a ministry, whether in the pulpit or in the study, in the cottage or in the mansion, in the room of sickness or of death, or in the scene of health, will surely be the likeliest to be the means of turning many from this present evil world to serve the living God, and to wait for His Son from heaven. May our brethren have this bright characteristic written on their ministry to the end. (*H. C. G. Moule, M.A.*) **And did turn many away from iniquity.**—*True priestly work*.—"Turn many away from iniquity." Believers are a spiritual priesthood, separated and sanctified, and placed among the unregenerate for their salvation. The saved are to save others. I. THE NATURE OF THIS WORK. Men naturally live in iniquity. Moral crookedness is innate. Salvation alone brings uprightness. This is confirmed by human consciousness, human confessions, human history, and Divine declarations. This makes the work of the Church difficult. It seeks to deliver men—1. By the persuasive power of holy living. 2. By the preaching of the Gospel. 3. By its philanthropic enterprises. 4. By

its power to bring down the Holy Spirit upon men through prayer. 5. By all its institutions and ordinances. In this work the Church will need (1) Much Divine power and wisdom. (2) Great self-denying zeal. (3) The attracting energy of Christian love. (4) Much persevering activity. Those who turn most away from iniquity give the surest proof that they are called to the Divine order of the priesthood. II. THIS WORK STILL NEEDS TO BE DONE. Iniquity abounds. The duty of the Church is imperative. III. THIS WORK MAY BE SUCCESSFULLY ACCOMPLISHED. Wonderful is the influence which one man can exert upon another for good. God works with those that work for Him. Before the emotions awakened by the love of the cross iniquity appears in its true light, and the sinner turns away from it with loathing. IV. THIS WORK IS GLORIOUS IN ITS RESULTS. 1. It saves men from the misery of eternal ruin. 2. It furthers the sublimest purposes of God in the redemption of mankind. 3. It brings to those who engage in it the sweetest satisfaction and delight. 4. It increases the joy of Christ, angels, and men. 5. It ensures to the workers themselves an eternal reward. Those whom they have blessed by the deliverance of the Gospel will bless them for ever. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*) *Priestly influence*.—What a criticism upon moral influence do we find in these words, namely, “And did turn many away from iniquity.” There is no historic pomp about the act: but who can tell what moral beauty there is in it? Prophets and priests and preachers and leaders work in different ways. Some have what may be called, from a public point of view, a negative or obscure function, but their record in heaven is that they turned many away from iniquity, by private expostulation, by unknown prayer—that is, fellowship together with the sinner—in communion that is never published; by influence, by example, by tender words, many are turned away from iniquity, from selfishness, from drunkenness, from baseness, from evil pursuits of every kind. Not by the thunder of eloquence, not by the lightning of logic or high reasoning, not by the mystery of metaphysics, but by calm, quiet, loving, tutorial interest in private life,—who knows what triumphs have been wrought within the sanctuary of the house? God is not unrighteous to forget our work of faith and labour of love: God knows how many lambs we have tended, how many straying sheep we have brought back to the fold, how many hopeless hearts we have re-inspired, to how many we have given of the oil of grace. Let no man, therefore, fail of heart and courage because he does not speak from a public pedestal. His name may not be known far away from his own fireside; there are private priests, there are household evangelists, there are ordained missionaries, whose names are not published; there are women-shepherds who are seeking the very worst sheep; the sheep that the shepherds would not look after, the shepherdesses are following still: all the service is written down, and attached to it is the commendation of God. The Lord now urges against the priesthood—*The heaviest charge of all*.—“Ye have caused many to stumble at the law.” There is the most malign influence which man can exert on man. No longer is the mere priest condemned, no longer is the laugh expended on the priest himself; the people have got beyond that, they say, If this is the priest, what must the law be? If the law were good, surely it would save the priest from such debasement as he embodies: if the priest can be so bad, so selfish, so worldly, so devil-loving, what must the law be? So we go from the personal to the moral, from the concrete individual instance to the written and eternal law: we begin by mocking the messenger, we end by trampling under foot the message. This has been woefully true in the history of Christianity. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 7. For the priest's lips should keep knowledge.—*The priest's lips should keep knowledge*.—There exists a broad and general analogy between the priesthood of the Levitical, and the ministry of the evangelical dispensations, an analogy sufficiently distinct and well-defined to enable us to argue from the one to the other in several most important particulars. I. THE NATURE OF THE KNOWLEDGE WHICH IS REQUIRED. When we speak of human knowledge we are perplexed by its variety and expansiveness. Where are we to find the precise boundaries of the knowledge which the priest's lips should keep? To a vigorous mind, all nature, and all history, and all philosophy, and every region of thought and imagination will be one vast storehouse of materials for the service of the Lord's temple. But some precise knowledge is here indicated, as specifically belonging to the priest; a professional knowledge, essential to the due discharge of his office. Surely it must be a knowledge of God's truth, revealed in holy

scripture: the knowledge of Christian doctrine in all its parts and proportions, as propounded by God to the faith of men for their salvation. This is the nucleus around which all his knowledge is to cluster, the centre to which all his other attainments are to converge. This knowledge has a twofold character. It is intellectual, and it is experimental: it is attained by the ordinary operations of the mind, and by the experience of the heart. The Christian minister must be one who rightly divideth the word of truth; one who has the nice and accurate skill to adjust the several portions of God's truth in their right places and due connections; to build symmetrically as a wise master-builder, and not merely to say what is true, but what is true in its own place and proportion. And this is not a skill which is attained by every one. The priest's knowledge must be experimental; i.e. learned by a feeling sense of the religious wants and cravings of the human heart. A further and higher teaching is required to give the true knowledge of the Gospel; it is an inward feeling of their adaptation to the wants of human nature, and a personal experience of their power upon his own heart. This is the real secret of ministerial strength. There is another branch of knowledge no less essential to the due discharge of the ministerial office—a knowledge of human nature. The hearts and consciences of men are the materials upon which the Christian minister's labour is to be expended. He will study his own heart as the best guide to the knowledge of the hearts of others. The most eminently successful ministers have been most proficient, in this knowledge.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS KNOWLEDGE. This is evident from the nature of the case. The minister is a messenger: he must be conversant with all things essential to a due execution of his commission. He is a teacher; and the people are to "seek the law at his mouth": he must therefore be competent to expound it. He is a referee in cases of doubt and difficulty; he must be skilled to deal with every such case which may come before him. He is the depository of the treasure of the Gospel; he must be able to dispense it with faithfulness. There are, at times, some special reasons why the Christian minister should be "a scribe well-instructed unto the kingdom of heaven." Times which demand, if not a higher tone of piety, at least a higher standard of knowledge. There are some peculiar features in the present circumstances and position of the Church. The Christian ministry must take up a commanding position whence it may direct and control the progress of society. (*W. Nicholson, M.A.*) *A minister's responsibility*:—Even strong and fearless Martin Luther confessed that he often trembled as he entered the pulpit. He could stand before kings and rulers without fear; but the responsibility of dealing with souls, and perhaps settling their destiny forever by his message, was to him so serious that he was wont to speak of "that awful place the pulpit." Have none of us been betrayed into that cold officialism which speaks strongly in the pulpit, and acts coldly out of the pulpit? Have none of us acted the inconsistency of making the pulpit holy ground and all outside common? (*A. J. Gordon, D.D.*) *An unobtrusive minister*:—"I remember once riding on a coach," remarked the late C. H. Spurgeon, "when the coachman observed to me he knew a certain minister (I will not say of what church) who, for the last six months, had been in the habit of riding up and down on the box of his coach with him; 'and,' says he, 'he is a good sort of man, sir, a sort of man I like.' 'Well, what sort of a man is he?' I asked. 'Well, you see, sir,' he replied, 'he is a minister: and I like him because he never intrudes his religion, sir. I never heard him say a word, that would make me believe him a religious man, the whole six months he has ridden with me, sir!'" I am afraid there are plenty of Christians of that sort: I am afraid the religion of such is not of much worth. They never intrude their religion; I think the reason it is so unobtrusive, is, that they have not any to intrude; for true godliness is one of the most intrusive things in the world. It is fire; and if you put fire down in your study, and give it most earnest admonition never to burn, you will find, while you are administering your sage advice, that a conflagration has commenced. *The duty of the Church in modern times*:—Did the conception of the Jewish priesthood given in this verse date from its original institution; was it part of the Mosaic legislation, or does it merely represent the ideal of the priesthood after the captivity? What does the prophet mean by "knowledge," and what by "law"? Is it the ceremonial law only? Or, is the priest enjoined to instruct the Jews of the restoration in the law of moral conduct? An honest view of Scriptural history requires us to make the wider and more comprehensive answer to these questions. With the pious Jew there was no divorce between religion

and morality. And the Jewish priesthood was not only a sacrificing, it was also a teaching priesthood. Compare the Jewish priesthood with that of ancient Greece. The Greek religion knew nothing of instruction, or of preaching, in connection with temples or festivals. At first sight, Malachi's words appear better suited to describe the prophet than the priest. But in truth, the priesthood, as an ideal, contained in itself the prophetic office as well. It is observable that the existence of organised prophetic schools in Israel appears just at those periods when the priesthood had ceased to be a witness to the truth. It was thus in the days of Samuel. The dearest desire of Samuel's heart was to win Israel back to God, and teach them true worship as well as true morality. When David is on the throne, national order is restored, the worship of God has a permanent centre, and the law of God—moral and ceremonial—is authoritatively set forth and enforced, then the prophetic schools fall into the background, or even cease, and the prophetic office itself becomes an occasional and extraordinary channel of God's grace. Later on, when religion and morality were in danger of extinction, under Elijah and Elisha the prophetic schools gained their moral and religious importance. But neither then did they imply any opposition to the ceremonial law. The true priest and the true prophet are at one. A right view of the Jewish priesthood is of importance toward a just estimate of the Christian ministry. You destroy the moral grandeur of the Jewish priest if you obliterate his prophetic function: and you miss the Divine ideal of the Christian ministry, if you see in it only a school of prophets, and forget that it is a teaching priesthood, with a fixed succession and a covenanted grace. None can deny the fact, that the Christian ministry has, to a very high degree, remembered and fulfilled its mission as a teaching priesthood, as a witness for the righteousness of God. But while we admire the powerful moral influence of the English clergy upon English morality, yet the very nature of this success helps to throw into stronger relief what appear to be its shortcomings. It may be seriously questioned whether the teaching of the Christian ministry has not tended to be too partial in its bearing upon Christian morals. The relation of the individual soul to God, the duty of man to himself and to his Maker,—these have naturally formed the principal theme of pulpit exhortation. But in that large field of duty which has regard to our fellow-men, it can hardly be said that the teaching of divines has been equally forcible and instructive. It may be feared that the Sunday sermon often gives little practical guidance for the toiling millions around us. The Sunday teaching must not be an alien from the duties of the week, nor leave out three parts of life. The type of character the Church tends to form is the foundation for the highest virtues and widest usefulness. It aims at making a man more devout towards God, mindful of the unseen and spiritual, self-controlled and master of the passions, true and tender in his home, forgiving to his enemy, generous to the sick and poor. These virtues are never out of date. Our religion as set forth in our Divine Exemplar, or in the teachings of His apostles, shows no one-sidedness. The New Testament sets the relative duties as high as the personal. Religion is there made to consist very largely in justice and benevolence. The principles of Christian conduct remain the same; but their application varies—love of God, self-denial, love of neighbour; and these based upon the doctrines of the cross; exemplified by the life of Christ; lit up with the hope of glory. Let me indicate some of the questions which demand the religious treatment of the Christian teacher. 1. The subject of amusements. 2. The ethics of dress. 3. Relation to the fine arts, painting, sculpture, music, the drama. Or—4. The laws concerning marriage and divorce. 5. Or consider the painful questions which arise out of the intensified vices of modern society; drunkenness, prostitution, bribery, commercial fraud. I do not fear that the Church will lose in spirituality or humility, by addressing herself to problems like these. (*E. L. Hicks.*)

Ver. 9. **I also made you contemptible.**—*Pulpits sinking into popular contempt*:—The priesthood of Israel is referred to. No greater calamity could happen to a community than this. **I. A CALAMITY TO ALL PARTIES.** 1. To the priests. Few things are more painful to man than social contempt. It divests a man of esteem, confidence, and influence. 2. To the community. The highest educational instrumentality in a country is that which religious ministers are appointed to employ. In every way they are to cultivate the spiritual natures of their contemporaries. When they become socially contemptible, they are

stripped of all power for this. The hearts of the people recoil from them with disgust. II. A CALAMITY TO WHICH THE RELIGIOUS MINISTRY IS LIABLE. There are moral elements at work amongst the clergy of all denominations which have a tendency to bring about this lamentable state of things. 1. Ignorance. 2. Greed. 3. Bigotry. 4. Sycophancy. III. A CALAMITY THAT IS MANIFESTLY TRANSPERING IN OUR COUNTRY. The decrease in the numbers of those who attend churches: the growth of a literature in thorough antagonism to the spirit and aims of Christianity: and the fact that the great bulk of the reading and thinking men of England stand aloof from all churches, plainly show that the pulpit of England is sinking into popular contempt. The "salt" of the pulpit has lost its savour, and it is being trodden under foot with disdain and contempt. (*Homilist*.)

A minister's inconsistency.—A minister of Christ had been preaching in a country village very earnestly and fervently. In his congregation was a young man who had been deeply impressed with a sense of sin under the sermon. When the service was over, he sought the minister as he went out, in the hope of walking home with him. They walked together till they came to a friend's house. On the way the minister talked about everything except the subject about which he had been preaching, though he had preached very earnestly, even with tears in his eyes. The young man thought within himself, "O! I wish I could unburden my heart and speak to him; but I cannot. He does not say anything *now* about what he spoke so fervently in the pulpit." When they were at supper that evening, the conversation was very far from what it should have been; and the minister indulged in all kinds of jokes and light sayings. The young man had gone into the house with eyes filled with tears, feeling as a sinner should feel; but as soon as he got outside he stamped his foot on the ground and cried out: "It is a lie from beginning to end! That man has preached like an angel, and now he has talked like a devil!" Some years after, the young man was taken suddenly ill and sent for that same minister to visit him. The minister did not remember him. "Do you remember preaching at the village of —?" said the young man. "I do." "Your sermon was very deeply laid on my heart." "Thank God for that," said the minister. "Do not be so quick about thanking God," said the young man. "Do you know what you talked of that evening, afterwards, when I went to supper with you? Sir, I shall be damned; and I shall charge *you*, before God's throne, with being the cause of my damnation. Oh, that night I *did* feel my sin, but you were the means of scattering all my impressions and driving me into a deeper darkness than I had ever been in before!" Minister of Christ! this is a true narrative. It is a common sin. In how many thousands of cases the testimony of the pulpit has been undone by the after conversation by the way, or at the dinner or supper table, only "the day" will declare! O! the account that we ministers will have to render for the light, frivolous, frothy conversation on such occasions, by which immortal souls have been sent further from God or altogether lost! What eyes have been upon us, secretly taking note of all and receiving from us a deadly influence! What opportunities for God presented and lost by our unwatchfulness and frivolity! Minister of Christ, aim to live out of the pulpit what you have preached in it. If you preach Christ, live Christ. What men hear in the pulpit let them see at the dinner table and the visit. (*F. Whitfield*.)

Partial in the law.—*An evil partiality*.—The possession of the law was the strength and glory of the Jewish priesthood. They had in it a Divine standard of human action, and it was their duty to maintain its authority, and enforce its requirements. Being selfish and corrupt they made their exalted position the means of gratifying their avarice; the vices of the rich were unreprieved, the faults of the poor were severely dealt with. They "knew faces" (Heb.). They were misrepresenting the character of God, bringing the law of God into contempt, and ruining the nation. I. THERE MAY BE PARTIALITY IN THE LAW ON THE PART OF THOSE WHO ADMINISTER IT TO THE PEOPLE. All righteous law is Divine. The principles of the decalogue underlie all just legislation. Administrators of righteous laws should feel that they are revealing and enforcing Divine, universal, and eternal realities. There should be no respect of persons. Partiality leads to—1. Loss of confidence in constituted authorities. 2. Rebellion and anarchy. 3. The increase of crime. Every Christian minister has to bring God's law into contact with public vices and personal sins. This must be done fearlessly, faithfully, firmly, and impartially. He must not adapt it to men's humours. He must not modify it to hinder its application to offenders of any

social grade. He must present it as God's unalterable standard, not his own. If he is "partial in the law"—(1) He will confirm men in their sins. (2) He will deceive and mislead them. (3) He will be accounted responsible for their destruction. (4) He will at last be rejected by God, and condemned by the people.

II. THERE MAY BE PARTIALITY IN THE LAW IN THE ESTIMATES OF MEN IN SOCIAL CIRCLES. The world is a court of justice. Society is always testing reputations and giving judgments. Men are oftener governed by prejudice than by the desire to judge righteously. Society often applies God's law according to its prejudices. Sometimes our application of the law is partial. 1. Because the person judged is, or is not, of the same religious persuasion as ourselves. 2. Because it is our interest either to hide or expose his faults. 3. Because we are already prejudiced favourably or otherwise towards him. 4. Because of his elevated or degraded social condition. This partiality leads to erroneous impressions, misrepresentations, unjust actions, and bitter feelings.

III. THERE MAY BE PARTIALITY IN THE LAW IN ITS APPLICATION TO OURSELVES. Men deal tenderly with their own sins. They hold the mirror of the law so as not to reveal them. They are willing to apply those commandments that do not condemn their particular vices. Faithful application of the law is seldom made. This is the cause of much ignorance of ourselves, much vanity and self-conceit, much folly and self-deception, much cherishing of sin, and persistence in it. By an impartial application of the law our sins are discovered, and we are led to Christ that they may be taken away. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*)

Vers. 10-12. Have we not all one Father?—One Father:—I. GOD IS NOT ONLY THE CREATOR, BUT THE COMMON FATHER OF MANKIND. This relationship implies two things: a resemblance in nature; and the existence of parental sympathy; and also the obligation of filial devotion. **II. THIS RELATIONSHIP IS AN ARGUMENT why man should do no wrong either against his fellow-creature or his God.** The wrong with which the Israelites were charged was—1. A wrong committed against mankind; and—2. Against God Himself. **III. THE PERPETRATION OF WRONG EXPOSES THE DOER TO THE MOST LAMENTABLE RESULTS.** This is only a shadowy picture of the evils that ever flow from wrong. It is sin that kindles and feeds the flames of retribution. Then haste the time when men shall realise the fact that they are all children of one Father, so that all wrongs against one another shall cease, and the spirit of universal brotherhood prevail! (*Homilist.*) **God our Father:—**I once said to a young person, "Well, Elizabeth, do you love God?" And what do you think her answer was? "Ah, I've been trying, sir; but it's hard, it's hard." That was how she answered. Then I said to her, "I'm afraid you don't know who and what God is. Try and find that out." I continued, "and then I think you'll love Him and have no difficulty in doing so." And it was just as I said it would be. Elizabeth went home, and before she slept that night she made one of the grandest discoveries any one ever made. What do you think it was? Why, she discovered that there was One up in heaven who felt for her all a father's love. She found out by reading her New Testament that God was her Father. (*A. Scott.*)

Ver. 11. And hath married the daughter of a strange god.—Unholy marriages:—The Jews were commanded to keep themselves separate from the heathen nations around them (Deut. vii. 2, 4). This was necessary that they might maintain their position as custodians of a peculiar revelation, and as abiding witnesses of the existence of the true God. But they often disobeyed this requirement, and formed idolatrous connections. This evil was now prevalent. Nehemiah and Ezra sought to remove this evil, and now Malachi strongly condemns it. **I. THIS EVIL MAY NOW BE COMMITTED LITERALLY.** Similar religious sympathies can alone form a true basis of connubial union. Without religion marriage loses its sanctity, and is merely a convenient alliance, a worldly compact, a carnal revel. Every woman that is not truly devoted to God is "a daughter of a strange god." She is under the influence of the god of this world. Christian men, for the sake of sensual and worldly considerations, sometimes marry such idolaters. They do so when—1. They marry women who sacrifice their noblest feelings for wealth. 2. Who have bound themselves upon the altar of fashion. 3. Who sacrifice their holiest impulses for pleasure. 4. Who are devoted to the triumphs of ambition. Christians should not violate their union with Jehovah to unite themselves with idolaters. To do so, even under the most plausible

circumstances, is—(1) To disobey a Divine command. (2) To lose the Divine blessing. (3) To incur the Divine displeasure. II. THIS EVIL MAY BE COMMITTED SPIRITUALLY. The soul's union with Jehovah is often spoken of in the Scriptures as marriage. God expects us to unite ourselves with Him in the closest bonds. From this celestial marriage spring all virtues and graces. But men have joined themselves to idols. The worship of strange gods has been most prolific in pernicious customs, degrading vices, and dangerous errors. Men marry the daughter of a strange god spiritually—1. When they join themselves with popular customs which have emanated from the spirit of idolatry. 2. When they embrace false and erroneous systems of religion. 3. When they associate themselves freely with unholy religionists. God requires His people to separate themselves from all the fascinating forms of evil. All unholy unions are as breaches of a marriage covenant, or as marriage with an idolater. They are a voluntary preference of evil to God. III. THIS EVIL, WHETHER COMMITTED LITERALLY OR SPIRITUALLY, WILL PRODUCE DISASTROUS RESULTS. 1. Literally. It will result in—(1) Domestic unhappiness. (2) A divided household. (3) Ill-trained children—probably generations of evil-doers. (4) Neglect of the true religion on the part of both. One religion matching with another not seldom breeds an atheist, one of no religion at all. 2. Spiritually. It will result in—(1) Blindness in spiritual things. (2) Loss of the Divine favour. (3) Wandering in deceptive errors. (4) Loss of religious influence. (5) Being given up by God. Learn to guard against uniting ourselves with anything that will separate us from God. An evil association has often been a devil's chain, binding the soul to everlasting wretchedness. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*)

Ver. 12. *The master and the scholar.*—*An interesting relationship.*—Various renderings have been given of these words. The meaning, however, from the context is clear. The leaders of the people were causing them to err. They had committed the evil themselves of casting off their Jewish wives for heathen women, and were teaching that it was no sin. God threatened that He would cut them off for this, and those whom they misled. An evil teacher works widespread ruin. But intellectual masterships are beneficial as well as evil. It is a Divine arrangement that some minds should control others. I. THE RELATIONSHIP IN WHICH THE MASTER AND THE SCHOLAR STAND TO EACH OTHER. Mastership consists in superior mental ability, knowledge, culture, and character. The possession of such gifts involves heavy responsibilities. Real mastership may ever be distinguished from mere positional authority. Scholars soon detect the difference; they render spontaneous homage to the one, but condemn the other. 1. The relationship is one of mutual benefit. The scholar receives much from the training, instruction, and example of the master; but the master also receives much from the scholar. He is stimulated to mental effort, made watchful over his conduct, and obtains a ready command of knowledge. 2. This relationship has much to do with the shaping of the scholar's character and destiny. The work of the master is the chief element in the formation of his being. The minds that mastered him in the formative period of life have shaped him, and will have much to do with fixing his destiny. Illustrate Arnold of Rugby. Masters may be great benefactors. They can—(1) Awaken latent energies. (2) Instil noble and life-giving thoughts. (3) Implant eternal principles. (4) Save the souls of their scholars from everlasting death. 3. This relationship tends to the general advancement of the race in knowledge and wisdom. The cultured minds of one generation convey, in this manner, its accumulations of knowledge and experience to that which follows it. The young of each age stand on a higher vantage ground than their fathers. II. THE DUTIES WHICH ARISE TO THE MASTER AND SCHOLAR FROM THE RELATIONSHIP IN WHICH THEY STAND TO EACH OTHER. Every relationship has its peculiar duties. 1. The master's—(1) To set a worthy example to his scholars. His own character will be his most influential lesson. (2) To eagerly impart knowledge to his scholars. He holds his position because of his possession of knowledge, and ability to impart it. He should have an enthusiasm to teach. (3) To unfold the natures of his scholars. Each one should be separately studied. (4) To administer correction to them. Some will only learn by the rod. (5) To seek to ensure their moral and spiritual welfare. To overlook the highest capabilities in education is folly. The work of the master should comprehend the whole nature. 2. The scholar's. (1) To respect his master's authority. Disrespect leads to disobedience, anarchy, and ignorance. (2) To give attention

to his master's instructions. Attention is generally the measure of attainment. (3) To possess a teachable disposition. He should seek to remove prejudice, conceit, and obstinacy, and yield himself to his master's guidance. (4) To remember that the results of his master's teaching will affect his future life in this world, and in the world to come. The future rests upon the present; eternity, on time. He is placed under instructors for his good; but neglect may rob him of all benefit, and send him forth unprepared for life's struggles, and unmeet for the solemn realities of eternity. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*)

Vers. 13-15. **Between thee and the wife of thy youth.—Marriage:—**
I. AS A SOCIAL COMPACT. "She is thy wife," here is the peculiarity of the relation. It is the fountain of humanity in its perpetuation, and the source of its purest affections, its dearest charities, and its richest enjoyments. It is a relation of choice, not of blood. Here is the mutual compact, with which, in the first instance, the two parties themselves have alone to do. It is a social compact, involving civil responsibilities. It is not enough that the individuals agree in the formation of this union; the magistracy of every state, watching over the weal of the whole, has a right to require a guarantee for the public, as well as for the parties. So far as society is concerned, and the public interest involved, marriage is exclusively a civil contract. All other relations arise out of this first alliance. This, being voluntary, and the root of all social ramifications, it becomes necessary that it should be formed with the greatest care, watched with the greatest circumspection, and secured by the most indestructible bond. "She is thy companion." Here is the propriety and solace of the relation. One crime alone dissolves the marriage tie, but many offences may occur to render it sore bondage. Incompatibility of temper and of habits will not fail, first or last, in a greater or less degree, to introduce estrangement into the heart, and disorder into the family. As thy companion, let her be treated as an equal. She is so in moral, intellectual, and immortal constitution—a partaker of the same nature, a possessor of the same qualities, a recipient of the same salvation. Society depends upon the participation of a common nature and a community of interests. **II. AS A RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION.** In view of the closeness of the union, the duties involved in it reciprocally, the inseparable connection of it with human happiness, such an alliance can acquire stability only from motives of a religious character, and from strength derived from spiritual aid. But God has laid down express laws for the regulation of the state thus entered upon, and watches over it to enforce those laws and to punish their violation. Consider the religious character of marriage—1. In its formation. 2. In its design. 3. In its connection with the altar. 4. In its responsibilities. 5. In its duties. 6. In the typical use made of it. (*W. B. Collyer, D.D.*) *The Divine institution of marriage:—*1. It implies a loving union of two, and only two souls, until death. 2. It has been sadly outraged in all ages. Polygamy, cruelty, and mutual unfaithfulness are outrages on it. 3. The outrage of this institution is fraught with calamitous results. It is abhorrent to God. It involves violence. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 16. **For one covereth violence with his garment.—Evil covered up:—**
 Sin indulged gathers force and violence. The oozing stream from the bursting reservoir becomes a torrent, and the torrent becomes a deluge. Lust leads to treachery, treachery to cruelty, cruelty to violence. There is a terrible momentum in evil. Impetuosity in sin is human energy diabolically directed. The Jews that had put away their wives drove them from their houses with violence, and though conscious of the evils they were committing, yet appealed to the Mosaic law of divorce (*Deut. xxiv. 1*), and sought to make that law a garment to hide their sin. But the prophet reminded them that God was cognisant of their sin, and would reveal it. **I. THERE IS A DISPOSITION IN MEN TO COVER UP THEIR EVIL DOINGS.** Men especially seek to hide acts of violence. Passion makes a man disreputable. The wrong-doer must put himself right with society. This is attempted in various ways. 1. By appealing to the Scriptures. Its teachings are perverted, its examples are distorted, and its injunctions are separated from their context, and wrongly applied. Truth is woven into a garment of sophistries to hide their sin. 2. By subtleties and false explanations. Men think that their real characters are not known by their fellow-men. They try to make their vices appear virtues. 3. By sheltering themselves behind the evil practices of the great. The lower classes make a garment of the vices of the

upper. Individual responsibility is forgotten. The moral character of a deed cannot be covered by prevailing customs, however elegant, nor by popular vices, however applauded or legalised. 4. By exercising themselves in the indulgence of their passions. Excuses are the garments which some men ever wear. They excuse themselves—(1) Because passions are not self-implanted. (2) Because of their strength. (3) Because they are generally yielded to. II. THIS DISPOSITION TO COVER UP EVIL REVEALS A CONSCIOUSNESS OF GUILT. 1. Man is conscious of moral emotions. His evil acts trouble him. The loudest witness to a man's guilt is in himself. 2. Man is conscious of a sense of shame in guilt. Years of persistent vice can hardly prevent trembling confusion in the evil-doer when discovered in his sin. He is self-condemned and ashamed. 3. This disposition often leads to an increase of guilt. Confession of sin brings mercy, cleansing, and peace; but the covering of sin, callousness, Divine displeasure, and ruin. It manifests obstinacy and determined rebellion. Men seek to cover up evil—(1) From fear of dishonour. (2) To escape punishment. (3) To silence conscience. (4) To avert the anger of God. III. THIS DISPOSITION TO COVER UP EVIL IS RECOGNISED BY THE LORD OF HOSTS. Vain are all subterfuges in an universe filled with God. Every evil is known by Him in its true character. Violence is not "expedient pressure"; it is violence. 1. His omniscience secures the detection of every evil-doer. 2. His justice secures the avenging of the wronged. 3. His holiness secures the exposure and punishment of every wrong-doer, however carefully he may cover his violence as "with a garment." All covering of sin by man is folly. God alone can cover it by His mercy in Christ Jesus. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*)

Ver. 17. Where is the God of judgment?—*A startling question*:—Times of abounding wickedness have been times of unbelief. Evil hinders the manifestation of God in the world. His laws seem to have no executive force; His righteousness is obscured; His very existence is questioned.—see text. This question may be asked—1. By the righteous in their distress. 2. By the wicked in their fancied security. 3. By the sceptic in his reluctant doubting. 4. This question will be answered by God—(1) To the joy of the righteous; (2) to the confusion of the wicked; (3) to the satisfaction of the honest doubter; (4) to the full vindication of the Divine justice. Faith is needed. The laws of God execute themselves most vividly in the invisible regions of the soul. Men look for God in the destructive hurricane rather than in the stings of conscience; in terrible thunderings rather than in the still small voice. Mercy, too, causes judgment to linger, but in the end every one will receive his sentence according to his deeds. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*) *God is a God of judgment*:—There was lately a judge in England, whom I need not be afraid to name as the honour of his robe and profession, namely, Judge Doddridge, whom they commonly called "the sleeping judge." Indeed, he had an affected drowsy posture on the Bench, inasmuch that many persons unacquainted with his custom, and having cases of concernment to be tried before him, have even given up all for lost, expecting no justice from a dormant judge; when he all the while did only retire himself within himself, the more seriously to consult with his own soul about the validity of what was alleged and proved unto him, as appeared afterwards by those oracles of law which he pronounced. Wicked men, in like manner, erroneously suppose God to be a sleeping God, . . . but in due time He will assuredly confute their mistake. (*Thos. Fuller.*)

CHAPTER III.

VERS. 1-6. Behold, I will send My messenger.—*Messiah's messenger*:—The coming of the Messiah was in the time of the world's deepest wants. As in all instances of national degeneracy, two special causes bore their fruit in Malachi's time. 1. Neglect of the Divine ordinances. No Divine law has ever been given that was not essential to human well-being. A neglect of the Divine standard is consequently a sin against one's self. There is not a Bible precept that is unreasonable, and therefore it is unreasonable to give no heed to what is written. In this respect the sufferings of Israel were self-imposed. 2. Decay of spiritual

life. It is hardly possible to realise the depth of wickedness portrayed by the prophet. The priests despised the name of Jehovah. The people had robbed God, and declared it a vain thing to serve Him. In a twofold way we observe the relation of such a lack of service to the national life. This sin resulted in the alienation of the hearts of the children from their parents. It is a mark of national decay when the children make light of their fathers, when they scoff at former virtues. Again, sin against God always carries with it wrong-doing against man. Love cannot be localised upon men while withheld from God. The man who cannot truly honour God will not truly honour man. Our deeds declare our religion. Well did the prophet ask, "Who may abide the day of His coming?" Who shall bear the tests of His judgment? The prophesied coming of Elijah referred to John the Baptist. There is something sublime in the rugged character that confronted a degenerate nation. He only who knows the Divine greatness and power can have courage to rebuke the self-conceit that resists God. The life of the Baptist interprets the two great lessons of the prophecy in our text calling for notice. 1. Our hope rests in the unchanging God. The idea of changeableness in the one trusted destroys all faith in its very essence. It is unhuman to love the being that to-morrow may turn against us. But for this Divine characteristic no sinner could stand in God's sight. It was this truth against whose bright background Israel's sin is of the deepest guilt. 2. The suicide of unbelief. God added no terrors to Israel's sufferings in the fiery day. They had but to remember their words, "His blood be on us, and on our children." Unbelief can stay the exercise of Divine mercy towards the individual, but it cannot keep back its own retribution. It can give blindness to the heart, but it cannot blot out the Divine judgment. Against the darkness of the prophet's picture there is another, of brighter meaning. There is a healing power in the beams of the Sun of Righteousness. Light takes the place of darkness. The righteous shall not be as flowers to fade and to die, but rather, strong and a source of joy, like the herds that feed in richest pastures. Jehovah is that blazing sun of glory. Unbelief brings a sunset of terror, while righteousness is itself the sunrise of everlasting joy. (*Sermons by Monday Club.*) *The appearance of the Great Deliverer*.—The event announced is the appearance of that Great Deliverer who had for many ages been the hope of Israel, and was to be a blessing to all the families of the earth. Concerning this desire of nations, Malachi here delivers no new prediction; but, by an earnest asseveration, uttered in the name and, as it were, in the person of the Deity, he means to confirm that general expectation which his predecessors had excited. 1. The characters under which the person is described whose coming is foretold. "The Lord," or Proprietor. It denotes dominion. "The Lord shall come to His temple." That is Jehovah's. Then the Christ whose coming Malachi announces is no other than the Jehovah of the Old Testament. From many texts it may be gathered that the promised Messiah is described by the more ancient prophets as no other than the everlasting God, the Jehovah of the Israelites. "The Messenger of the covenant." Not the Mosaic. Another covenant is spoken of as the new and the everlasting covenant. Of this covenant, so clearly foretold, and so circumstantially described by the preceding prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Malachi thinks it unnecessary to introduce any particular description. The Messenger of the covenant is Jehovah's servant, for a message is a service; it implies a person sending, and a person sent; in the person who sendeth there must be authority to send,—submission to that authority in the person sent. But the servant of the Lord Jehovah is the Lord Jehovah Himself; not the same person with the sender, but bearing the same name because united in that mysterious nature and undivided substance which the name imports. The same person therefore is servant and Lord. Another character of the Messiah must be added. He is the Messenger whom "they delight in." But this expression here is ironical; the words express the very reverse of that which they seem to affirm. There is more or less of severity in this ironical language, by which it stands remarkably distinguished from the levity of ridicule, and is particularly adapted to the purposes of invective and rebuke. It denotes conscious superiority, sometimes indignation, in the person who employs it; it excites shame, confusion, and remorse in the person against whom it is employed,—in a third person, contempt and abhorrence of him who is the object of it. Irony is the keenest weapon of the orator. 2. The particulars of the business upon which the person announced is said to come. It is reducible to these—the final judgment, when the wicked shall be destroyed; a previous

trial or experiment of the different tempers and dispositions of men, in order to that judgment; and something to be done for their amendment and improvement. The trial is signified under the image of an assayer's separation of the nobler metals from the dross with which they are blended in the ore. The means used for the amendment and improvement of mankind, by the Messiah's atonement for our sins, by the preaching of the Gospel, and by the internal influences of the Holy Spirit,—all these means, employed under the Messiah's covenant, for the reformation of men, are expressed under the image of a fuller's soap, which restores a soiled garment to its original purity. One particular effect of this purification is to be, that the "sons of Levi" will be purified. The worship of God shall be purged from all hypocrisy and superstition, and reduced to a few simple rules, the natural expressions of true devotion. "And then shall this offering of Judah and Jerusalem" (that is, of the true members of God's true Church) "be pleasant unto the Lord." All these prophecies were fulfilled, or will yet be fulfilled, in Jesus of Nazareth. (*Bishop Horsley.*)

Messiah and His forerunner.—1. John the Baptist as a kind of connecting link between the law and the Gospel. He displayed much of the austerity of the prophets of old. He may be said to have taught that the law was about to be swept away as a covenant of works; there was not to be introduced any system but one of strict and self-denying morality. As he preached a baptism of repentance, and not one of mere ceremonial purification, it became evident that the long twilight of figure and type was about to be succeeded by the clear day of spiritual and heart work religion. John occupied a most singular position: commissioned neither to enforce the law nor to proclaim the Gospel. He may be called a man of two worlds. He stood mysteriously between the law and the Gospel, being neither instructed to marshal the shadows nor privileged to exhibit the substance. And yet with all this John was not ignorant of the atoning sacrifice which Jesus was to offer. From the lips of John flowed the first announcement of an expiatory sacrifice. "Behold the Lamb of God." But the preaching of the Gospel includes a vast deal more than the showing forth of the doctrine of the dying Redeemer. Upon this doctrine, as a foundation, rests every other; but the superstructure is not to be confounded with the foundation. Christ must be preached as a risen, a living, and a glorified Saviour. John was a messenger sent to prepare Christ's way. But in every case the herald of an illustrious personage announces but part of the business on which that personage comes.

2. Notice the titles here given to Christ: "the Lord" (*Adonai*), and the "Messenger of the covenant." There is much in the latter title which has to do with the offices of Christ. His special business was, enacting a fresh covenant between God and the human race. The only covenant God could make is one whereby He promises blessings and at the same time prescribes conditions. The whole drawing up of the covenant must be, so to speak, with God. God proposes it, and the only thing which man can have to do is merely to embrace it. (*Henry Melville, B.D.*)

"My messenger".—I. THE GREATNESS OF JOHN THE BAPTIST. 1. The angel said he should be "great in the sight of the Lord" (*Luke i. 18*). He was "a prophet, and more than a prophet." 2. What is a prophet? A teacher? Yes, but one who is taught directly by God. He not only predicts the future, but he is the revealer of God's will for the present. 3. John was "more than a prophet." This is explained in three ways. (1) He was prophesied of. (2) He was more than a prophet in the richness of his illumination. (3) Through his nearness to Christ—going before the face of the Lord. 4. The praise of Christ is the purest indication and guarantee of the excellence of His forerunner.

II. THE GREATNESS OF HIS WORK. 1. He had to make ready the way of the Lord in souls, by preaching repentance. 2. The most remarkable part of his office was that of pointing out and bearing witness to "the Light." III. LESSONS. 1. Observe how God uses human agency in the accomplishment of His purposes. 2. The preparation is the same in all approaches of the Lord. 3. The work of the Baptist reminds us of the importance of preparation before Holy Communion, when Christ comes hiddenly to us. (*The Thinker.*)

Christ's coming.—These words were spoken to the unbelieving priests of Malachi's days, who professed that they could see no tokens of the presence of God among His people. The Lord describes—

I. THE PREPARATION FOR HIS COMING. John the Baptist prepared the way "of the Lord"—1. By his singular birth. 2. By his awaking ministry. 3. By direct testimony. "He saw and bare record that this was the Son of God."

II. THE TIME OF HIS COMING. Suddenly, or immediately after the preparation of His

way by the "messenger." How remarkably did the facts agree with the prediction! III. THE DIGNITY OF HIS COMING. No mere man could use such authoritative words. "He shall prepare the way before Me." IV. THE SPECIAL BUSINESS OF HIS COMING. "Messenger of the covenant." "Equal with the Father, as touching His Godhead," Christ is at the same time "inferior to the Father as touching His manhood," in order that He might become the Messenger of heaven to a lost world. He came to reveal and to fulfil His own part in a gracious covenant of redemption for guilty sinners. V. THE CERTAINTY OF HIS COMING. The unbelieving Jews doubted it; even the faithful were despondent; the prediction is therefore attested by a most solemn assurance, "Behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts." (*J. Jowett, M.A.*) *The Messenger of the covenant delighted in*.—This passage cannot speak of any intervention of the Deity, like that which the nation of Israel had often experienced; here was a prediction of the Messiah to come. His Divine nature is declared, and yet, when He is spoken of as the Messenger of the Almighty, we see Him as distinct from God in His human nature. He is the Lord who should come to His own temple; and He is the Messenger or Servant of the Lord of hosts. He is not the Messenger of the Mosaic covenant. That had long previously been established under Moses, as its mediator. Isaiah writes of another covenant, an "everlasting covenant." The national covenant must pass to give way to a better. Of this new covenant, to receive the elect remnant of the Jews, and to gather around them all the elect people of the Gentiles—of this covenant it is here said, that the Messiah to come was to be the Messenger; He should establish the covenant; He should be its source; He should be its Mediator; He should be the very substance of the covenant. It was His blood formed that covenant; when He made an atonement for transgression He rendered it possible, because it became just and right that the Almighty should again enter into a covenant of peace with His rebellious creatures. Look at Christ under this character, the "Messenger of the covenant,"—Him who was sent of God to establish and confirm it. He, in order to bring His people into covenant with God, has been their substitute in suffering. He would also secure us every best blessing. He has become our wisdom, He has also become our sanctification. He is also our perfect example. He becomes an advocate for each of His offending people. And He is our High Priest, touched with the feeling of our infirmities. The prophet tells of the reception which the Saviour was to meet. "Whom ye delight in." And good reason have we to delight in this Messenger of the covenant, if indeed we have tasted of His love. We may delight in what He has done, what He does, and what He will do for us. (*Hon. and Rev. B. W. Noel, M.A.*) *England's ideal future, and our duty with regard to it*.—In these words Malachi proclaims to the Jews in Jerusalem the ideal future. Every nation lives in its past. It derives inspiration for noble and worthy conduct, from the memory of illustrious heroes whose names adorn its roll of fame. The Jew appealed to the magnificent episodes in the earlier history of His people, when God had signally and miraculously interposed on Israel's behalf. And He drew from this historical source arguments for a renewed faith in God, for a purified religious and national life. But every nation in whom there still throbs the pulse of a vigorous life lives also in an ideal future. It believes in its individual destiny. That destiny may not be clearly defined. It does not need clear definition to exert its power in shaping the course of a nation's history. The presence of a great idea is sufficient of itself to shed a guiding light upon a nation's onward track. Israel possessed a great leading idea with respect to its future, that, namely, of the coming of a Messiah. The nation held this idea under different forms at different periods of its history. In the latest of the prophets, in Malachi, there is a departure from the traditional picture of the nation's future. Malachi no longer speaks of the coming of an earth-born prince. He speaks of a heaven-born Messenger, who should carry into effect the covenant long established between Jehovah and His people. The "Messenger of the covenant," who should "sit as a Refiner and Purifier of silver," who should separate the evil from the good; who should, like a glorious sun new risen upon the world with healing in his beams, bring new life and invigoration to all earnest souls, to all who feared the name of God. The moment in the nation's history which this verse brings before us is that when it is face to face with its apparently destined future, as that future is disclosed by the inspired voice of Malachi. The purpose for which the prophet draws his picture is, that he may rouse the conscience of the different classes of the people; and lead them to reconsider

seriously, and in God's sight, their national, religious, and domestic duties. He derives from his contemplation of the ideal future of his nation an incentive for present action. Let us draw from a contemplation of the near future of our own country a motive and stimulus for present guidance and action. 1. Contrast Malachi's vision of the future of Israel with the ideal future of our own country. What is the mightiest force at present working in our national life? It is the progress of popular government, the rule of the country by the people of the country. The nineteenth century was the age of the growth of democratic institutions, of the spread of democratic ideas. This is the one grand force in our national life which contains within itself inexhaustible energies, the capacity for almost unlimited development. Nothing can successfully oppose its course. The tide of popular development will sweep forward. It is destined to attain vaster proportions. Shall we, as religious, God-fearing men, loving our country and humanity, caring for posterity, fail to recognise in this tendency of our age the summons of God to renewed earnestness, to intensified zeal? Shall we say that these vast political movements and issues have no voice for our conscience, no bearing on our Christian duty and Christian faith? The great Hebrew prophet Malachi rebukes us. 2. Look at our duty as Christian men, as Christian workers, in the light of the political destiny of our country. We should—(1) Accept it fearlessly, and with full faith in God. (2) Let the Christian Church determine that the movement shall be under the direction of Christian men. (3) The necessity of promoting education and enlightenment becomes ever more clear. (4) A new impetus is given to the preacher of the Gospel by the contemplation of this magnificent future of our country. (*A. J. Griffith.*) *Did Jesus come again*:—What manner of personage would He be did He condescend to appear among us? Should we know Him merely by His bearing and character? We must believe that, as in Judea of old, Christ would meet men with all consideration and courtesy. All, or almost all, the good manners which we have among us—courtesies, refinements, self-restraint, mutual respect—we owe to Christ, to the influence of His example, and to that Bible which testifies of Him. Conceive—but which of us can conceive?—His perfect tenderness, patience, sympathy, graciousness, and grace, combined with perfect strength, stateliness, even awfulness, when awe was needed. He alone, of all personages of whom history tells us, solved in His own words and deeds the most difficult paradox of human character,—to be at once utterly conscious and utterly unconscious of self; to combine with perfect self-sacrifice a perfect self-assertion. He condescended, in His teaching of old, to the level of Jewish knowledge at that time. We may therefore believe that He would condescend to the level of our modern knowledge; and what would that involve? It would leave Him, however, far less than Himself, at least Master of all that the human race has thought or discovered in the last eighteen hundred years. He might speak as never yet man spoke on English soil, might speak with an authority, originality, earnestness, as well as eloquence which might exercise a fascination, purifying though painful as a “refiner's fire”; a fascination equally attractive to those who wished to do right, and intolerable to those who wished to do wrong. But how long would His influence last? As before, there might come a day when His hearers and admirers would become fewer through bigotry, envy, fickleness, cowardice, &c. And so the world, the religious world as well as the rest, might let Him go His way, and vanish from the eyes and minds of men, leaving behind little more than a regret that one so gifted and so fascinating should have proved—so unsafe and so unsound a teacher. (*Canon Charles Kingsley.*) *The Lord coming to His temple*:—Here before us is a twofold prediction. We have a forerunner of Christ announced in it, and then Christ Himself. I. A FORERUNNER OF CHRIST. 1. His mission from God. “Behold I will send My Messenger”—there is his Divine mission. Reference is to John the Baptist. Observe the honour it puts upon him. It not only describes him as in the mind of God before his appearance, and as specially appointed by God to his office, but it makes him, like his great Master Himself, the subject of prophecy, and an object of expectation for ages to the Church. It was no personal pre-eminence that so peculiarly distinguished this man. It was this—he was nearer to Christ; he testified more plainly and fully of Him. 2. The work this forerunner was sent to perform. “He shall prepare the way before Me.” John came, sustaining the character and doing the work of the herald of Christ. The preaching of the Baptist should not only lead men to expect the Messiah, but should prepare their hearts to receive Him. What

was it that first led some of you to seek Christ and welcome Him? Was it not a consciousness of sin, a sense of God's anger, a dread of merited destruction? Now examine John's preaching, and you will find it calculated to produce just these effects. II. A PREDICTION OF CHRIST. 1. The names applied to Christ. He is "the Lord." He comes to "His temple." Thus the Holy Spirit asserts the Redeemer's Godhead. Another name is applied to Christ, a lowly one—"the Messenger of the covenant." He sustains in relation to the covenant a similar character to that which John sustained towards Himself. He is God's servant, sent into our world on an errand connected with God's covenant of grace. The "covenant" is the term applied by Jehovah to the promises He has given His people to bless and save them. It shows them the stability of these promises, and the fixed purpose of God to perform them. And Christ is called the Messenger of this covenant, because He it is who makes it known. He, in His human nature, is the instrument employed by Jehovah in carrying it into effect. Observe the happy blending together in these two names of the Redeemer's greatness and lowliness—the Lord of hosts, and yet a servant. 2. The appearing of Christ in our world. Mark the place—"His temple." Mark the predicted manner of His appearing—"suddenly." Mark the certainty of His advent—"He shall come." Put three questions. (1) What reception have you given to this heaven-descended Saviour? (2) With what feelings and expectations do you come up to this house of the Lord? (3) How stand you prepared for the future coming of the Lord? (*C. Bradley, M.A.*) *The advent of Christ*.—In the days of Malachi there were many who, as the prophet says, even "wearied the Lord with their words." They said that God delighted in the wicked as much as in the good, and denied that He would ever put any difference between them. "Where," said they, "is the God of judgment?" Notice—I. WHAT THE PROPHET SAYS RESPECTING OUR LORD'S ADVENT. Jesus is here described under the most august titles. He is the Lord, the supreme Ruler and Governor of heaven and earth. Yet, notwithstanding His equality with the Father as God, He assumes the form of a servant, and comes as the Messenger of the covenant. In this office He was an object of desire and delight long before He came into the world. He was "the Desire of all nations." The circumstances of His advent were minutely foretold. 1. He was to be preceded by a herald or messenger. This messenger was John. The conduct of the Baptist excited universal attention, and very general admiration. 2. The temple was the place to which especially He was to come. 3. His advent, though so long predicted, was to be sudden. The manner of His appearance was so contrary to the worldly notions entertained respecting Him that He was overlooked and even rejected as an impostor. II. THE EFFECTS WHICH THE PROPHET DESCRIBES AS ATTENDING THE ADVENT OF THE SAVIOUR. 1. As the characters of those to whom He was to come were very various, so His advent was to prove discriminating. To discover the hidden dispositions of the heart was one intent of our Lord's coming. This effect still follows from the preaching of the Gospel. Men, though unconscious of it themselves, are led to manifest their real characters, either as careless Pharisees or atheistical scoffers or humble believers. 2. As a consequence of this discriminating effect of our Saviour's advent it will also prove destructive. A refiner's fire will consume the dross, and fuller's soap will purge the filth of that to which it is applied. So will our Lord eventually destroy many of those to whom He comes. Their sins are aggravated by His coming. 3. There are many whom the advent of Christ will have the effect of purifying. How comfortable it should be for those who are enduring trials of affliction below, to know that while they are in the furnace the Refiner Himself sitteth over them, watching the process with all due solicitude, and taking care that they shall lose nothing but their dross. Two questions. (1) What reception have you given to Christ since His first coming? (2) What preparation have you made for His future advent? (*G. Preston.*) *The coming of Messiah*.—I. HIS FORERUNNER. John was to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord," and accordingly he aroused their attention, he removed their prejudices, he awakened their consciences, he announced the nearness of Messiah's approach, proclaimed the nature of His reign, convinced them of sin, and showed them that they stood in need of a much greater salvation than deliverance from the Roman yoke. II. HIS CHARACTER. He is described in three ways. 1. By His person—the Lord. The word used is Adonai, a name for God, but not an incommunicable one like the name of Jehovah; for we find it sometimes applied to kings and superiors. It properly

signifies authority and dominion. How fully does this apply to Him. He must have had a previous claim to dominion before He acquired this by obedience and suffering unto death. 2. By His office. "The Messenger of the covenant." Of the covenant of grace. He is the Mediator, and the Surety, and the Messenger of this covenant, because He was not only to procure its blessings, but to bestow them. "Messenger of the covenant" is His inferior title. It shows His infinite condescension and grace. His people will never suffer His glory to be injured by His goodness. 3. By the estimation in which He was holden. "Whom ye delight in." This will apply even to the carnal Jews, who did look for a Messiah. Much more does it apply to spiritual Jews; He was desired and delighted in by all the people of God from the beginning. III. HIS ADVENT. "Suddenly come to His temple." He was now to come incarnate—"clothed in a body like our own." Two things are mentioned with regard to His advent: the one regards the manner in which He was to come. Suddenly; which may mean both "soon" and "unawares." The other regards the place to which He was to come. His temple. Fulfilled by His presentation in the temple, and subsequent visits to it, and teaching in it. IV. THE AWFULNESS OF HIS COMING. "Who may abide?" Observe the awfulness—1. In the occasional emanations and displays of His majesty. 2. In His detection of characters. 3. In the calamities which were to follow the rejection of Him. V. THE OPERATIONS OF HIS GRACE. "Like a refiner's fire," &c. The fuller's soap takes stains out without destroying the texture of the cloth, and gives it clearness and freshness of appearance: and the refiner's fire severs the dross from the ore, and instead of injuring it, prepares it for circulation or use, and makes it shine. Thus the Lord does with all the subjects of Divine grace. The incarnation of our Saviour regards two classes of men. To the one it is injurious, and to the other beneficial. (*William Jay.*) *The Lord's coming to His temple:*—Taking John the Baptist as only the precursor of the Lord Jesus, let us look at what is here predicated of Him. 1. It is declared, "He shall suddenly come to His temple." "His" temple implies that He was Lord of the temple. The Jewish people anxiously looked forward to His coming, but greatly mistook its object. They little thought what a searcher of heart and corrector of wrong He would be. 2. Notice how He acted in respect to His temple when He came. (1) One of His early acts was to cast out them that bought and sold there. (2) Observe His righteous indignation against evil wherever He met with it. (3) This was the proximate cause, no doubt, why the Jews put Him to death. 3. Notice the result of His coming as respects others. (1) It would subject men's characters to a severe trial. Fire separates between the gold and the dross: and the fuller's soap fetches the spots out of the stained cloth. How would this be done? By the preaching of the Word. By His dealings with His people. (*Stephen Jenner, M.A.*) *Purifying through the Lord's coming:*—I. THROUGH HIS FIRST COMING. The prophet Malachi announces the Saviour as one who on His appearing will set on foot a great purifying among the people of Israel. Christ's forerunner, John the Baptist, of whom our text speaks, alluded to this. With the greatest earnestness he insisted on purification of heart. The forgiveness of sins, through faith in Christ, is the great purification, through which we are presented pure and holy before God. Thus has Christ laid in Himself a foundation for the purifying and sanctifying of our entire race. II. THROUGH HIS DAILY, INVISIBLE COMING the Lord exercises His purifying office for our salvation. What Christ did in person at His first coming in the flesh He does now by His Holy Spirit. Even the gold that has been purified needs a continuous purifying. The stain of earthliness still clings too readily even to the pure heart, the flesh always lusts against the spirit; and sin, so long as we tarry in the body, is a foe always cleaving to and burdening us. Therefore does the Lord come even to believing souls with many a crucible of affliction, in which He again and again cleanses the gold from dross, that it may be fitted for His temple. But He often exercises His purifying office inwardly by a gracious coming to our hearts. He then comes with a specially blessed sense of His love, by which we are made ashamed and dissolve in love, such fire of love removing impurity. III. AT HIS SECOND COMING IN GLORY the Lord will destroy all anti-Christian ways, and all human pride that raises itself against Him. The day of His first coming the people might well abide. He had veiled His glory under our weak flesh. Who would not rather in the day of grace be purified by the inner fire of Christ's and the Spirit's love and grace? To-day is the season of grace, to-morrow perhaps not. (*S. C. Kapff.*)

Ver. 2. But who may abide the day of His coming?—*The coming of the Lord*.—Look at this subject in two points of view. I. AS A QUESTION OF SOLEMN REMONSTRANCE. That the Lord has come, we know; that the Lord will come, we profess to believe. The Scripture tells us much about that coming, but leaves much that is uncertain. One thing is clear—the return is to be sudden. But the very suddenness of that return teaches us that when the time comes for the Lord's appearing, then the time of preparation is past. When our blessed Lord does come suddenly, He returns for judgment; no nice distinctions will then be drawn; party spirit must then sleep, and sleep for ever. Then shall it be seen who have worshipped God in spirit and in truth. A difference, however, will be made, absolute and relative—absolute to the right or to the left—relative, for we know there are degrees in glory. At the Lord's coming no secret shall be hidden, the mere outward appearance of religion will be unavailing. Then we shall learn who can abide His coming. There is a true and a false profession: and then the false profession will be detected, the veil of hypocrisy will be rent, and the mere formal hypocrite will be made known to all. It seems that the very teacher may then be lost. Then search and see whether there is Christian practice with the Christian profession. Those who have crowded together to hear the Word of God will then be detected. II. AS AN APPEAL TO OUR CHRISTIAN CONFIDENCE. The Apostle says that some can stand in that day. Who? The real Christian alone: the man who has the Spirit of the living God dwelling in his heart. What is your preparation for eternity? Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is essential. The man that stands now, stands by faith. The man that does not trust Christ—I care not what his morality may be, I speak of him as one weighed in the balances of eternity. (*Bishop of Carlisle*.) *Christ's second coming*.—I. REMIND OF SOME PARTICULARS IN THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST. 1. The certainty of that event. That Christ will come is a point on which we are not left to doubt and conjecture. We have the plainest testimony which words could give (Acts i. 11). 2. The manner of it. It will be glorious. The first coming was in all outward meanness and humiliation. The second is to be "the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour." His coming will be sudden. 3. The purpose and consequences of it. In His state of humiliation Christ came as a Saviour; when He comes in glory, He will come as a Judge. II. ANSWER THE SOLEMN QUESTION OF THE TEXT. "Who may abide the day of His coming?" Who will be able to bear that severe and close inquiry which will then be made into our lives and characters? 1. Those who will not be able to abide. Every open and habitual sinner. The worldly man, who has made the world his god, and has set up his idols in his heart. The hypocrite, who has the form of godliness, but is without the power of it. The man who is self-righteous, and trusts to his own merits and strength. 2. Those who will abide. The humble, penitent, believing Christian, a character widely differing from every other. His ground of confidence in that day will not be his innocence. He will claim an interest in the death of Christ. His penitence, his uprightness, his secret striving with sin, his useful life, his godly motives will be brought in evidence of the soundness and reality of his faith. The Judge Himself will own him as a friend. (*E. Cooper*.) *Before the Son of Man*.—The coming of Christ was the trial-test of the world. Men never needed Him more; were never less prepared to receive Him. It was the age of force. Society was not in a condition to hear Christ favourably. We say the time was ripe for His coming. As to necessity, yes; as to preparation, no. This was the "historical" day of Christ. Few were able to abide it. Few could stand when He appeared. I. RIGID REQUIREMENTS OF HIS STANDARD. Christ's coming is represented as attended by healing, comfort, and blessing. An era of peace and goodwill. But these results were not immediate. God's promises are conditional. It is not easy to live by Christ's standard. What is the nature of these requirements? 1. Consecration, which implies self-surrender. The doctrine of the Cross is but faintly understood to-day. 2. Purity. Involves thought of the heart, speech, actions. Christ raised the white standard of chastity higher than ever before. 3. Non-resistance. Must not give blow for blow. Overcome evil with good. 4. Forgiveness of injury. We are actually to love our enemies. Must pray for them, and do them good. II. DUTY OF STANDING BEFORE HIM. Christ does not judge the world in person to-day. Does this through the Gospel. Christ is the great refiner of men. It is our duty to stand before Him. 1. Because He is the only perfect standard. 2. Because it is the only way to secure His favour. 3. Because by this we reach

our proper place. To hate sin, and love the sinning one—this is a Christlike prerogative. To separate the one from the other—this is a Christlike work. To stand before the Son of Man implies—(1) That your life is in harmony with His. (2) Watching and prayer. (3) His favour and Divine blessing. (*Henry Schell Lobingier.*) *Solemn questions*.—I. WHAT DID THEY IMPLY? 1. A false security. Jews thought they were ready for Messiah. The prophet sees them to be self-willed, dreaming of their own notions rather than desiring God's truth. Religion only nominal. 2. The coming judgment. 3. A call to prepare. II. THEY CONVINCED US OF—Indifference, worldliness, indolence, self-indulgence. We need God's call, the prophet's appeal. Christ is coming: are we ready to meet Him? to be examined and tested by Him? III. HOW ARE WE TO REPLY? We are at first struck dumb. None can stand. So says conscience, experience, observation, Scripture. Then the Gospel message of forgiveness and salvation comes to us in the person of Him who was "presented in the temple" in our nature unto God, and is the Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. In Jesus we find our refuge, our hope, our holiness, our home. (*Homilist.*) *The day of Christ's coming*.—I. THERE IS A MOMENTOUS PERIOD FOR MAN TO ANTICIPATE. The distinguishing characteristics of that day are—1. It will be a day on which the Lord will visibly and personally appear in the presence of the universe. 2. It will be a day on which the Lord, by His coming, will perform great and wondrous acts. Note the inevitable certainty of that day. II. THERE IS A MOMENTOUS QUESTION FOR MAN TO CONSIDER. "Who may abide the day of His coming?" 1. This inquiry shall be vindicated. Our right to press and urge this inquiry is as valid as was the right of the prophets of old. On what is our right founded? (1) On the nature of the commission which we have received in the ministry of the Lord. (2) Upon a just estimate of the value of your intelligent and immortal spirits. (3) Upon a just conviction of the fact, that while in a state of impenitent and unbelieving sin, you are in danger. 2. This inquiry is to be applied. To the infidel, the sensualist, the worldling, the Pharisee, the hypocrite. 3. This inquiry is to be advised upon. (1) To embrace from the heart the appointed method of preparation for the day of the Lord's coming. (2) To embrace this method of preparation without procrastination or delay. Consider the importance of the matter at issue; the hardening influence of sin, while there is delay; and the uncertainties of human life. (*James Parsons.*) *The solemnities of the last great day, and the characters of those who are prepared for it*.—These words of the prophet relate immediately to the first advent. They naturally lead our thoughts to the second advent. I. LAY BEFORE YOU SOME OF THE SOLEMNITIES OF THAT GREAT DAY. 1. The actual coming of the Lord, or His appearance in His human nature. (1) This revelation of Jesus Christ will be visible to the universal assembly of the human race. (2) It will be unspeakably glorious. 2. The resurrection of the dead. The bodies of the unnumbered millions, who through succeeding ages have inhabited the globe, wherever laid, or however consumed, will be restored to life, and reunited to their immortal souls; that, with them, they may participate their happiness or misery. 3. The general judgment. "The books shall be opened." The book of the Divine law: of God's omniscience; the book of life. 4. The assignment of an endless doom. Our departure into everlasting punishment, or our admission into life eternal. II. CONSIDER THE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS OF THE TEXT. 1. The profane scoffer will not be able to abide that day. 2. Neither will that numerous class of persons, who live in the habitual practice of open and flagrant sin, be able to stand before the Judge. 3. Nor that more respectable class who, nevertheless, are wholly devoted to the world. 4. Nor those who pay attention to the duties of religion in a proud and self-complacent spirit. 5. Nor those who acknowledge that salvation is of grace, but forget that we are created in Christ Jesus "unto good works." They insist much on faith, but are lamentably deficient in its fruits. Who then may abide the day of His coming? Only the Christian who is worthy of the name. The man absolved by the Judge is one who, condemned by himself for his transgressions, has deeply repented and sought pardon on the ground of Christ's meritorious obedience unto the death of the Cross, and works out his salvation with fear and trembling. (*John Natt, B.D.*) *Divine manifestations*.—Scepticism abounded, but no moral gloom could deaden the prophet's faith. God, whose authority was contemned, would reveal Himself. I. DIVINE MANIFESTATIONS ARE SEARCHING. If God were fully to disclose Himself no flesh could live. Veiled in material glory, His ancient saints found it difficult to bear His

appearing. The manifestation of God in Christ, though veiled in the weakness of human flesh, was not easy to bear. Men felt it as a piercing light. Corrupt and oppressive rulers, selfish and self-satisfied moralists, hypocritical religionists, and ruthless evil-doers could not bear His presence. Some could bear His coming, and stand when He appeared. They were those—1. Who were willing to feel, confess, and turn from their sinfulness. 2. Those who were sincerely waiting for His coming, as Simeon. 3. Those who had within them true faith, or spiritual receptiveness, as the Roman centurion and the Syrophenician woman. These could bear the most searching day in the world's history, when the Lord appeared among men. II. DIVINE MANIFESTATIONS ARE SEPARATING. He is "like a refiner's fire." The appearance of the Lord on the earth tested and separated men. Society was then like seething, molten metal. The good were revealed and refined; the bad, like dross, were separated from them, to be cast away. In His presence men discovered of what sort they were, and ranged themselves for Him or against Him. As fire, His Spirit still tests and separates men. Fire has been by several nations regarded as a symbol of the Deity. As a Divine heat, enkindling shame, disgust, and remorse at our failures and sins. He will not consume us, but our impurities. 1. That we have much dross in our natures need not lead us to despair. 2. We should be thankful that God manifests Himself to us as a refining heat. 3. We should seek for continued manifestations of God to our souls. III. DIVINE MANIFESTATIONS ARE CLEANSING OR DESTROYING. He is like "fuller's soap." The fuller's trade was one well-known in Judæa. White garments were worn by the Jews on all festive occasions; these the fuller cleansed from all stains, and whitened them by rubbing them with a kind of marl. Creta limolia was probably the earth most commonly used. His soap (borith) was a vegetable alkali obtained from numerous plants, such as the *Salsola huli*, the *Ajran*, the *Gilloo*, and a heath which grows abundantly in the neighbourhood of Joppa. If a garment could not bear the work of the fuller, it was destroyed by it. So the coming of Christ would either cleanse men or hasten their destruction. Christ Himself is the cleansing power. He can wash out the most inveterate stains. None but He can cleanse men. If men will not bear His cleansing, their corruptions will destroy them. All Divine manifestations are essentially the same. There is one yet in the future for mankind. He who came in lowliness to redeem men will come in awful majesty to fix their doom. Who may abide that day of His coming? Who will be able to stand then? Only those who could have borne His first advent—the contrite, the sincere, the believing. (W. Osborne Lilley.) *The coming of Christ and the purification of the Church.*—Thoughts suggested by the day. As Christ was presented pure in the temple, so it should be our prayer that by His blood and righteousness, and by the sanctifying power of His Spirit, we may be presented unto God by Him, at the last day, pure and spotless. We will consider—I. THE COMING OF THE LORD. 1. John the Baptist prepared the way for that event—(1) By giving warning that it was near at hand. (2) By calling men to repent. 2. Christ is called "the messenger of the covenant," because that covenant began to be spoken by Him (Heb. ii. 3). He who was also the prince of the covenant, condescended to be its messenger. 3. "Whom we delight in." Christ is called "the desire of all nations" (Hag. ii. 7); but especially was He the desire of the Jewish nation, because He was especially promised to them, and was to be one of themselves. II. WHO MAY ABIDE THE DAY OF HIS COMING? Not the hypocrite, not the formalist, not the self-righteous, not the lukewarm Laodicean, not the stony-ground hearer who is ashamed when tribulation or persecution because of the Word ariseth; but he who can endure the refiner's fire and the fuller's soap. III. CHRIST SHALL SIT AS A REFINER AND PURIFIER OF SILVER. 1. By this process He will purify His visible Church, by sifting and testing it. 2. He will purify His own people by purging them. 3. The refiner of silver always sits, in order that he may watch the silver carefully; for if it be a minute too long or too short a time in the fire, the whole is spoiled, or at least injured. The sign which tells him when the silver is fit for use is his being able to see in it his own image. All this is a picture of the manner in which Christ purifies His people by trial, and of the end which He aims at. (Ven. Archd. Whately, M.A.) *The appearing of Christ.*—This truth was once brought out in an unusual manner at a gathering of literary men. After some general conversation it occurred to them to speculate how they would feel were certain of the illustrious dead suddenly to appear in their midst. "Think," said one, "if Homer were to enter this room, or Dante! How should we meet them?" "Or

suppose," exclaimed another, "Milton or Shakespeare were to come?" "We should stand in profound respect; we should honour the great seers and singers of the past." "Ah," added one who had not yet spoken, "and if Jesus Christ stood before us?" "That would be wholly different," was the instant and united response; "He is above all. We should fall down on our knees and do homage to God's Son and man's Saviour." *The coming of Christ not the same thing to all*.—Did you ever hear the sound of the trumpets which are blown before the judges as they come to a city to open the assizes? How different the feelings of the different people who hear the sound. The innocent man against whom there is no charge hears them unmoved. But the poor wretch waiting his trial in yonder cell, they tell him the day of his trial has arrived. Soon he will stand at the bar of justice, and receive his sentence. So will it be when Jesus comes; some will rejoice, but others will be afraid to meet Him. (*Home Magazine*.)

Ver. 3. And He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver.—*The refiner*.—The sons of Levi were the authorised instructors of the Hebrew people. By fidelity to their special work they fostered, by unfaithfulness they repressed the higher life of the Hebrews. They became, therefore, the sure gauge of spiritual vigour among their countrymen, or of their spiritual decay. Malachi speaks of the purification of silver and gold, the two most precious metals of the earth, one or other supplying a standard of value among all nations. Nor are these metals inapt symbols of the Church of Christ. She has been the gold and silver of the earth. The world is largely indebted to the Church. Whence does the Church derive her value? From her relation to Christ. The first Church was gathered in loving fealty to Christ. The disciples were His representatives. The bodily presence of their Master and Lord was visible through them. The world can never be converted by the world: Christ has given that great work to His Church. All the fitness of His disciples for their grave and responsible duties is derived from Him. Whatever defectiveness may appear, either in primitive or later Churches, the past nineteen centuries reveal the immense indebtedness of the world to the Church. How frequently has it proved the ark of the nations, saving in its sacred barque the seeds of future learning and civilisation. The material, social, intellectual and moral indebtedness of the world to the Church is too large to be seen by any eye but that of Omniscience. But as the eye glances over many periods of the Church's history, how painfully abundant the evidence that the gold has become dim, and the most fine gold changed. The early Christian Church soon showed a proneness to adulterate the pure truth of the Gospel. See the influence of Mosaism and Gnosticism. How vast and varied the corruptions which later ages reveal! There were the Allegorists, the Sacerdotalists, the Schoolmen, the Ascetics and Mystics. There have been many strange perversions of truth later than these. Popery has faced the light of modern civilisation, not to be extinguished, as our fathers thought, but to snatch a new lease of life. Nor are the followers of Romanism without powerful auxiliaries in our own country. Confine our attention to the more obvious evidences of the need of purification, chiefly in individual men. Among those may be placed narrow and defective views of Divine truth. The Bible is more praised than read. Doctrines and rites, alien to the Spirit of Christ's Gospel, have sprung up within the visible Church. Men have denied Christ in the name of Christ. Their words are the words of the Master, but their spirit has been the spirit of unbelief. There is proof of the need of purification in the superstitious clinging to that which is old, merely because it is old; the vain reverence for a dead past. A painful evidence of corruption is seen in imperfect obedience to the truth. Is it not a fact, beyond all dispute, that deficiency of truth, and deficiency in fidelity to it, have both proved serious hindrances to the spread of Christ's kingdom on the earth? How, then, shall men be purified from these? and by whom? The process of refining originates and is directed by Christ Himself. By His permission times of sore trial came upon the Church universal, or upon some branch of it; and the record of such times is full of instruction and warning to men of other and less eventful days. Beneath the eye of Christ each separate soul is cleansed. All power is His. He can wisely adopt the means that, in His judgment, may be individually demanded in separating the gold from the dross. The process of purifying the precious metals demands undivided attention and protracted patience. Christ "sits as the refiner and purifier of silver." He never

relinquishes His fixed and steady gaze upon the soul from which He seeks to remove the earthly dross. The refiner of gold has certain tests by which he discovers the progress of his work. At the beginning of real change, a deep orange colour spreads itself over the molten mass in the cupel. At the next instant, a flickering wave passes rapidly over the surface; and with increasing heat, the fiery mass becomes still, and the colour pale and faint. Now, attention is deepened. Expectation is on tiptoe. In another second the supreme moment may come. As the refiner's eye is steadily fixed upon the burning metal, its surface suddenly becomes as a burnished mirror, and flashes back his pictured face. Thus, also, does Christ watch unweariedly. The process of change is very tardy, very reluctant. The purpose for which this purification is sought demands a closing word. Before the precious metals were put into the cupel, they were full of earthly impurities; were unmalleable, inductile, comparatively useless. Being now purged from all dross, they become the standard and representatives of a nation's wealth. They are fashioned into coins bearing the king's image. They are wrought into vessels fitted for the king's use. Thus it is also with individual members of the Church of Christ. Before our purification, we were but ill-adapted to serve our Divine Lord. The attempt to render this service was marred by our lack of holiness. After our purification, we are made "vessels unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use, prepared unto every good work." There is no duty, however humble, which we are not the better fitted to discharge. There is no service, however noble, which we shall not the more acceptably perform. What love is shown by Christ to His people in all this patient watching and working for the removal of the dross of sin. Be patient, therefore, in your particular trial, of whatever sort it is. (*J. Jackson Goadby.*) *The refiner's fire.*—The state of the Jewish community in the days of Malachi was very similar to what it was when our Lord appeared on the earth. A proud and self-righteous pharisaism had supplanted all true spirituality of worship, and attention even to the outward forms of piety had become little better than a name. Manifestly such a state of things could not last, for unless some spiritual revolution took place, religion could not go on much longer breathing an atmosphere of universal degeneracy. Malachi tells the people of a coming Reformer. But what is the character of this reformer to be? Will he be mild, gentle, indulgent; or will he go with just severity to the root of all existing evils, and when he begins, will he make an end of abuse and wrong? The prophet does not hesitate to clothe the coming One with attributes of surpassing glory and awfulness, and to represent Him as wielding prerogatives of the most scathing power. The figure in the text refers to the process of refining gold. As the agency of fire separates the dross from the precious metal, by disintegrating the particles of which the mass is composed; so Christ, not only in His capacity as the final Judge, but more especially in His character as the present embodiment of truth, and as the administrator of the Gospel kingdom, is subjecting the world to a searching fiery test. Malachi deals with the relation of the truth of Christ, and Christ Himself, to four aspects of human affairs. I. THE NATION. The difference between a nation defiled by error and sin, and a nation purged by truth, is just this—the one is cursed and repulsive; the other is blessed and delightful. In every case where nations have attempted to rob God of His prerogative of government, the action of the refiner's fire has revealed the weakness of their corruptible systems. II. THE CHURCH. When Christ refines the Church, He tests her government, her doctrine, and her discipline. As to government; He is not indifferent to the way in which His kingdom is administered. Order must here be reconciled with liberty. Christ is most jealous of His truth. To say that false doctrine does not necessarily bring with it moral corruption, is to say that the Christian's understanding is useless as an element of mind. But is it so? As to discipline, there is no Church that has not spots in her feasts of charity. III. SOCIETY. In the unrefined condition of society one man is preying upon another, every man seeking his own pleasure and indulging his own passions, without the slightest regard to the welfare of the community. But when society is refined, men "speak often one to another." They take an interest in one another. It is not then every man for himself, but every man considering what is best for all the rest. No one who gravely considers the characteristics of our time will deny that society stands much in need of purification. IV. THE SOUL. The unrefined soul is addressed in Mal. iv. 2. But the address to the renewed soul is given in Mal. iv. 2. Our text goes deeper than

nations, churches, or society : it deals with the soul, its motives, opinions, desires. There are two classes of souls in the world : those which will lose everything in the fire, even themselves ; and those which will lose something, but retain unimpaired the pure gold of faith, and they themselves be saved. (*Richard Smyth, D.D.*) *Christ the refiner* :—Malachi's is the last prophet-voice of the Old Testament times. Nothing is known concerning the man Malachi. He is only a name. Our interest lies entirely in his message. The various aspects under which Messiah is presented to us by the prophets bear direct relation to the immediate needs of the people who are told about Him. Moses gives us Messiah the Leader, who should permanently take his place. Isaiah gives us Messiah as Sufferer, Conqueror, Comforter, matching the condition of Israel as suffering and exiled. Daniel gives us Messiah the Prince, matching the condition of the people as anticipating the restoration of their kingdom. Malachi gives us Messiah the Refiner, matching the condition of the people, as in a state of moral and religious degradation. It is well for us thus to be reminded of the many-sidedness of Christ's adaptation to human needs. He is the precise Christ needed in every age. And men are earnestly seeking, in this our time, to find those sides and aspects of Christ and of Christianity which precisely adapt to modern, social, and intellectual confusions. Whenever and wherever Christ comes, He comes as the refiner and purifier. **I. MAN IS ALWAYS GATHERING DROSS.** Metals are always found mingled with some sort of earthly matter that must be burned or cleansed away. Everything man has to do with gradually tarnishes, or collects the dust, or rusts, or corrupts. We are always at work checking some gathering evil, or cleansing something that has become foul. Whatever human scene you examine you will surely find this tendency to deteriorate. Take the sphere of man's thinking. It is constantly observed that the followers of all great philosophers, and teachers, and thought-leaders, always complicate and deteriorate the systems. They bring in the dirt and the dross. Take the sphere of man's religion. All the world over, and all the ages through, you may see man recalled to pure principles, and soon losing them again under the accumulating and debasing dross of ceremonies and superstitions. Take the sphere of man's social relations. Self-interest has always proved to be the dross that gathers on and spoils the most perfect social schemes man has ever devised. Take the sphere of man's personal life. The noblest ideals are unattained, for the dross of self-indulgence soon gathers, and in middle life men are content with low attainments. Read human history, as epitomised for us in the Bible, and see how the dross is always collecting and defiling. Try the Christian ages. The river of Christianity scarcely began to flow before corruptions mingled with it. Our apostolical epistles tell of errors and heresies and immoralities even prevailing and defiling in their day, and the next centuries are a painful record of ever-increasing degradations. This would be but a depressing side of truth, if it had to stand quite alone. There is, however, an answering truth. **II. GOD IS ALWAYS SEEKING TO REFINER THE DROSS AWAY.** This is the meaning of God in history. Precisely what He has always been doing is this—putting things straight ; clearing away evils ; redeeming men from their follies and sins. He raises up the Reformer, who will clear the gathered dross away, and liberate the pure truth. He brings forth social leaders who can bravely resist the hurrying tyranny. Everywhere, if men show us hastening corruption, we will show them God staying the corrupting process. Refining, purifying, straining, washing, means no less than this, God intends to present us at last faultless : and therefore He must sit as the refiner and purifier, and get the dross away. This is prominently illustrated in the mission of Christ as Messiah. Egyptian paintings give us the refiner seated on his low stool, steadily maintaining the fires with his blow-pipe, and all the while intently watching the silver in the melting-pot, as it grows clearer in the heat. They give us the fuller, trampling the befouled garments, pounding them with his stout rod, and adding the strong lye, the "sopo" that shall draw out all the stains. It is the figure of God, manifested in Christ, and working His work of grace through Christ. Christ was the refiner of His own age. The whip of small cords which drove the dross out of the temple courts is typical of the work of His whole life. He is the refiner of every age. Christ has stern hard work to do for His people. Trying for Him. Trying for them. But most blessed. I have seen the man working, stripped to the waist, pouring forth streams of perspiration, at the great iron furnaces ; and I have not known which to sympathise with most, the man who, with his long rod, was skilfully moving the iron mass in the great flames, getting

it free from all dross, and pure metal for the workers; or that mass of iron itself, burning in the flames, and turned, now this way and now that, until every part has been fully subjected to the fierce flame. It is hard for us to suffer, but if we saw things aright, should we not think it even harder for Christ to make us suffer? (*Robert Tuck, B.A.*) *The Divine refiner*.—In the preceding verse, Christ is a refiner's fire, but in this He is the refiner sitting and watching the metal in the fire. His position suggests—I. THAT HIS PEOPLE NEED REFINING. The dross of sin cleaves to the holiest. Nothing cleaves so closely. Christ sees dross where we do not. We are not always willing that it should be purged away when we do see it. The furnace is necessary. II. THAT HIS PEOPLE ARE BEING REFINED. They find life a fiery ordeal. They often suffer more than sinners. The heat is often very penetrating; sometimes very hard to bear with patience. They do not always recognise the purpose of suffering. The process goes on even when the results are not perceived. A refiner's furnace is the truest simile of life. III. THAT HIS PEOPLE ARE VALUABLE IN HIS EYES. He watches them in the furnace. He waits for their perfection. They are silver, not common earth. Often despised by the world, they are highly esteemed by Him. The refiner only watches precious metals in the fire. "Reprobate silver" may be consumed, but every particle of pure metal is preserved. Christ's people are precious to Him. IV. THAT HIS PEOPLE WILL HAVE THEIR FIERY TRIALS TEMPERED TO THEIR SPIRITUAL REQUIREMENTS. He aims to make them spiritually perfect. He tempers the fire that He may separate "the sin that He hates from the soul that He loves." He seeks not to give carnal enjoyment, but purity. He, sitting to watch, manifests solicitude, patience, expectancy, and care. V. THAT IN THE END HIS PEOPLE WILL BE FULLY PURIFIED. His purpose shall be accomplished in them. We often see the purification going on. The refiner uses the silver he purifies. Perfect purity will bring perfect blessedness. Learn—1. To trust more perfectly the watchful care of your Refiner under your trials. 2. To estimate your trials by the amount of purifying they accomplish. 3. To co-operate with the refiner in His efforts to purify you. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*) *Christ the refiner*.—All the inventions of two thousand years have not relieved the watcher at the furnace door from the same anxieties and cares that rested upon the alchemist of Israel over his rude fireplace. What a beautiful figure the illustration furnishes of the plans and providences of God in Christ Jesus. The world's great crucible is ever before Him; the fire of His judgment ever burning beneath; the confused alloy of humanity seething and bubbling within; the solvent and separator of His truth cast ever and anon into the mass; the absorbent of the great unknown ready to receive the refuse; the purified matter growing brighter and brighter; but through all times and in all methods, the same watchful oversight, the same touch of the practised hand, the same unfailing Godlike patience, directing and ensuring final success. God who sent His only Son into the world, that He might gather out of the world a peculiar people for Himself, did, by the sending of His Son, set in action certain laws and orders that separated the evil from the good, and that refined and purified the good; but God over all, and God watching all, and God guiding all things, with untiring love and patience, kept those laws and principles to their purposes, subjecting generation after generation of men to the test of their action, regulating the nature and extent of those tests, taking the purified mass out of the fire before it should be consumed, and acting always upon the coming of that critical moment, when He could see His own image in the mass under trial; sitting and watching, as holding the great results in His own hands. There is a further side to the illustration. A very beautiful phenomenon known as the fulguration of the metal, attends the removal of the impurities from the silver. During the earlier stages of the process, the film of oxide of lead, which has constantly remained over the melted surface of the mass, is removed as rapidly as can be, and the colour of the metal is dark; but when the silver is almost clear of impurities, the film of litharge upon its surface grows finer and finer, and a succession of beautiful rings, of iridescent tints, form, one after another, until at last the film of oxide suddenly melts away and disappears, and the brilliant surface of the silver flashes forth in all its purity and glory. Under the old methods, the watcher did not disturb the crucible until that last change came,—until he could see his own image on the glowing surface. Then his work was done, and his purpose fulfilled. Think of the Lord Jesus under this figure, and then read history again. There is the mass of humanity in the cupel (shallow crucible) of God's law, and here, in this age, the

dark film of sin is over the whole surface, and there, in that age, a ray of light breaks forth, and lights up history's pages, and another, and another, until a continent is encircled; and in these last days the heavy film is breaking, and the whole world is lighting up, because the end is drawing near; and in the very last time the Son of Man shall put forth His power on the earth, and shall call together His elect from the uttermost parts of the earth, and then the darkness shall suddenly all break away, and the true light shine forth, and the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth, and God's loving, patient watching shall be over, and Christ shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied. Men grow weary under the test, and think the world has suffered enough; but still God waits and watches for the true signs of purity, and sends His trials and judgments, and throws in His solvents and absorbents, and looks for His own image. When that appears, then the end cometh. (*W. H. Lewis.*) *The refiner's furnace*:—Everything used in the erection of the Jewish temple was to be flawless and perfect. So it was with the gifts to be presented. The temple was the earthly picture of heaven. Those who enter there have come out of great tribulation, and been made white in the blood of the Lamb. Thus Malachi prophesies: "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver." The purification of character is not an exceptional experience. Christian melting is a common necessity. We are all made perfect through suffering. There is a work to be done in us which involves pain and trial. We are not only sculptors working on a building, we are sculptures with living hearts and quivering nerves, to whom the furnace of trial is a needful thing.

I. THE DIVINE HAND WHICH ARRANGES THE FURNACE. Fire is an element over which we have little control. Over the tribulation of which it is here the symbol, we have less control. We cannot set in order the moral procedure which issues in refined and energised character. Directly men begin to choose their discipline they become foolish and vain ascetics. At times we have all wished that there were no griefs and trials here. The furnace needs ordering for us all. It is much to know that our Father's hand is at work in all the events of our history.

II. THE DIVINE EYE THAT WATCHES THE FURNACE. "He sits." A refiner of silver was asked, "Do you sit?" "Yes," he replied, "I must keep my eye steadily fixed on the furnace, for if the silver remains too long under the intense heat it is sure to be damaged." A beautiful illustration, completed when the silversmith added, "I only know the exact instant when the purifying process is complete, by seeing my own countenance in the silver." Only when God sees His own image in the children is He satisfied. Therefore the Father "sits." We see not the Invisible Face behind the furnace, and we may be forgiven if we wonder at all the mysteries of pain and grief.

III. THE DIVINE END IN ORDERING THE FURNACE. The beautiful Bible words have become hardened coins of traditional usage. "Sanctification" is one of the words that have become conventionalised; it has been narrowed to a cheerless type of goodness. Diversity of character gives room for manliness in spiritual life. Experience does not alter the groundwork of human nature. But in all cases tribulation works patience, and patience experience, and experience hope. The end which our Father has in any special trial is often hidden from us. What furnace should we ever have chosen for ourselves? The end will explain it all. All is to the praise of the glory of His grace, and never let us forget that His grace involves our good, and His glory our happiness too.

IV. THE DIVINE GRACE THAT SUSTAINS US IN THE FURNACE. In most cases the furnace is gradually heated. There are beginnings of sorrow and gradations of trial, so that God gradually tempers our nature to the heat of the fire. Christian life is silver. It is not wood and hay and stubble to be burned; it is silver to be purified. (*W. M. Statham.*) *The refiner's fire*:—The process of refining is in the text made to illustrate the work of Christ upon the heart of man.

I. THE PROCESS. One important truth is assumed, the inherent preciousness of man. Many things are too worthless to pay for refining. When God undertakes to refine or purify man, it is because of his intrinsic dignity and worth. The Scriptures nowhere allow you to suppose that they treat man as an insignificant creature. And man still bears about him in dimness and defacement the image of God. Our Saviour takes great pains to impress us with the intrinsic and indestructible grandeur of man. No word ever escapes His lips which tend to lower him in your esteem. He sets His seal upon the infinite worth of man by taking his nature. Has not sin made a great difference, and reduced, if not destroyed, the worth of man? Yes, sin has made a great difference in his character, and in the part he has played in the world, but it has made no difference in the intrinsic

majesty and grandeur of his being. He is still man. He has not fallen into lower rank of creatureship, nor can he. If he could cease to be man, his shame and misery would instantly leave him. Unworthy you are, but not worthless. If you were worthless, he would not sit as a refiner and purifier of silver. He sees the dross, and He sees the metal, and He does not cast away the metal because of the dross, but He seeks to cast the dross out of the metal. "He shall purify." Here we see the great aim and purpose of the Gospel. So far as man's own life and character are concerned, there is no other or higher end than that the Gospel can contemplate than this—our purification. In this the Gospel stands out above and distinct from all other religions. Most of the religions of the world have made men impure, and many of them have enjoined and required impurity as an essential condition of salvation. The whole scheme of the Gospel is pervaded by the idea of purity. Our religion is one which has for its supreme aim our perfect holiness. Among the agencies, through means of which this purity is to be accomplished, one is that of trial—trial as if by fire. One of the purposes of affliction is to purify. To come out of the fire no better than we went into it, shows a tenacity of evil in us which may well make us alarmed. It is an unspeakable joy for the Christian to know that, as he must be tried in the fire, he is to be tried under the eye and hand and heart of his Saviour. A process over which He presides will be conducted with infinite wisdom. He knows the nature of the evil which has to be separated. He alone knows the kind of trials to send. There is no uniformity in the process of purification by which Christ tests and refines His followers. Uniformity is the resource of routine and ignorance or despotism. The discipline of a home is a better illustration of the spirit in which Christ acts toward us than any other. In the family the children can be looked at and treated in the light of their individual peculiarities and needs. Each one of Christ's disciples is taken in hand by Himself, and treated for what he is; and the Saviour makes no mistakes, He sends no affliction without reason. It comes at its best time, in the best way, tarries only so long as it is needed, and until its purpose is accomplished. Bodily affliction is not the only fire which Christ kindles for the sanctification of His followers. His fires, and acids, and cleansing agencies are innumerable. II. ITS PURPOSE. Sufferings have a purpose as well as a cause. The purpose of affliction, as stated here, is, that its subjects "may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness." As a rule, great service can only come out of great suffering. The men of power and influence have been annealed in a furnace of trial of some sort. Shrink not then from the fire, unless you would shrink from the service too. Many a saint on earth is at this hour just purified, and ready to be removed to the world where God keeps all His treasures. (*Enoch Mellor, D.D.*) *Christ the great disciplinarian of regenerate souls*:—In this character, sitting, purifying, Christ RECOGNISES THE WORTH OF REGENERATE SOULS. He created them by His power. He redeemed them by His love. His work is to them even more valuable. As He burns up the dross of depravity, the souls become more precious in His sight. II. HE EMPLOYS PAINFUL INSTRUMENTALITIES. Purifies by fire. The fire of truth. The fire of the Spirit. The fire of trial; of personal and relative afflictions,—the fire of persecution. As nothing can purify the gold and the silver but fire, so nothing but the Spirit of truth and the Spirit of providence can purge the human soul of all the dross of sin. III. HE IS PERMANENTLY ENGAGED. "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier." IV. HE AIMS AT THE ENTIRE CONSECRATION TO GOD. "That they may offer unto God an offering of righteousness." The great work of every man is that of a priest. Man has to "offer to the Lord," his faculties, his being, all he has and is, and to do all this in "righteousness." (*Homilist.*) *Christ's cleansing and refining office in His Church*:—We may take these figures as exhibiting the plain and manifest features of our Lord's mission to earth. Still He is among us as fullers' soap, and as a refiner's fire, to cleanse and to purify us all. Here is a great, continuous office of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherever He comes, He is always "like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap." Christ came expressly to establish sanctification, and seal a covenant, of which the very spirit was cleansing and purification by His blood, which cleanseth from all sin. And Christ came also to give those purifying graces without which no effectual cleansing can be carried on or maintained. It is in all the graces, and motives, and desires, which the Holy Spirit generates, fosters, and matures in our too often half-reluctant hearts, that the great Fuller and Refiner of the Word carries out the purpose, the great mission of cleansing and refining for the perfect-

ing of which He once graced the earth, and the nature of man, by His Incarnate Presence. What is the machinery by which the Holy Refiner makes His power known? This refining is to be sought for, and realised if we would have any usefulness, any ultimate profit, in it. The Refiner is ever present, doing the refining work Himself. But He is as the refiner's fire. In the furnace of some kind of affliction He refines us—"Purging away the dross, taking away all the tin." Trial is the refining agent. The trial may bear relation not only to the outward, but also to the inner life. Whether then Christ sit among us as a Fuller to cleanse, and as a Refiner to purify, is a question which concerns us all. (*Archdeacon Mildmay.*)

Messiah's Kingdom.—These last sentences from Malachi's scroll are the specifications for the Kingdom of Christ. The perfected outline of this character and kingdom, and the preparation needed for the return of the Lord, is the theme of our chapter. I. THE COMPLETED PICTURE OF THE COMING MESSIAH. Isaiah brings before us the Man of Sorrows. From Isaiah onwards the lineaments seem to change, and the tints to deepen. We become familiar with a martial step and warlike notes. II. THE CHURCH IS TO BE PURIFIED AND REVIVED. This is a service which Christ will constantly render and require of His Church,—their cleansing. It is, as it were, a permanent employment. He is watching the crucibles and the scales, like the silversmith at his bench. This is the answer to a question of the day, "Is God doing the best He can for this world?" Controversy, the shaking and sifting of small and great, of good and bad, may have its wholesome results when presided over by the magisterial and gracious presence of Christ. III. SOCIETY IS TO BE JUDGED AND TRANSFORMED. "And I will come near you to judgment." When the Lord comes into His temple He appears also as a swift witness against the iniquities of society. He is a swift witness against evil-doers. IV. SPECIFICATIONS ARE MADE TO THE CHURCH, SOCIETY, AND THE INDIVIDUAL, IN REGARD TO THEIR SHORTCOMINGS. Men do not wish to be definite in their faith, or confine themselves to commended and well-tested helps to a Divine life. But even an imperfect comprehension of a great character yields more than an accurate inventory of an insignificant person or thing. Much is said about religion not meeting the needs of men, but the truth is overlooked that men do not comply with the conditions of Divine help. (*William K. Campbell.*)

Christ appearing among His people.—These words were spoken by Malachi respecting Christ and John the Baptist. My present design is to notice the characteristics of a genuine appearance of Christ among the people to revive His work. Before Christ personally appeared among the Jews, He sent His messenger to prepare the way. When Christ could appear to revive His work, He still sends a messenger to prepare His way. Somebody will be stirred up to call the attention of the people to the real condition of things, and the necessity for a reformation among them. When this has been done, the Lord will suddenly come to His temple. There is first the seeking after the Lord, then a calling upon His name in earnest supplications for Him to revive His work, and then His coming. The Lord's temple is His true Church on earth, of which the temple at Jerusalem was only a type. What did Christ do when He first appeared among men? Whenever He comes to revive His work in a place, there is sure to be great need for it. Much is wrong, and there is need for reformation. When Christ comes there will be a tremendous searching among the people. He began by upturning the foundations of their hopes; all their self-righteous expectations. He brought to bear upon them a searching ministry. He must try the metal to see what dross is in it; he must see what chaff there is in the wheat, and then fan it away. In such processes, certain classes of persons are peculiarly affected. Christ took in hand chiefly the Pharisees, the leaders of the Church, and in a most unsparing manner searched and tried them; reproved their errors, contradicted them, and turned their false teaching completely upside down. So now Christ does with all churches and all people. Whatever errors and misconceptions they may be labouring under, He must set Himself to correct. If He find them with superficial views of the spirituality of God's law, He must correct them. If they have superficial views of the depravity of the human heart, they must be corrected. He must cast light on all dark places, search the nooks and corners, and dispel all errors by the powerful light of truth. He begins by trying the ministers. He needs to try them, that they may be instrumental in trying others. He will search out the carnal professors of religion. These are divided into various classes. Sometimes there are ambitious persons in the Church. They wish to be highly influential. Such persons are often searched out in such a

manner as greatly to expose and mortify them. Some are spiritually proud, or have had a worldly pride; and they will all be searched out. When Christ comes to revive His work, He will bring iniquity to light by searching, preaching, and the power of the Holy Ghost. He will not only do this with the Church; He will also try the congregation who are not professors of religion; and will bring a terrible searching to bear upon them. If religion is to be revived, sin must be put away. If sin is to be put away, there must be a conviction of sin; and if there is to be a conviction of sin, searching must be applied. (*C. G. Finney.*)

Christ as a spiritual reformer.—The passage points to Christ. I. HE IS GLORIOUS. This appears—1. From the fact that a Divine messenger was sent to prepare the way for Him. 2. From the description that is here given of Him; He revolutionises the thoughts, the emotions, the aims, the habits of mankind. II. HE IS AWE-INSPIRING. Unrenewed men will stand aghast and tremble in the presence of this Reformer. He would subject their principles to the fiery test of His heart-searching truth. III. HE IS THOROUGH. "A refiner's fire." "Fullers' soap." In Christ's reformation, everything that is wrong, that is impure, is worked out of the human soul. IV. HE IS PERSISTENT. "He shall sit," &c. He is intent upon the work, and makes no slight or passing business of it. V. HE IS SUCCESSFUL. He will constitute for men one day a "holy priesthood," a priesthood that will render to the Almighty offerings that are holy and acceptable to Him. (*Homilist.*)

Christ's purifying presence.—We do well to remember with awe the day when Christ will come to be our Judge; and yet these words may be understood of His coming near a man, or near His Church, in any way. God never reveals Himself as closely approaching sinners, without putting them to proof and trial, more or less resembling that by which metals are tried in the fire. Those who, even in the day of His humiliation, knew or felt Him to be the Son of God, and themselves sinners, trembled before Him, and would fain have got away from His presence. They could not "abide the day of His coming." That the prophet meant this kind of continued presence, and not simply Christ's final coming, is probable for two reasons—1. That he connects this purifying presence of our Lord with the sending of His message to prepare the way before Him. 2. That he speaks of Him not as a destroyer, but as a refiner, especially of the priests. This seems to tell us of some unspeakable mercy of His, to temper, as it were, the natural effects of His purity coming in contact with us sinners, so as that He may be in us, and with us, a fire not to consume, but to refine. The God of Purity abides in man's nature, and it is not destroyed, but purified. The first coming of our Lord to His new temple should be connected with some great purification, which was to take place in His Church, the consequence of which would be, that He would be fully reconciled to His fallen people. Notice the ceremony connected with the purification of the mother of Jesus. She brought two turtle-doves; one for a burnt offering, as an acknowledgment of what sinners deserve at the hands of the Almighty; and she acknowledged that her only hope of purification lay in her presenting a pure offering. Note that other Israelitish mothers offered in acknowledgment and expiation of the sin which they had communicated to the infant newly born; but this holy mother needed not to make any such confession. Her offspring was pure and untainted, and had no occasion to be expiated. The offering of the Blessed Virgin differed infinitely from all others, in the worth of the first-born, whom she presented to her God. (*Sermons by Contrib. to "Tracts for the Times."*)

Christianity as a civilisation.—It is necessary to think of civilisation in two lights—the one as the condition of the individual, the other as a power to influence others standing apart from its condition. What mankind needs is, not simply an ideal picture of an elevated human life, but also an agency that will rapidly cast men into the likeness of this ideal picture. Individuals may have nearly reached the ideal manhood, but their virtues have been unable to multiply themselves infinitely in the outer world. History is dotted over with names of such piety as marked Aurelius, Cato, and Xenophon. In seeking for a desirable civilisation, it is necessary for us to find a culture that will overflow, a civilisation that possesses the aggressive power and genius, that will open out, fanlike, and pass from one to many, incapable of rest as to labour, and as to its aspirations and conquests. Give attention then to Christian character as a civilisation. Man is civilised when all his faculties of mind and heart are active within their spheres, not falling short of nature's law, nor going beyond it. Under "faculties" must be included conscience, and all the tender sentiments of friendship, love, sympathy, and

religion, for, without these, a character may possess greatness in many respects, but not that perfect blending which seems to give us the perfect manhood. Edmund Burke says: "The spirit of civilisation is composed of two parts, the spirit of a gentleman, and the spirit of religion." This is only another way of informing us, that civilisation is a life lived in the presence of man and of God. Paul describes the perfect gentleman in 1 Cor. xiii. In living up to such a picture we should all make a grand approach to a civilised life. It has long been a custom of philosophic minds to pass in silence any lessons of civilisation upon the pages of Scripture, and patiently to seek, and deeply to love everything in Aristotle or Plato. Permit me to assume that the truly Christian character is a highly civilised character. Hence our second proposition, that Christianity possesses in a large measure the power to influence those standing afar off. In order to produce a universal manhood, we must find a truth that overflows, a philosophy the opposite of egotism, a philosophy deeply altruistic. A religion in which one good man becomes ten good men is the only one that will offer society hope. Now the grand attribute of Christ and His method is this—living for others. If there is one sentence which, more than others, may express the genius of this Christ, it is this: His was a goodness that rolled outward, a love whose rays, like those of the sun, darted away from itself. In the world of morals, Christianity is a love which from one heart moves outward and contemplates nothing less than shining upon each face that is seen, or shall be seen walking the paths in this vale. No Christ-like soul will consent to walk along through life, or to heaven, without wishing to drag all society with it to the sublime destiny. Above all other systems Christianity is an aggressive civilisation. Let us now defend Christianity against some parts of its history. It does not argue against a sentiment that men have erred as to what path it should follow. Christ has stood so near the people, that they have wreathed the cross with their infirmities at the very hour when they crowded round it to find their salvation. And it is this nearness to the human heart which has made Christianity drench with blood fields over which infidelity would have whispered "peace," for religion has always been an active, powerful sentiment, and hence its errors have been as active as its truths. As love in a wrong path, or itself wronged, may become an agony and a cruelty, but in its full light and wisdom opens out into a paradise, so Christianity escaping from errors of doctrine and practice, will either become the world's civilisation, or else we must bow in sorrow and declare the generations to come to be utterly without hope. Here, then, is a reform adequate in its truths and in its motives. What detains it from its great mission? It waits simply for man. It waits for the Church to escape from the letter which killeth to the spirit which giveth life. It waits for the Christian throng to enter, not their sanctuary only, but the world. (*David Swing.*) *Refining silver*:—The following description of silver refining is given by Napier:—"When the alloy is melted upon a cuppel and the air blown upon it, the surface of the melted metals has a deep orange-colour with a kind of flickering wave constantly passing over the surface, caused by the combining of the oxygen with the impurity; and these being blown off as the process proceeds, the heat is increased, because the nearer purity the more heat is necessary to keep it in fusion; and in a little the colour of the fused metal becomes lighter, the impurities only forming reddish striae which continue to pass over the surface. At this stage the refiner watches the operation, either standing or sitting, with the greatest earnestness, until all the orange colour and shading disappears, and the metal has the appearance of a highly-polished mirror, reflecting every object around it, even the refiner, as he looks upon the mass of metal, may see himself as in a looking-glass, and thus he can form a very correct judgment respecting the purity of the metal. If he is satisfied the fire is drawn, and the metal removed from the furnace; but if not considered pure more lead is added and the process is repeated." All this is illustrative of the dealings of God with the Christian, who, being put into the furnace of affliction, is often kept there for a considerable time, the heat meanwhile increasing daily; but no sooner is the end answered, and the drop of sin removed, than he is taken out of the furnace reflecting the image of his Lord. *Melted over*:—I stood in the foundry-yard. Great piles of iron, all ready for melting, were gathered there. I noticed one heap of columns, broken, bent, split, shattered. I went into the foundry. They were "tapping" the furnace, and the molten metal flowed out in one stream of fire, sending up a sputter of sparks, whiter than the stars. A row of men, on whose swarthy faces fell the strange glare

of the fire, stood a little way from the furnace to catch the iron in ladles, and carry it off to be run in the moulds. I knew these broken columns would some day be cast into the furnace, softened, melted, to run out in a stream of fire, and be moulded again in tall, shapely pillars. In no other way could they be of use. They must be melted over. That very afternoon I saw a mother all bent and broken by affliction. She had parted with an only child. Just the Sabbath before had the earth been broken for that child's grave. I pitied that mother. How keenly her Saviour felt for her. And yet, perhaps, the only way to reach some elements in that mother's character, and change them, was through affliction. The character was not worthless; far from it. It only needed melting over. O, the pain of that furnace of suffering, its smart, its agony! But in just this way is character sometimes made over, its qualities shaped into the strong, stately pillars sustaining the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom. (*J. A. Gordon.*)

The refiner :—The word translated "soap" does not signify the article which is now called by that name; soap was not known in the days of Malachi. It means rather what we call "lye." It was water impregnated with alkali drawn from the ashes of the vegetable known as salt-wort. "He shall sit" is not merely pictorial, "to make the figure more striking." It is the position which the refiner must occupy, because the process of purification is often protracted, and must always be watched with unbroken attention. Recently a few ladies in Dublin, who are accustomed to meet and read the Scriptures, and converse upon topics suggested, were reading this third chapter of Malachi, when one of them observed, "There is something remarkable in the expression in the third verse: 'He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver.'" They agreed that possibly it might be so, and one of the ladies promised to call on a silversmith, and report to them what he said on the subject. She went accordingly, and, without telling the object of her errand, begged to know from him the process of refining silver, which he described to her. "But, sir," she said, "do you sit while the process of refining is going on?" "Oh yes, madam," replied the silversmith; "I must sit with my eye steadily fixed on the furnace, for if the time necessary for refining be exceeded in the slightest degree the silver is sure to be injured." At once she saw the beauty and the comfort, too, of the expression, "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver." Christ sees it is needful to put His children into the furnace, but He is seated by the side of it, His eye is steadily on the work of purifying, and His wisdom and love are both engaged in the best manner for them. Their trials do not come at random; the very hairs of their head are all numbered. As the lady was leaving the shop the silversmith called her back, and said he had still further to mention that he only knew the process of purifying was complete by seeing his own image reflected in the silver. Beautiful figure! When Christ sees His own image in His people His work of purifying is accomplished. Then He instantly removes the crucible from the fire. (*Charles F. Deems, D.D.*)

The mystery of suffering :—As a matter of fact, suffering is the condition in which every human life is lived to a greater or less degree. It embraces every portion of our nature, in pain of body, in perplexity of mind, in great sorrow of heart, in conflict of will, in restlessness of conscience, in desolation of spirit. Life always seems to me to be like our Lord's life in this—it is a drawing nearer, nearer, nearer to Calvary, a more and more living to conditions of suffering. And that which is an experience with us is a universal experience; we see it in every page that tells the story of the past. We see it wherever we look round upon human life to-day. We cannot help it; our own nature instinctively revolts against it. In the degree in which we can see how the mystery of suffering can be reconciled with the wisdom and the power and the love of God, in that degree we shall be helped to be enduring for ourselves, and to be trustful about others. Suffering is not of God; it is contrary to the ideal will of God. Tennyson says, "Man thinks he was not made to die." Man was no more made to suffer than he was made to die. Suffering is the necessary result of the violation of law; that is, suffering is of sin; and that it is by man's resistance to the loving guidance of God in the laws of life that He has set for him, that all suffering has come into the world. We are right to hate it; we are right to feel in the position of absolute antagonism to it. We are right to do all we can to work it out of human life. It is not of God, and although it is not of God, we are obliged to admit this fact, that God foreknew how man would use the liberty wherewith He dowered him, that He foreknew human sin, and that therefore He foreknew all the suffering that follows from human sin, and yet foreknowing this He created man. How is this reconciled

with His love? Well, the answer which we are going to consider in detail is this: Because God foreknew how out of suffering He could work gracious purposes to men. Now, the first of these purposes is this: suffering rightly borne purifies the character, and sets it free from sin. "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver." It is to this corrective aspect of suffering that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews turns our attention in the 12th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Let us look at the text itself in its first application. Malachi is the last of the prophets. His prophecy synchronises with the later days of the reign of Nehemiah. You remember what the story is that is told us of the religious position of Judah and Israel in Jerusalem towards the end of Nehemiah's reign. He had come first of all from Babylon, and had rebuilt Jerusalem, and had reorganised its religious and its social life; then he had gone back again to the court of his king, and an interval of some years intervenes. During this time Israel falls into a position of religious decay. It is quite true that she no longer reverts to idolatry as before she had gone through the stern discipline of the Babylonish Captivity. The temple services are maintained with regularity, but there is gross carelessness in the ministris. The lame and the blind are brought near to God, as if they were worthy offerings to be laid upon His altar. Side by side with this careless, irreverent worship we see worldliness. The sons of Israel are joining themselves in marriage alliances with the Gentile heathen around; and then, of course, with this worldliness there is a great deal of licentiousness of conduct, and the saddest feature about the whole thing is this—that lies beneath the religious declension of the people—the corruption of the priesthood. The national life is stained by that which is immoral in the conduct of the priests in their daily life. And one thing is necessary, if the national life is to be purified, if the worship which is to rise from the Church of Israel is to be acceptable with God—there must be purification of the nation, and the necessary preliminary to that is the purification of the priesthood. God says it shall come, and it shall come of suffering! Now, the symbolism is quite clear, is it not? We see before us some refining furnace; the fire is burning, and there is cast into that furnace ore mingled with dross and precious metal. Under the action of the fire the dross is separated from the metal. The refiner is watching the process of purification as it goes on. At length the separation is complete. Here, then, is given to us the picture of our life. As a matter of fact, we are in that fire; we have seen it. Its flames are involving every portion of our being. But why? Well, the answer that is given is this: for the purification of our nature. It is true, by the action of suffering that purification is wrought. Just see how true this is in instances with which we are familiar in the Bible. Recall to mind, for instance, the story of the conversion of the woman who was a sinner. In her time of indifference and thoughtlessness she is in the grip of her sin. Then she is brought to the sorrow, the exquisite suffering of contrition. Or take, again, another instance just as simple. Look at that thief as he hangs at the side of our Lord upon the Cross. He is in a position of absolute cleaving to his sin, and the words that he casts in the teeth of the Redeemer are words of reproach. But as he hangs there upon the Cross, and draws nigh to the unseen world, he is prepared to receive the ministry of Him who is on the Cross as the Refiner and Purifier of silver, and he, too, through the pain of his body, through what he is suffering materially in mind and heart and will, is turned to the Christ, and he who dies as the outcast of men is the first accepted penitent to enter Paradise with Christ. And just as we see that it is through suffering continually that men are first of all turned to God in initial conversion, so it is in life. Of course, the real convert in the moment of his initial conversion turns from his sin to God; but what the sin is from which he has to turn is only gradually made clear to him as he goes through life, and not until we are wholly conformed to the will of God in every detail of life and character is the work of conversion complete, because until this is so we have something from which to turn unto our God. Take two simple instances. There is John as he comes before us naturally in the New Testament: Boanerges, the Son of Thunder, said, "Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them even as Elias did?" Here we see him a Christian man but with undisciplined zeal; he has not zeal tempered with charity. Look again at him when he has reached extreme old age, and when he lies on his couch at Ephesus, with Christians gathered round him; and this is the burden of his teaching, "Little children, love one another." Thus we see the fiery zeal of the youth turned into the ripened tenderness of the dying saint. Take another instance.

Look at Simon Peter, what a strangely human character his is. At first a man carried away by his enthusiasms. What a strange mixture there is in his character. Who shall separate that strength from that weakness? Well, it is done. You pass on, and you look at St. Peter in his own epistles, and there you see quiet, firm strength without any bluster. He has acquired spiritual stability. How? In the discipline of life. And so it is always. God casts us into the furnace of affliction in order that He may deal with us just as that one is dealt with—separates in us that which is displeasing to Himself from that which is true to our true human nature, and He purifies us. We are not surprised, therefore, when people say to us we are simply actors in our religious life. It is not true. If it were true that all life was unified, that man was either wholly of the world or wholly of God, then the criticism would be true. But when a new higher nature is awakened within me, and becomes within me a real yearning, yet the lower nature co-exists with it. How different a person I am in one house to what I am in another. What a different person I am when I am kneeling before God—it may be in His sanctuary—lifted up to the worship of the Eucharist, and what I am when I find myself, well, in my own home, it may be an hour afterwards. And yet I am not a hypocrite in either case. The only thing is that there is brought clearly out before my eyes the co-existence in my character of contradictory forces. There is dross and there is gold. What do I want? To be my true, better self, which, God knows, I long to be, and which I am not sustainedly. What do I want? Why, plainly, the setting free of my higher self from all the power of this lower self. I want to have the dross purged out of my character, I want to be purified within. And so this truth comes before us: God has a loving purpose in consigning me to this great world, to the conditions of life in which we live. It is the essential condition, as far as we see, for the working out of us what is bad and what is mean, and for the development within us of what is grand and beautiful and true. Only, we must remember this, if this is the purpose of suffering, it is not always an attained purpose. Certain characters very often deteriorate under the discipline of suffering. But there is just one essential condition for the metal which is cast into the furnace: if it is to be separated from the dross a current of air must be always breathing over the living flame; if not, the effect would be this, that instead of fire separating the metal from the ore it would cause them to recombine, and under conditions of greater fixity, so that it would be more difficult than it was before to purify it. Is not this a wonderful parable? It is only when suffering is borne in God, only when suffering is borne through the action within us of the Holy Spirit, the true wind of God, that it is a purifying force within us. And so the first essential condition of our being purified by suffering is this, that we give ourselves to God up to the measure in which it is possible for us, in the submission to His will, to endure suffering. Here, as ever, we are face to face with that mystery of will. The issue in your character and mine of suffering conditions under which we live our lives depends entirely on the posture of the will. If we refuse to give up our wills to God our characters will deteriorate and not be purified or beautified. And the second thing is this, is it not? Giving ourselves thus up to God, if we are called on to live this life of suffering it ought to be a life in which we have keen realisation of the conditions under which we suffer in the thought of the Holy Spirit. Devotion to the Holy Ghost is of great importance in every aspect of our Christian life, but it is of emphatic importance in connection with our life of endurance of God's discipline. If we try to meet it with fixity of resolution, with solidarity of purpose, we shall fail, but if we throw ourselves upon God to enable us by His Spirit to endure the suffering which He lays upon us, in simple abandonment to the aid of the Holy Ghost, we shall be able patiently to endure. Lastly, remember this. All the time the process of the refining of the silver is going on the Refiner is watching. So it is here. We suffer under His watching eye; we suffer for the realisation of the dear Lord's loving purpose. He knows what we suffer. He has a heart that can understand. He does give me more than pity, He can give me sympathy, He bears with me so patiently, He comforts me so tenderly; in my rebellions He can forgive me so continuously. Yes, Lord, yes; I can bear these fiery burdens. Within the very flames I will look up and see Thy loving eye fixed on me, so that Thou knowest where I am, so that Thou feelest for me, so that Thou givest me effectual help. (*G. Body.*)

An offering in righteousness.—An acceptable offering:— This offering was presented to God after the purification of His people had taken place. An offering in righteousness. I. MUST HAVE NOTHING UNRIGHTEOUS

ASSOCIATED WITH IT. God hates robbery for burnt-offering. Righteous getting must precede righteous giving. Trade morality is more acceptable in God's sight than spurious temple munificence. II. MUST BE PRESENTED UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF RIGHT EMOTIONS. God regards the impulses that stir the offerer more than the offering. It is for the offerer's sake that He requires an offering. In presenting our offerings rightly, we need—1. The promptings of love. 2. The inspiration of gratitude. 3. The ardour of consecration. III. MUST BE OFFERED IN A RIGHT WAY. God has made known the right way of approach to Himself. 1. The offering must be presented with sincerity. Insincerity is unrighteous. The offering must be made to God, and not to win the favour, admiration, or interest of men. 2. The offering must be presented with humility. Self-righteousness is unrighteousness. 3. The offering must be presented with faith in God's revelation of Himself in Christ. IV. MUST BE PROPORTIONATE TO OUR POSSESSIONS. For the rich to give as the poor is unrighteous. Our possessions test us. Our willing offerings to God often manifest the righteousness or unrighteousness of our characters as nothing else does. God gives to us that we may have the joy of giving to Him. V. WILL BE ACCEPTABLE TO GOD. 1. The righteous offerings of His people are in accordance with His own righteous nature. 2. They manifest the effects of His grace upon their hearts. 3. They tend to spread the knowledge of His benevolence in the earth. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*)

Ver. 4. *The days of old.*—*Past days* :—Every age has its peculiar features. It is a duty to study the past. A knowledge of the past is often the basis of safety in the present, and stability in the future. I. THE DAYS OF OLD HAVE CREATED THE PRESENT DAYS. Time is a development, society a building, humanity a growth. No age can begin for itself. The past surrounds us everywhere. "You will find fibrous roots of this day's occurrences among the dust of Cadmus and Trismegistus, of Tubalcain and Triptolemus: the top-roots of them are with Father Adam himself and the cinders of Eve's first fire."—Carlyle. You cannot understand the present without a knowledge of the past. This is true politically, socially, and religiously. It is true of nations and of each individual life. II. THE DAYS OF OLD ARE FULL OF EXAMPLES WORTHY OF IMITATION. "History is philosophy teaching by examples."—Bolingbroke. Jewish history was full of examples that might have improved and instructed the degenerate age in which Malachi lived. Good men's lives are for all time. They are God's gifts to the world. They brighten the days of old and make them influential. We can best discover what those days were by the lives of the men who lived in them—

"There is a history in all men's lives

Figuring the nature of the times deceased."—Shakespeare.

One age may imitate another. Biographies teach more powerfully than philosophical deductions. III. THE DAYS OF OLD ARE FULL OF DIVINE REVELATIONS. God reveals Himself in many ways. Each age has its own revelations. God revealed Himself to the world in past ages as He does not now. The patriarchs, prophets, and apostles had visions of His glory denied to men of this generation. God was manifested in the flesh in days of old. Heaven seemed nearer to the earth then. God expects us to learn His will by His acts in past times; by the working out of His purposes; by rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked; by revealing His self-sacrificing love in the cross of Christ. The Bible is God's record of the "days of old." We may learn what He will be to us in our days by what He was to men then. His faithfulness, mercy, and truth are written unmistakably on those wondrous days. IV. THE DAYS OF OLD SHOULD BE SURPASSED BY THE PRESENT DAYS. Men should be more virtuous and pure as the days roll on. Human experience should lead to advancement in holiness. All departures from the past are not in the line of true progress. Some ages have prided themselves in their onward movements when they have really been retrograding. Sad when in the life of a nation, or in the life of a man, the former days are nobler than the present. Ages should be stepping stones for humanity to rise to God. Every age should be an advance upon that which has preceded it. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*)

Ver. 5. *I will come near to you to judgment.*—*A Divine threatening* :—God comes near to men when He manifests Himself to their spiritual consciousness. He may do this by His truth, by the circumstances which He causes to surround

them, or by the direct action of His Spirit. He often comes near to men to enlighten, strengthen, help, and save. He will come near to the wicked to judge and punish them. Observe—I. THIS THREATENING WAS UTTERED AGAINST WORKERS OF INQUITY. Jerusalem abounded with evil-doers. The wizards deluded the people with their arts, the adulterers lurked in the twilight for their prey, false witnesses perjured themselves for a bribe, the covetous robbed the hireling of his wages and defrauded the widow, the stranger, and the fatherless; all fear of God had departed from their eyes. Against these His anger burned. The righteous had nothing to fear from His judgments. His nearness was their joy. But the wicked would be filled with terror as His presence flashed through all their sheltering deceits upon their souls. Workers of iniquity may deny the existence of the God of judgment, but—(1) He is a witness of all their deeds. (2) His displeasure is awakened against them. (3) He sends His servants to declare His certain judgment upon them. II. THIS THREATENING WAS UTTERED BY HIM WHO IS THE SOLE JUDGE OF ALL MEN. God alone has the right to threaten judgment on men. He alone can judge men truly.

“What’s done we partly can compute,
But know not what’s resisted.”—Burns.

He knows all. He is the Creator of men. The evil-doer has violated His laws. His judgment will be just, final, and certainly executed. God threatens before He strikes. His judgment will be individual. He will come near to every man, and, in the light of the Divine presence, the evil of every man’s life will be made manifest to himself, and he will feel the justice of the sentence passed upon him. The bitterness of the doom of the lost will be their consciousness that they have merited it. God’s judgment on a man’s completed life will fix his destiny. God’s eternal supremacy, absolute knowledge, inflexible justice, and spotless holiness constitute Him judge of all. It is He who threatens the sinner. III. THIS THREATENING WILL BE CERTAINLY FULFILLED. Obstinate evil workers may close their ears to this solemn threatening, may make themselves callous by sophistries, may harden themselves in a false security by foolish infatuations, may abuse the Divine mercy that is reluctant to punish, yet judgment will certainly come upon them, to their dismay and destruction. 1. God’s character ensures the fulfilment of this threatening. 2. History and human life are full of events that foreshadow its fulfilment. 3. The consciences of men in all countries have, in a measure, anticipated its fulfilment. 4. The Scriptures constantly reiterate this threatening, and declare that it shall be fulfilled. 5. The indication of God’s administration over mankind requires its fulfilment. As Luthardt says: “Divine justice must have the last word. It has long suffered men—suffered sinners—to speak. But the last word will be its own; and this word must be a word of retaliation, for it is the word of a Judge.” IV. THIS THREATENING SHOULD AWAKEN REFLECTION, REPENTANCE, AND REFORMATION. The peril of the worker of evil is great and imminent. God’s anger abides upon him. To the eye of his Judge his sins have no covering. God, who has loved him with infinite tenderness, must destroy him unless he repents. Repentance averts judgment. A reformed life, by the power of the Gospel of Christ, is the only means of escape from ruin. To those who turn from their iniquities God comes near to comfort, not to condemn. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*) *God’s law of judgment*:—There is no scene in history more full of moving pathos than that of Christ weeping over Jerusalem. The city was there right before His eyes in her matchless beauty. “He who has not seen the temple of Herod,” said a contemporary rabbi, “does not know what beauty is.” The Roman Pliny said, “By far the most glorious city not of Judæa only, but of the whole East, is Jerusalem.” But as our Lord had seen through her religious ritual, so He sees through the splendour of her situation and her buildings the moral horror beneath. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! how often would I have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wing, and ye would not. Behold your house is left unto you desolate.” And so He pronounces over them that solemn prophecy of the degradation and destruction that were to come. True it is that the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem is also a prophecy of the moral end of all things. The destruction of Jerusalem is a type of that judgment with which God shall at last and in the end judge at their true moral value all human institutions. And the point is that Jerusalem was destroyed because she rejected Christ. That is an historical fact. I mean the temper

which caused her final destruction was simply the same as the temper which caused her to reject Christ. She rejected Christ because of that narrow, self-satisfied Jewish pride which refused to allow her to admit the larger light. And it all happened naturally: you can read it in the pages of the modern historian—it all happened by natural laws, natural sequences. And yet it is—as in the mind of our Lord, so to the imagination of all time—the very type of what we mean by a Divine judgment upon a nation for her sin. I believe this in particular is our intellectual vocation and duty to-day, to realise that natural laws are God's methods, and that it is not the less but rather the more His working, because He works by ordinary sequences, and by what we call natural causes in the government of men as of the world. The old idea of a Divine judgment was of something arbitrary, violent, disconnected; a favourite type for judgment was an earthquake, because an earthquake is something which cannot be put into any connection with any works of men. God forbid that we should deny that there are judgments of this kind. If we admit evidence, which we ought to do, we must admit there have been miraculous acts of God, but this is not the normal way in which God acts. What we have to learn is that God is the God of order and of law, and that because He proceeds by natural law it is not less God, the moral Governor of the world, who is at work among us. A disease is a judgment, because it springs from our vices. We are continually confronted with it: we see it; perhaps at the particular moment we may see it with special emphasis. Diseases follow our vices, our lusts. The duty of our piety in this present day is to be taught by God to see into the hand of God, to search out what are the methods by which these things happen, to seek to stanch the sources of the evil, but always to recognise that as the source is moral so the only true and vital remedies. Our piety lies in recognising this. There are natural judgments that spring from moral causes; these are God's judgments. "Providence," a cynic remarks, "is to be observed generally on the side of the strongest battalions." Perfectly true! But the moral qualities of nations and of individuals have a remarkable power, as shown by history, to strengthen or to weaken the battalion in the long run. History is full of these things. We know the temper of the French aristocracy at the birth of the French Revolution. Carlyle has described it to us in a spirit which is really prophetic. We know their moral blindness, we know their selfishness, and we know the result. The French Revolution was no less a Divine judgment upon the aristocracy, upon the Church, because the instruments of it were very often reckless and godless and wicked men! There is no country which has for the traveller a greater pathos at the present day than Spain. And why? Because everywhere we see amid great natural beauty the traces of the Divine judgment. There is in the present nothing to stir any hope, any feeling of a prospect or of a future for that nation, but yet the very soil is strewn with the marks and the memory of great civilisation. We ask, "Why did she fall?" And the history is written, it was for moral qualities that she fell. They are discoverable; you can put your finger upon them and mark them in the pages of history. No doubt the world as it is at present presents to us no complete picture of the moral government of God, but at the end we know we shall see that God's government has detailed for each particular institution, as for each particular individual, a judgment according to righteousness and truth. When human history is wound up there shall be none who can fail to recognise that God is a God of judgment. But for the present it is not so. The eyes of those who believe in God are strained to see some indication of His moral government, and find it hard to trace them in the facts of the world. Prophets and psalmists call out, "How long, O Lord, how long! How long, holy and true?" but meanwhile the attitude of one who believes in the moral government of God is always the same. He looks out upon the world, and he expects God to govern not only individuals, but classes, nations, and institutions by natural laws, but with moral results. This he expects, and I ask you, Was there ever a time when there was greater need to remember this than there is now? In the government of nations, in their relations to one another, in the relations of classes, in the structure of society, in the dealing with institutions, there is a tendency to banish morals from politics and from commerce, and it seems as if, in spite of resistance, the tendency were augmenting. But look out upon our commerce. Think of it! The unblushing selfishness and unscrupulousness of the great companies and trusts, the unblushing prevalence of bribery under the name of commission, the scandalous lying and trickery in the details of retail trade! Well, then, if we believe in the moral

government of God, we need not be prophets, we need not be able to discern with any certainty the tendency of things, or their outcome, but at least we anticipate and expect that in proportion to the deep and widespread character of this moral hollowness there will be judgment by natural law, a judgment of God. The chief way in which we can do any good socially, or look out with fresh eyes upon the great world outside us, is by attending to religion in our own souls, no doubt. There, too, let us think how God comes near to us in judgment. The penitent is ready to be punished. But you will say, "Of course, I know unrepented sin has to be punished, but then I am forgiven. Do you talk of punishing me, then?" Shall we never learn that lesson! Shall we always go on thinking and talking as if to be forgiven meant to be let off, as if Christ's atonement was suffering punishment in order that we might go scot-free? Christ made Himself the sacrifice for our sins in order that He might bring us nearer to God. We are indeed exempted from that which is the truest and deepest and most terrible punishment—the alienation from God, and all that that involves, the gnawing worm, the devouring fire, which sin is—from that, indeed, He delivers us in bringing us near to God, but from the punishment which lies in bearing the consequences of sin there is not one word in the New Testament which would lead you to suppose that you were to be exempted. On the contrary, He has brought you into that new relation to God in order that you may learn how to bear it. For judgment, whether on nations or on individuals, need not be final judgment. The great multitude of Divine judgments are His deepest and most effective corrective agencies. Oh! let us learn that lesson. There is the purpose of God the Father with regard to the world—a large purpose, an eternal purpose, a wise purpose. There is only one hindrance to that purpose of God, but it is deep and wide and terrible: it is the hindrance of sin in individuals, in classes, in nations. Sin may run to the point when it passes beyond the Divine law, but God will do His utmost, and among His most effective instruments are the instruments of judgments. Judgments are intended to purify. The first thought of judgment or of misfortune ought, to the Christian conscience, to be this, "It is given to cleanse me. God is visiting me. I am to be purified. He punishes me because He has a purpose for me. To feel the hand of God is to know that I am to be dealt with to my eternal enrichment and blessedness." (*Charles Gore.*)

Ver. 6. **For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore, ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.**—*The Divine unchangeableness*:—Here, in the land of our exile, we must live by faith, not by sight. Fear of Him who is the unchangeable Majesty is more suitable for us whilst we are here, than to rejoice and be glad. We now speak of that glorious and incomparable attribute, the Divine unchangeableness. Changeableness is the note of all things here below: but He takes here to Himself a more excellent name, and who can doubt that which He hath spoken? When we seriously reflect on the unchangeableness of God, we find that He is such a One, notwithstanding of all His infinite works and varieties of dispensations that come from Him, as yet remains unchangeable. All things remain in a circuit of being and not being; and even such things, when they have a being, remain changeable. But, to speak of God's unchangeableness, it is held forth that He is void of all variableness and corruption, and that He, in the blessed purpose of His goodwill, is void of any shadow of changeableness; He is unchangeable in His essence, in respect of this, that He is void of, and cannot be subject to, corruption. That He is void of all alteration, and infinitely perfect, proves sufficiently His being both sufficient, and all-sufficient. Wherein can man be profitable to God? His perfection cannot be found out. He is infinite in His omnipotency; in His understanding and knowledge; and He is unchangeable in His love. Consider the advantages a Christian may have, in this consideration, that God is unchangeable. 1. It is an excellent way to keep the grace of love growing in the Christian. 2. It is an immutable and irresistible way to keep life in the exercise of faith. O, for the faith to believe that God cannot nor will change His immutable purpose. 3. The attaining to much Divine patience and submission, under all sad dispensations. 4. We come to the distinct persuasion, that the "gifts and calling of God are without repentance." 5. The mortification of all things here below. 6. Much joy and satisfaction, for the heirs of God have strong consolation. (*A. Gray.*) *The immutability of God*:—"The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work,

the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind than thoughts of God. But while the subject humbles the mind it also expands it. And the subject is eminently consolatory. In contemplating Christ, there is a balm for every wound; in musing on the Father, a quietus for every grief, and in the influence of the Holy Ghost, there is a balsam for every sore. One subject we treat now—the immutability of the glorious Jehovah. I. AN UNCHANGING GOD. 1. He changes not in His essence. We cannot tell you the substance of what we call God. Whatever it is, we call it His essence, and that essence never changes. The substance of mortal things is ever changing. All creatures change. But God is perpetually the same. He is Spirit-pure, essential, etherial spirit—and therefore He is immutable. His essence did not undergo any change when it was united with the manhood. 2. He changes not in His attributes. Apply to His power, wisdom, justice, truth, goodness, love. Take any one thing that you can say of God now, and it may be said not only in the dark past, but in the bright future it shall always remain the same. 3. He changes not in His plans. Has it ever been said that God began to build but was not able to finish? God altereth not His plans. Why should He? He is the All-Wise, and cannot have planned wrongly. 4. He changes not in His promises. I want immutable things; and I find that I have immutable promises when I turn to the Bible. 5. He changes not in His threatenings. 6. He changes not in the objects of His love—not only in His love, but in the objects of it. II. THE PROOF THAT GOD IS UNCHANGEABLE. The very existence and being of a God seem to me to imply immutability. An argument may be found in the fact of God's perfection. Another in God's infinity. From the past we may gather proof. "Hath He spoken, and hath He not done it?" III. THE PERSONS TO WHOM THIS UNCHANGEABLE GOD IS A BENEFIT. "Sons of Jacob." 1. The sons of God's election. 2. Persons who enjoy peculiar rights and titles. 3. Men of peculiar manifestations. 4. Men of peculiar trials. 5. Men of peculiar character. IV. THE BENEFIT WHICH THE SONS OF JACOB RECEIVE FROM AN UNCHANGING GOD. "Not consumed." How can man be consumed? In two ways. We might have been consumed in hell. We might have been left to our own devices, and then where would you have been now? Remember, then, that God is the same, whatever may be removed. There is one place where change cannot put his finger; there is one Name on which mutability can never be written; there is one heart that can never alter. That heart is God's—that name is Love. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *God's immutable mercy the refuge of His people* :—The Holy Spirit, by the prophet, is here recalling the Jewish nation to a recollection of their transgressions, and particularly with regard to God's own ordinances. In the words before us there is vast consolation. 1. What Jehovah is in Himself. "I change not." It is the Lord Jesus who is spoken of. He for whom John Baptist prepared the way. Our glorious Lord stands recorded in this chapter as Jehovah, self-existent, one with the Father and the Spirit. The immutability of Christ is a sweet truth. It is frequently mentioned or referred to in Scripture. 2. His covenant, like Himself, is eternal. God's mind is eternal. He who is so immutable in Himself, and in His own purposes, will do all His pleasure, and His counsel shall stand. He sweetly speaks for the comfort and peace of sinners, brought to the feet of Jesus. There is no possibility of failure; His infinite wisdom has provided for every emergency; His infinite foreknowledge foresees all the obstacles that ever did or ever will arise to counteract His own plans; His infinite power is sure to carry His plans into effect. God is as true in His threatenings as in His promises. This is illustrated in the case of the Jewish nation. Whilst, however, these witnesses stand before us, to teach us that God is faithful, let us remember that the God who is thus faithful in His promises and in His threatenings has been pleased also in His Word to give poor souls this blessed testimony—that the seed of Jacob shall never seek His face in vain. (F. Silver.) *Of the immutability of God* :—I. THE NATURE OF THIS DIVINE ATTRIBUTE. 1. In respect of His essence, God is absolutely unchangeable, because His being is necessary, and His essence self-existent. 2. In respect of His perfections God is absolutely unchangeable. Concerning those perfections which flow necessarily from His essence, and depend not on His will, this is self-evident; because whatever necessarily flows from any cause or principle must likewise of necessity be as invariable as the cause or principle from which it necessarily proceeds. Of this

kind are the power, the knowledge, the wisdom, and the other natural attributes of God. Concerning those perfections, the exercise whereof depends upon His will; such as justice, veracity, goodness, mercy, and all other moral perfections, the absolute immutability of these is not, indeed, so obvious and self-evident; because it depends on the unchangeableness, not only of His essence, but of His will also. But in a Being who always knows what is right to be done, and can never possibly be deceived, the general will or intention must be unchangeable.

3. In the particular decrees and purposes of His will—in His laws, promises, and threatenings. Having all power and all knowledge, He can never resolve upon anything which shall be either not possible or not reasonable to be accomplished. All finite beings are frequently forced to change their designs, because they find it impossible to finish what they began, or unreasonable to pursue their first intention. But in God these things have no place. He is unchangeable in His decrees and purposes, because, having all things in His power, and comprehending all things in His foreknowledge, He can by no force be overruled, by no surprise or unexpected accident be prevented. In His laws God is unchangeable, because they are always founded on the same immutable reason, the eternal differences of good and evil, the original nature of things, and universal equity; and they always tend to the same regular end, the order and happiness of the whole creation. In His covenants or promises God is unchangeable. Because they are founded upon such grounds as cannot be altered; even upon the original, fixed, and permanent designs and intentions of all-wise providence. In His threatenings God is unchangeable, that is to say, in such threatenings as are not merely personal. Because, as His love to virtue and goodness is unalterable, so His hatred to vice is irreconcilable. And also because these threatenings are often prophetic parts of the general scheme of providence. Against this unchangeableness of God it may be urged, that Scripture frequently represents Him as repenting and changing His purpose. Reply, that while the declarations of the designs and purposes of God, which are propetic of the great events of providence, are in themselves absolutely fixed and unalterable; those promises and threatenings which are merely personal, either to any particular man or to any number of men, are always conditional, because the wisdom of God thought fit to make these depend on the behaviour of men; and the unchangeableness characterises the conditions. II. USES OF THIS DISCOURSE. 1. The unchangeableness of God is to good men at all times the greatest possible security that they shall not finally fail to be happy. 2. The threatenings of Him whose nature and perfections are unchangeable ought to be a perpetual terror to impenitent sinners. 3. The consideration of the mercy of Him who is unchangeable in His perfections ought to be a constant encouragement to such as are truly penitent, and sincerely desirous to amend. 4. As unchangeableness is an excellency and perfection in God, so in man, on the contrary, to change his opinion and manner of acting, when there is just cause to do so, is one of his greatest commendations. Right and truth are to be followed unchangeably, but when frail and fallible man finds he has erred from what is true and right he must immediately return to it. (*S. Clarke, D.D.*) *The immutability of God*:—Each property and perfection of God's character and being produces its own peculiar effect upon the renewed mind; and, although no one by searching can find out the Almighty to perfection, yet the higher we soar in our contemplations of Him the more we shall be excited to wonder, love, and adore. The more we think upon God the more shall we be constrained to exclaim, "How incomprehensible art Thou!" True religion and pure and spiritual enjoyment do not proceed from the knowledge of some of God's attributes only, nor from a merely speculative knowledge of all. All, when experimentally and practically considered, are engaged in producing piety and devotion in the human soul. 1. The immutability of God is not only revealed in the Bible, but is discoverable by reason. Mutability implies cause. Where can we imagine there exists a cause that can change the being or attributes of the Deity? He can Himself never possess a desire to change. All possible, as well as all past, present, and future, sources of pleasure are always open to Him. And He is independent for pleasure on all these. Does a power of producing change in God exist in His creatures? God, who is infinite, must be placed beyond the reach of any external and finite cause. All are dependent on Him, but He is dependent on none. 2. God's purposes are immutable. God foresees from the eternity past all the transactions of the eternity to come. No sudden event, therefore, can take Him unawares, and so subvert

His designs. The plans of men may be frustrated by a slight unforeseen accident, but there are no accidents with "Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." Note the sense in which the term "repentance" is in Scripture applied to God. Divine repentance conveys no notion of regret or dissatisfaction with His past procedure, but it is expressive of God's determination to act in a different manner than before towards those who by their change of conduct have rendered necessary a different mode of procedure in the just administration of God's moral government. The immutability of God's purposes may be inferred from the nature of the end, to promote and consummate which they are all but means—even the manifestation of Jehovah's all-sufficiency. Let the immutability of Jehovah's purpose in Christ Jesus encourage the Christian labourer to ceaseless exertions in the work of the Lord. 3. God's Word is unchangeable. His moral law, threatenings, and promises are alike unalterable. The Divine moral law, which is a transcript of the character of God, "holy, just, and good," is based upon eternal and unchangeable principles of rectitude, co-existent with God Himself, and must continue to exist as long as God exists. It is a great mistake to suppose that the moral law has been abrogated by the Gospel. The work of Him who "hath magnified the law and made it honourable" is the sole ground of our restoration to the favour of God and our title to heaven. The Gospel does not abolish the believer's obligation to obey the law. To demolish the law would be to drag away the pillar which supports the universal fabric of God's moral government. God's threatenings too are unalterable. History, sacred and profane, teems with fearful proofs of God's immutable hatred of sin, and determination not to let it go unpunished. And the promises of God are immutable. They cannot fail of fulfilment. But the fulfilment of the promises is conditional; and the condition is as unalterable as the promise. There is an immutable promise suitable for every circumstance of life. How well calculated is the contemplation of the Divine immutability to promote confidence in God. Our whole happiness depends upon the immutability of God. God is unchangeable, and is therefore a firm and stable refuge to the believer. (*J. James.*) *The unchangeableness of God*.—I. HE IS UNCHANGEABLE IN HIS BEING. Change is impossible. Created and dependent beings have the law of development and decay in them; imperfect beings may become more or less perfect, but God, being separate from all these contingencies of existence, cannot change. 2. He is unchangeable in His attributes. All the excellences that He possesses He has possessed, and will possess, for ever. His creatures may understand them more or less perfectly, but there is no change in them. There can be no increase or diminution of His power, wisdom, holiness, love, &c. 3. He is unchangeable in His purposes. All His designs are from eternity. His knowledge and power being perfect, and His will having no variableness in it, there is no reason to suppose that any of His purposes have altered, or that any of them can fail. Nothing can be a surprise to Him, nothing can thwart Him, and nothing can suggest an improvement in His plans. When He is said to repent or turn aside from His purpose, it is to show us that He is not an impassive spectator in human affairs, and that men may expect to be truly blessed as they co-operate with Him in working out His holy will in the earth. History testifies to God's unchangeableness. His purpose to bless all men in Christ, like a thread of gold, runs through the ages. 4. He is unchangeable in the principles of His government. He reigns over the whole universe with calm and equitable sway. Intellectual beings, myriads of ages before this race peopled the earth, found His reign the same as we do now. He has ever been just and merciful, and ever will be. There can be no fickleness, no uncertainty, with Him. Those who maintain their original righteousness, or having sinned, accept of His mercy, are blessed, while those who obstinately rebel perish. 5. His unchangeableness does not involve fatalism, impassiveness, or necessity. His designs are the outcome of His wisdom and love; He feels deeply the condition of His creatures, making them conscious of His favour according to their obedience to His laws, and all His actions are free. II. THE DIVINE INFERENCE DRAWN FROM THIS DECLARATION. "Therefore," &c. At first sight this inference is a strange one. He was threatening judgment; and the legitimate inference that might have been drawn from His unchangeableness was that they should be consumed. But instead of this He draws the opposite, reminding them that it was because of His eternal purpose to keep the seed of Jacob alive upon the earth, as a witness for Him for the world's sake, and not because of their faithfulness, that they had

been spared. They had often merited destruction, but in His unchanging mercy He had remembered His covenant with their fathers, and His purpose to bless the whole race through them, and so they were not consumed. This is true of the Church now. Its sure resting-place is the immutability of God. It will abide, however evils may abound, scepticism darken, or superstition deprave. Consider, then—1. That the continued existence of the Church does not arise from its faithfulness, but from God's unchanging mercy and purpose. 2. That as the continued existence of the Church arises from God's immutability, there should be in the minds of the members deep humility, fervent adoration, and ardent gratitude. 3. That as the permanence of the Church rests upon the immutability of God, there should be, in the members, full confidence in its stability and ultimate triumph. 4. That this should lead any who have wandered from the Church to return to its privileges again. 5. That it should make the enemies of the Church consider the futility of their attacks upon it, and repent of their folly. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*) *Christ unchangeable*:—Christ is like the rock in mid-ocean, that never changes, and braves every storm; feeling is like the restless, shifting water that rolls round it. Christ is like the grand old church tower standing foursquare to every wind, grey with centuries, a shelter and a home to all who will come; feeling is like the bells in the tower, which only ring on rare occasions, and easily change their tune; most demonstrative on Sunday, and often still all the week when duty much needs their merry music. Christ is like the sun, whose light and heat are constant; feeling is like the fleecy cloud, now beautiful as an angel's wing, now a cold grey sky. Christ is the tree of life, with root deep and the soil firmly gripped, lifting into the sky leaf and blossom and branch; feeling is a mere blossom, a child of the gay summer time, unfit for storm or winter service. Christ is the guide who never leaves the traveller; feeling is the torch sometimes burning brightly, but very liable to be blown out. He who trusts mere feeling will trust a light most likely to have gone out when most he needs guidance and comfort, while it will often burn brightly when it is least needed.

The saints' final perseverance secured by the immutability of God:—This glorious doctrine stands—1. On the perfections of Jehovah. 2. Upon the covenant work of the Lord Jesus. 3. Upon the faithfulness of the faithful and eternal Spirit. Of the perfections of God, His immutability is here placed before us. This is declared to be the security of the sons of Jacob. I. "THE SONS OF JACOB," who are they? Some consider the passage as having regard to the literal Jacob, the literal restoration and conversion of the Jews. These "sons of Jacob" are God's own sons. These are they who, clad in the garment of their elder brother, do inherit all blessings. These are they that "wrestle," like their father Jacob; they "wrestle" in prayer with God. And they cannot live without Him. More than that, these are the "Israel," and they "prevail." But these "sons of Jacob" have all the elements of destruction in them. They have the indwelling corruption of their nature. It goes with them where they go—stays with them where they stay. It defiles all that they touch, and all that they think and all that they do. Besides the fountain of evil, there is the actual evil—what a man does. Both in sin as a principle and in sin as an act there is in a "son of Jacob" the very element of his own destruction. II. **THOUGH THIS IS SO, THEY ARE NOT CONSUMED.** Though they are often placed in a hot fire; sometimes so hot that faith seems almost to be gone. They are tried; their grace is tried, their faith is tried, hope tried, love tried, every "fruit of the Spirit tried," and yet they are not consumed. III. **WHEREFORE ARE THEY NOT CONSUMED?** "I am the Lord; I change not." The description can only be true of God Himself. He is unchangeable in His being, in His perfections, in His faithfulness, in His justice, in His holiness, in His love. (*J. Harrington Evans, M.A.*) *The unchangeableness of God manifested in the preservation of Israel*:—I. **A FACT STATED.** "The sons of Jacob are not consumed." This is a remarkable fact concerning the literal descendants of the patriarch. It is true still. II. **THE REASON ASSIGNED.** "I am the Lord; I change not." Had it depended upon the nations of the earth they would long ago have been consumed. God had entered into covenant with them, and given them great and precious promises. And though they have broken the covenant, the Lord on His part changes not. There is abundant encouragement in this subject for every child of God. Abide in Him, and no enemy shall be able to separate you from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus your Lord. (*M. S. Alexander.*) *The unchangeableness of God*:—It is of very serious consequence to man that he

should make himself acquainted with the character of God. In order to improve ourselves in this knowledge, it is useful to fix our attention at times on particular qualities of the Divine character. By carefully observing the different parts we shall become better acquainted with the whole. I. And first, let us consider **THIS QUALITY ITSELF; THAT IS, THE UNCHANGEABLENESS OF GOD.** In this world every thing is changeable. It has pleased the Almighty that even the most beautiful parts of the visible creation should be full of change. Days and seasons follow and chase away each other. The leaf dies; the grass withers; the flower fades; "the mountain falling cometh to nought, and the rock is removed out of his place." Man himself, who marks and mourns those changes, is as changeable as the rest. The objects in which he takes delight, change: his honours fade; his pleasures wither; his riches make to themselves wings and flee away; his kinsfolk fail, and his familiar friends forget him. His body changes: the strength of his youth is dried up; his beauty consumes away. His mind changes: the desires of yesterday are not the desires of to-day; the purposes of youth are abandoned in age. But while man varies, God is the same. For what says the Psalmist? "My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass; but Thou, O Lord, shalt endure for ever; and Thy remembrance unto all generations." "I am the Lord, and for that reason I change not." I am the Creator, and not the creature; God, and not man; therefore I change not. Beside Me there is none other; all else is vanity of vanities; the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but I am supreme, self-existent, and eternal, and My counsel, that shall stand. If, then, God is unchangeable, we must remember that all His Divine perfections are unchangeable: His power, His wisdom, His holiness, His goodness, change not. There is something so awful—so unlike ourselves—in the idea of a Being placed far above all chance and change and infirmity, that we should be terrified by the thought if we were not told that the mercy of this great Being was as constant and enduring as His wisdom, His righteousness, and His power. But there is something else to be observed if we would take a full view of this subject. The Christian dispensation teaches us to study and know, not merely the character of God, but the character of God in Christ. And it is in Him that the unchanging mercy of God shines forth with the greatest lustre.

II. Having now considered the unchangeableness of God in itself, let us consider **WHAT EFFECTS OUGHT TO BE PRODUCED ON OUR MINDS BY THE CONTEMPLATION OF IT.** And I begin with remarking that this doctrine of God's unchangeableness gives unspeakable value to the holy Scriptures. It is the whole end and aim of the Scriptures to reveal God to man. Now, if God were as changeable as man we could have no secure reliance on this revelation. In that case the book of Scripture might be true at one time and not at another. This is what actually happens among men. There are few if any persons whose habits, or manners, or principles do not vary more or less at different periods of life; nor is there any government which does not more or less alter its laws from time to time. And, in such cases, new descriptions of character, and new books of laws, become necessary. But God is always the same; and therefore the Scriptures are always sure. The New Testament has now been written nearly eighteen hundred years; and some parts of the Old Testament three thousand. Yet the Bible is as faithful an account of the Most High at this moment as at first; and it will remain so, if the world should last even millions of years longer. Let us, therefore, with this sacred book in our hands, consider more particularly what effect should be produced on our minds by reflecting on the great truth delivered in the text, "I am the Lord, I change not." 1. First, on the sinful and impenitent. By the sinful and impenitent, I mean not only those who live in gross sin or impiety, but those also whose hearts are chiefly set on the things of this life, and not on the things of the life to come. And in what words shall I describe the folly and danger of such persons! I say, their folly, for, if God be unchanging, and every thing else fickle and fleeting and delusive, how exquisite must be the folly of seeking our chief good anywhere but in Him! How exquisite must be the folly of casting ourselves, not on the favour of Him who can give steady and lasting happiness, but on the wretched friendship of things that perish in the using! These miserable trifles,—which will certainly fail us in a few years,—which may possibly fail us this very day,—these are our gods; and for the sake of these we desert Him who, if we did but choose to trust Him, would be "the strength of our hearts, and our portion for ever." If we saw a man building his house on a quicksand we should be amazed at his stupidity; but how infinitely greater the infatuation of

an immortal creature who builds his happiness on the passing, perishing objects of time and sense ! That folly rises to the most perfect madness when we consider that, if we have not God for our unchangeable friend, we must have Him for our unchangeable enemy. Once more I present you with the offer of mercy and reconciliation. And remember that, if God is unchanging, you must change, for there is no hope of a reconciliation with Him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and who will by no means clear the guilty. 2. In hopes that this solemn warning may not have been entirely lost I proceed, secondly, to apply our subject to those who are seriously alarmed about their everlasting safety ; but who, when they consider the greatness of the sins they have committed, are apt to fear that for them there is no forgiveness. But I would ask you this question : were you at this moment, with your bodily eyes, to see your blessed Saviour extended on His Cross, offering Himself a sacrifice for the sins of His enemies, could you doubt that His most precious blood was able to wash away even your sins, however heavy and numerous ? If you could not doubt this, then recollect that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. 3. In the third place, let me very shortly address those who are really making devotional and practical religion the principal object of their lives, and who humbly trust that, through the Divine blessing, they are gradually increasing in all godliness and Christian virtue. Such persons will find their advantage in frequent meditation on the unchangeableness of God. If they are in affliction or in distress of mind, this will be their hope and stay ; they will reflect that, though outward things alter, He in whom they have laid up their chief hopes remains the same. (*Christian Observer.*)

Ver. 7. Ye are gone away from Mine ordinances. — Misused religious privileges :—In proportion to the value and the importance of our privileges, is apt to be our negligence, our carelessness, in improving them. In religion, in morals, in everything concerning man, it is in the season of calm, and amid the quietude of apparent prosperity, that the foot is readiest to slip. It is melancholy to think how little value men in general set on the ordinances of a pure religion. The temporal benefits that are so profusely conferred on us by our Maker have each and all of them a measure of alloy mixed up with them, so as to modify and qualify their sweetness. Religion is the solitary one of His gifts that may be characterised as sweet unmixed ; and yet it is the one to which, by a great majority of our race, the least value is attached. The text deals with a class of persons who, enjoying the privileges of religion, derived no advantage from them ; and it intimates that the loss originated in a fault of their own. **1. EVILS THAT ARE CALCULATED TO RENDER THE MINISTRATIONS OF THE GOSPEL PROFITLESS.** 1. Irregular attendance on those ministrations. In theory we admit that the worship of God is the most important business of life. Because it is a preparation for eternity ; it is labour in the interest and for the well-being of an immortal soul, and our homage is a debt, a sacred, serious, solemn debt we owe to the Divinity. Then zeal, regularity, precise punctuality in that service, are of all things most important. Your services, it is true, have nothing of merit about them ; but it is also true that if you refuse them you need not expect the blessing of God. 2. Love to the world, and a propensity to worldly thoughts. Who does not know that, even while apparently engaged in the most sacred services, the world, and the things of the world, occasionally pass over and darken our spiritual perceptions ? Who is there who has never mourned this and deplored it ? This tendency to carnal thoughts in the midst of religious-seeming services is one of the most serious obstacles that stand in the way of our improvement from a preached Gospel. 3. The pride of intellect, and a carping taste for literary criticism. It were passing strange, indeed, if the music of soft words, the grace of polished sentences, and all the blandishments of composition were excluded from the pulpit, while on any other stage they are deemed needful to success. But there is peril in it. It may lay a powerful temptation in the way of men's souls. It leads to a sacrificing of substance for shadow. Men nowadays must have the Gospel preached to them in their own particular fashion, or they will not listen to the preaching of the Gospel at all. Remember, I beseech you, that the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and that the wisdom of God is stronger than men. 4. The want of solemnity and reverence in the sanctuary. How little we think, in general, of the society in which we are, or the nature of Divine service, when we come up to the temple of the Lord. 5. The want of a spirit of prayer. The effect

to be produced is altogether dependent on Almighty power. Then how obvious it is that all our attendances on these ordinances should be preluded by prayer ! We know that of ourselves we cannot profit. We know that God has told us how His blessing is to be obtained. Shall not, then, the footstool of His throne be approached by us ? Shall we not ask that Divine strength may be perfected in our weakness ? (*W. Craig.*) **Return unto Me, and I will return unto you — God's charge and call to a backsliding people :** — Three things contained in these words, which well suit our times. 1. A charge or accusation brought by God against His professing people. All sin is going away from God's ordinances, or a breach of His law. To omit known duties, God construes as a commission of known sins. 2. A solemn exhortation backed by an alluring motive. God promises mercy when He might execute judgment. Repentance is that which sets a creature right again, with his face towards God, so that all his desires and expectations are from Him. The motive is, God's return unto us. God is said to return when He shows His face and favour, which sin has hid. 3. The people's reply. "Wherein shall we return ?" This was either in words—"We are not conscious of guilt, show us wherein we have offended." Or it is the language of their hearts and lives. **I. SHOW WHEREIN WE HAVE GONE AWAY FROM GOD AS A PROFESSING PEOPLE AND LAND.** 1. We have gone away from His truth. As to the generality of professors in the land, they scarce know what are the foundations of the Gospel, or what are the pillars of the reformation. 2. We are gone away from His worship. Now families professing godliness are prayerless, and there is a weariness of ordinances. 3. We are gone away from our trust and confidence in God. This is a complaint every one may bring against himself. 4. We are gone away from God in conversation. Faith is nothing without fruit, nor Gospel truth without Gospel holiness. Are thy thoughts spiritual, thy speech savoury, thy mind and disposition heavenly, and thy outward behaviour without offence ? **II. HOW MUST OUR RETURN TO HIM BE ?** 1. With deep humiliation. Sense of sin will beget sorrow and shame for it. When God touches the heart, sin will become the greatest burden we ever felt. 2. With real reformation. God's anger is increased by mock returns. It is one thing to confess sin with our mouths, and another thing to cast it out of our hearts. 3. It should be with an eye to the blood of Christ. No mercy is to be expected but through the satisfaction and intercession of our Lord Jesus Christ. **III. THE BLESSING WHICH IS IN GOD'S RETURN TO US.** When God comes to a land or people, good comes with Him. 1. He comes with grace and pardon. 2. He comes with grace to sanctify and renew. 3. He comes with power and strength to save and deliver. 4. He comes with love to delight in them. **IV. WHY WILL GOD RETURN TO US ONLY IN THE WAY OF OUR RETURN TO HIM ?** It does not suppose anything meritorious in the obedience of the creature ; nor yet that the blessings of grace are suspended upon the condition of duty. 1. It is to justify His dispensations before men. Though duty be not the ground of our claim, it is the warrant of our expectation and our hope. 2. He will slay presumption and self-confidence in His own people. **V. IN WHOM THIS VILE FRAME MENTIONED IN THE TEXT IS FOUND.** This may serve by way of caution, and by way of trial. We speak as in the text when—1. We rest in generals, in confessing sin before God. Sin is a sort of packhorse upon which every burden is laid. 2. This frame prevails where there is a transferring sin upon others. It is easy confessing other men's sins, but evangelical repentance begins at home. 3. Men speak thus when they confess some sins, but not the sin which God aims at. We are all too partial with respect to ourselves. 4. To confess sin with a secret liking of it in the heart is a way of saying, "Wherein shall I return ?" It argues little to confess sin if thou dost not part with it. **Uses**—(1) Are we thus gone away from God, and shall we not admire Divine patience, that we are yet spared, both our persons and our land ? (2) Adore grace. (3) See what is the special duty of this day. "Return unto the Lord." (4) Beware of a double heart this day, and all your life after. Seek peace and truth, but Christ as the foundation of both. (*John Hill.*) **Necessity of our returning to God :**—Whenever, in any respect, we have wandered away from the strait and narrow way which leadeth unto life our Father in heaven does not at once leave us to ourselves, but in His tender love and forbearance has recourse to various means whereby to bring us back to Himself. This is plainly the case with individual Christians ; perhaps it is the condition of mankind universally. Our merciful Father offers cheeks

and warnings when He sees any generally prevailing tendency to depart from Him. If, in any Christian Church, people have become self-confident, neglectful of ancient rules, scornful attention to moral duties, yet all the while exulting in unreal feelings and fancies, as tokens of the Divine favour—when such symptoms of corruption show themselves, it is a great mercy if our good God, by any chastisements, warns us of our danger, and of the necessity of returning to Him whilst yet we may. Jehovah sent this message of affectionate compassion to His ancient people, “Return unto Me, and I will return unto you.” And it was to be expected that they would gladly embrace so gracious an offer; that their only inquiry would be in what way they could best prove the sincerity of their repentance. But no such temper showed itself. Quite otherwise. They had done nothing to be ashamed of. They said,—why may we not go on as we are; what need is there of repentance or amendment? Jesus Christ pressed on all who would follow Him the necessity of self-denial, that is, of doing and suffering what is painful and unpleasant to us, out of love to Him. This we promised to do in our baptism. If we have not led the rest of our lives according to that beginning, then we should hear the voice of God saying to us, “Return unto Me, and I will return unto you.” Return unto Me in all self-abasement and self-denial, and I will return to you in those special gifts and graces which eminently mark the presence of God’s good Spirit. Whatever our condition in life may be, self-denial in matters of disposition and temper is so essential to the Christian character that, if we have neglected it, we have indeed urgent need to return to the Lord in this respect without delay. Any tendency to self-will is an evidence that “the heart is not right with God.” In regard to the duty, or privilege, of prayer, we should ascertain for ourselves whether we have at all wandered away from the Lord, and so need to return to Him in true substantial amendment. There must be a real and hearty obedience, otherwise a return is no return. It is not a matter of profession or of feeling or of knowledge, but of absolute practice, of humble temper and humble practice. (*Sermons by Contrib. to “Tracts for the Times.”*) *Coming to God by love or by fear*.—Our life in this world is, in substance, a returning to God. When we were new-born we were set in the path that leads to eternal life, and bidden to keep in it, and so return to God. Few, if any, go straight onward; most of us are like wayward children, following the road for a while, then straying; anon recovering it, and then, with repentance, proceeding. So, all the life through, we are returning to God; lapsing here and there; erring and straying like lost sheep; finding the way back, we often wonder how; and so, as for our general direction, working a slow course toward final safety, through the temptations and dangers of the track by which we go. Often have Christians to check themselves, to deplore errors, and to retrace heedless steps; they must do this when they see or feel that they are out of the straight path. The text asks, “Wherein shall we return?” The question suggests some thought on motives which may act to lead men back to God. How shall they that are astray be brought home? If we grow lax, cold, and hard, how shall we be recovered? There are two great motives that can keep men near to God, and keep God’s name in honour in the world. These two are love and fear: the love of God for His mercy, the fear of God for His justice. Either of these may save a man; either may keep a race alive and strong. With the heart we lay-fast hold on God as the Father and the Saviour. God calls Himself our Father; the word includes His act in giving us our being, His providence which keeps, upholds, and blesses us day by day. God, as Creator, Ruler, and Governor, asks of us our love. He reveals Himself as God our Saviour. The symbol of the mighty all-constraining love is, and must ever be, the Cross. So first the Lord draws us by love. There are, however, those in the world on whom these considerations have no effect. In that case there remains one, and but one, other motive to bring them to God; it is the lower motive of fear. Not mere fear of punishment, nor the fear of suffering. It is the fear of irreparable disaster, of everlasting loss. That men cannot face. That is the dread of dreads. But there are those in whom there is no such dread; they do not feel the love of God, they cannot be shaken by the fear of God. What other motive can you name when both these fail? There is no answer. Destroy the belief in the Almighty God as a Creator; with that vanishes the belief in Almighty God as a providence. And when that is done the basis on which love rests is gone also. Destroy the belief in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of the world, and with it vanish

also the sense of sin, gratitude for deliverance from its effects, and the love that has filled the hearts of men as they meditated on the mercy of the Saviour, and the sweetness of the "precious blood of Christ." Thus all ground for loving God is taken away. Cast out the belief in eternal death, in perpetual penalty, in irreparable doom, and fear must vanish. If there is no just God to requite me, whom is there to fear? What will men do when fallen so low? Let us consider. Can love and fear die out of the heart? Never. The love and fear of God can die; but love and fear of something will remain. Toward what shall these direct themselves? When man will no longer love God, he must come to loving himself; and when it comes to loving himself, his main fear is lest, in that self-love, he should be interfered with or balked. What would become of a world which had lost its own love and its fear, which neither loved the Redeemer nor feared the pains of hell? One may be pardoned for doubting whether such a world would be worth saving; and for questioning whether it could be saved. We therefore teach, as most necessary for these times, the love of God and the fear of God. (*Morgan Dix.*) *Encouragement for the erring*.—God comes to His people. His purpose is to refine, purify, and save; and to judge and witness against wrong-doing. God's blessings are given conditionally. Observe—I. THE DUTY. "Return unto Me." 1. The words imply distance from God. The cause is sin. Sin deepens and widens the difference between God and man. Sin put away, God and man are one. 2. Return to a recognition of neglected duty. 3. Return with a fixed purpose in all things to conform to God's will. II. THE PROMISE. "I will return unto you." 1. God's promises are many. 2. God's promises are great. 3. God's promises are precious. 4. God's promises are encouraging. To the weak, afflicted, troubled, unfortunate; yea, to the erring and sinful. III. THE CONFIRMATION. "Saith the Lord." 1. The authority. "The Lord." 2. The confidence it inspires. 3. The action it should prompt. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *The love-hunger in God's heart*.—I. JEHOVAH'S ENTREATY. "Return unto Me." Sin is not only departure from righteousness, but from God. God is man's true sphere. Those who have lived in God may wander from Him. Their sad condition may furnish reasons for their return; but the most powerful is that God entreats them to do so. This should affect them deeply. For it manifests—1. His condescending pity. 2. Forbearing grace. 3. Unchanging love. 4. Willingness to receive them again into His favour. Man's departure from God grieves Him. In order that the wanderer may return he must—(1) Reflect upon his waywardness, its folly and ingratitude. (2) Yield to the Divine drawings which reach him through the Word and Spirit. (3) Discover the cause of his wanderings, and put it away. (4) Turn unto God with contrite confession and earnest prayer. The Divine Word to Him might have justly been "Depart," not "Return." II. JEHOVAH'S PROMISE. "I will return unto you." God delights to fill the consciousness of man with His presence. He reluctantly withdraws Himself from the wanderer. In God's return is all spiritual blessedness. 1. All wanderings are forgiven. 2. The soul is quickened into newness of life. 3. The evil effects of wandering are purged away. 4. The springs of a deep and immortal happiness are opened in the soul. 5. The spirit is conscious of possessing its true and eternal rest. God's return is dependent upon the wanderer's return to Him. He cannot reveal Himself fully to those who depart from His ways. He may warn them, chastise them, and strive with them, but they cannot know what His presence is to the obedient heart. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*) *A fast sermon*.—This text is an exhortation to repentance. I. AN ACCUSATION. "Ye have gone away." They had gone off from God's ordinances, and had not kept them. Law may be broken, either by omitting the good required or doing the evils forbidden. They had long continued in these sins; "from the days of your fathers." II. THE EXHORTATION. "Return," &c. Notice the duty. Repentance toward God is necessary to set the creature right again, and put him in his proper place and posture. III. THE REJOINDER OF THE PEOPLE. "Ye said, wherein shall we return?" It is not a serious question, but a cavil. It suited the stout and stubborn genius of this people, who would not yield to anything that might infer their guilt. The exhortation was lost upon them, as if they needed no repentance or reformation. Doctrine.—That a people who are apparently gone off from the ways of God are not easily brought to a sight and sense of the necessity of returning to Him. This point is true of mankind in general, of nations, and of particular persons. Men set up a false happiness in their carnal estate. There is

something in us which is instead of Christ to us, when our affections take up with present things. The commonness and continuance of sin takes away the odiousness of it. Men many times return feignedly. A people professing repentance in the general, when it cometh to particulars, wince and start. That is but a notion of repentance, not a real exercise of it, when we profess to return to God, and know not wherein we should return. Exhort to two things—(1) Take heed of the shifts wherewith men beguile themselves. (2) Inquire wherein you should return. Find out the provoking sin. To do so you will need much searching and self-communing. Seek for information from God. And carefully observe your own ways. (*T. Manton, D.D.*) *A Divine complaint and a Divine invitation* :—I. A DIVINE COMPLAINT AGAINST SINNERS. Three charges. Apostasy. Dishonesty. Insensibility. II. A DIVINE INVITATION TO SINNERS. An invitation to return—1. To Divine friendship. 2. To honest service. “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse.” If they accede, God promises—(1) To give them good in abundance. (2) To give them good in connection with the produce of the earth. (3) To give them good in the affections of men. Learn—1. A man is a bad man who withholdeth from God His due. 2. A bad man becomes good by surrendering his all to God. 3. The more good a man has in himself, the more good he has from the universe. (*Homilist*). Will a man rob God?—*Robbery of God* :—The ordinance of God has been that men should have certain things, on certain conditions, belonging to them severally, as their own. But there has always been a mighty propensity to break through this great law. We do not at all wonder at the laws in respect to property among men. But here in the text is another kind of robbery, which does sound strangely; of which many may be guilty, and little think of it. “Rob God,”—who could ever think of a thing so monstrous? Yet it can be. In the next words the assertion is made, “Ye have robbed Me.” All here on earth belongs to God. It is in the midst of things belonging to Him that we are conversant, living and acting. If all belongs to God, then comes in the liability to commit robbery against Him. It may be, that there shall be no general habitual sense and acknowledgment of His sovereign claims; no feeling that all does so belong. This is the comprehensive spirit and principle of the wrong toward Him, and will go into many special forms; this state of mind is a general refusal to acknowledge His law. It is taking, as it were, the whole ground at once from God, and assuming a licence for every particular act and kind of robbery. Robbing God is also permitting anything to have stronger power over us than His will. There should be conscientious care to form a right honest judgment of what is due, of what belongs to God. This guilt is incurred by misapplying to other uses what is due to God. A few plain particulars may be specified of what we cannot withhold from God without this guilt. One is, a very considerable proportion of thought concerning Him. Fear, of the deepest, most solemn kind, is due to God. We have, naturally, an awe of power. There are other tributes due, corresponding to what we may call the more attractive and gracious attributes. Will a man refuse the gentler affections—love, gratitude, humble reliance? But we have to look further, at the full breadth of the declared law of God: the comprehensive sum of His commands; a grand scheme of the dictates of the Divine will, placed peremptorily before us, and abiding there as permanently as our view of the purpose of the earth or the starry sky. Each and every precept tells of something we may refuse Him, namely, the obedience; and a temptation stands close by each. Some seem to “rob God” of nearly all. And with so determined a will, that there would seem but to need more precepts for them to extend their injustice. Others think they must render something, but that a partial tribute, and a small one, may suffice. Many appear to think that if they do not rob men, there needs not much care about what is specially and directly due to God. It is not for His own sake that God requires our homage, service, and obedience. It is for our sakes. Thus it will come to be found, that in robbing God, men iniquitously and fatally rob themselves. Name one thing specially as due to God—the duty of promoting the cause of God in the world. If each professed servant of God, and follower of Christ, could be supposed to be asked, “Will you have your individual part set before you?” he must be a bold man, who should instantly, and free from all apprehension, say, “Yes, I am sure of what it will testify.” (*John Foster.*) *Robbery of God* :—It is possible, and the sin has been perpetrated. God says to these Jews, “Ye have robbed Me.” In their case it referred to the withholding of the tithes and offerings for the support of the temple worship. This does not appertain to us; but it is not the only way

in which the sin can be committed. Robbery means taking either by fraud or violence that which belongs to another, and appropriating it to our own use. **I. APPLY THIS CHARGE OF ROBBING GOD TO A LARGE PORTION OF MANKIND, GENERALLY CONSIDERED.** To a pious mind, it is an affecting and melancholy thing to consider what a conspiracy seems ever going on to shut God out of His own world, to deprive Him of His rights in the homage which is due to Him from His creatures. Atheism robs Him of the glory of His existence; Deism, of the glory of His revelation; Paganism, of the glory of His spirituality and perfections; Mohanimedanism, of His exclusive manifestation of Himself through the person and work of His own Son, in regard to the purposes of His grace to our world; Judaism, of the glory of His relationship to His only-begotten and well-beloved Son. So that we see, on a very large scale, God's rational creation continually robbing Him of His glory. If we come from systems to men, we shall see that the same felony is continually going on against Him, as the God of nature, providence, and redemption. Is not man-worship one of the most striking characteristics of the age in which we live? Looking abroad upon society, we see a felony continually going on, in robbing God of His glory, and not giving Him the honour that in all these things is due unto His name. In the sphere of religion, what robbery of God there is in taking from Him His Sabbaths—taking them from religion, and giving them to pleasure and business. Socinianism deprives Him of the glory of the Divinity of His Son. Popery corrupts every thing in religion—raising up a rival to God in the pope, a rival to the Bible in tradition, a rival to the Saviour in priests, a rival to the Cross in the crucifix. **II. APPLY THIS CHARGE OF ROBBING GOD TO PARTICULAR CLASSES.** 1. It lies against the man who is living without personal, decided, spiritual religion, whose heart is not yet converted to God. The man who is living without religion, that man is committing a wholesale robbery upon God. He robs God of himself. He belongs to God. His body does, and he takes it from Him, for sensuality, for vice, or for worldliness. He is robbing God of the soul, with all its faculties. The intellect belongs to God; and yet, though thousands of thoughts are streaming off from that man's mind day after day, none of these go to God. He is robbing God of his will, of his affections, &c. An unconverted man robs God of his time. The same remark may be made as to influence; as to property. It is God's world we live in, His ground we tread upon, His sun that shines upon us, His rain that falls upon us, His creatures that support us, His wool and cotton that clothe us; and we have no right to use any of His creatures but in a way that, while it does us good, shall at the same time glorify God. **III. APPLY THIS SUBJECT TO PROFESSING CHRISTIANS.** Can they stand altogether exempt from the accusation? Ought not their life to be "a whole burnt-offering" to God? A Christian ought to be a partaker of that religion which brings out a holy morality in all the stations, occupations, and circumstances in which he is placed. Are we then living for God or for ourselves? Are there no pulpit robbers of God? None who, instead of seeking God's glory, are seeking their own? From the very nature of the ministerial office, self is the idol that we are in danger of lifting up, if not in the place of God, yet side by side with Him. What duty arising out of this subject shall I prescribe? Restitution. Yield yourselves unto God. (*John Angel James.*) Is it probable? Is it possible? Can he be so disingenuous? What! rob a Father, a Friend, a Benefactor! Can he be so daring? To rob a Being so high and sacred; and whose glory so enhances the offence! Can he be so irrational, so desperate? Yet, says God, "Ye have robbed Me." And the charge falls on those who are to be found in the house of God. Who has not robbed God of property? Our wealth is not our own. We are only stewards. It always looks suspicious when a gentleman's steward becomes very rich, and dies affluent. Substance is entrusted to its occupiers, for certain purposes plainly laid down in the Scripture. Do you discharge those claims? How much do some unjustly expend; in table-luxuries, in costly dress, in magnificent furniture? Who has not robbed God of time? The Sabbath. Our youth-time, so often squandered away in vanity, folly, and vice. All our moments and opportunities are His: and He commands us to redeem the time. Who has not robbed God of the heart? The fear, the confidence, the gratitude, the attachment of the heart, we have transferred from the Creator, God over all, blessed for evermore. And may not the same be said of our talents—whether learning, or the powers of conversation, or the retentiveness of memory, or our influence over others? Let us not affect to deny the charge; but let us repair to the footstool of mercy, and cry, "If Thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity,

O Lord, who shall stand ? ” (*William Jay.*) *Robbers* :—There are many more robbers than the police know about. Men might be surprised to know that a robber, sometimes, is concealed in their own breast. How wicked to rob a man who has done us a kindness ; but how much more so to rob a God who loves us with everlasting love ! As robbers of God, consider—I. **ATHEISTS**. Such imagine there is no Creating-God ; or if there be a God, that nobody can discover anything about Him ; and that there is no God-revealed religion. In a picture gallery in London, I was shown a grand painting of a woman’s face, and asking the name of the artist, my friend replied, “ Though it is a valuable picture, the artist’s name is unknown.” I show you a picture, the frame is made of earth, and the picture is called life. See the carving of Divine genius in the frame, and behold the lines of everlasting love in the picture ! Can you say that no intelligent mind ever conceived and no skilful hand ever formed the leaf, the fruit, the rose of that picture ? Some atheists admit there is a Mind above that which is human, yet they say that the God-mind has no personal sympathy with men. Many people live as if there were no God. Is it not fashionable to do so ? Would you be glad if there were no God ? Think, God’s happiness is to bless you, and yet you rob Him of that joy. II. **DEISTS**. One who thinks there is a supreme God, but will not believe that He revealed Himself in Christ Jesus. Deist, I ask you to behold God through Jesus. Do not rob Jesus of His loving influence, which is meant to bless your own heart. Can you find any other man who ever taught the world a better truth, or one who loved men more than Jesus did ? (*William Birch.*) *Robbing God* :—It is a fearful crime to rob God, and yet it is done every day, and done by His professed friends as well as by His open enemies. God is robbed whenever His requirements are disregarded, whenever His rights are resisted, whenever the demands and interests of His kingdom are neglected. Consider wherein God is robbed by His people. 1. In the matter of affection. “ My son, give Me thy heart.” That is the supreme offering. 2. In the matter of consecration. God will have the whole heart, life, gifts, or none. 3. In the matter of service. God’s claim is absolute upon your time, influence, prayers, efforts, gifts, means, even in their potentiality. 4. In the matter of gratitude. 5. In tithes and offerings. (*J. M. Sherwood.*) *Living by theft* :—This is a kind of theft which is very common. It does not affect the credit of those who are guilty of it. It is practised by all unsaved persons, more or less. Indeed, this is one of the principal means by which Satan keeps Christless persons at their ease. It is most common amongst those of the unsaved who are respectable, moral, and, after their own fashion, religious people. Satan teaches them to live by theft. He gets them to appropriate to themselves promises and hopes which do not belong to them : and by means of this stolen property, he succeeds in keeping them at their ease until he has ruined them for ever. (*A. J. Gordon.*) *Robbing God* :—The story about old Stradivarius, the famous violin-maker, is suggestive. He said that if his hand slackened in its work of making violins he would rob God, and leave a blank instead of good violins. He said that even God would not make Antonio’s violins without Antonio. The truth has a wide application. It may be applied to every life, and to every piece of work that any of us do. One is engaged in a factory, one in a machine-shop, one in an office, one on a farm, one is at school. One man is a physician, another is a lawyer, another a merchant, another a mechanic, another a minister. Whatever our work is, we cannot be faithful to God unless we do it as well as we can. To slur is to do God’s work badly. To neglect is to rob God. *Robbing God* :—We do well to ask ourselves at this time how far the words of God by Malachi apply to our case : “ Ye are cursed with a curse ; for ye have robbed Me.” . . . “ Wherein ? In tithes and offerings.” When we compare the millions upon millions lavished upon vain display, costly feasts, extravagant dress, palatial dwellings, frivolous or debasing amusements, and worse, on gambling, drinking, and unhallowed lusts, with the shabby pittance doled out for the Gospel at home and abroad, and then ask ourselves how this must look in God’s sight, is it any wonder that we are visited with hard times ? “ I tremble for my country (said Thomas Jefferson) when I remember that God is just.” Nine hundred million dollars spent in one year for intoxicating liquors ; five and a half millions for missions (not church-support) at home and abroad—that is, one hundred and sixty-four to one. The nine hundred millions are not only squandered—they would better be cast into the sea than used as they now are to ruin the souls and bodies of men, to destroy families, and to plague the State. (*F. H. Harling.*) *The great robbery* :—

Well, there can be no doubt that man will do some very daring deeds. What magnificent things he is capable of! He may not be much to look at, he may not fill a large space in the landscape; but out of his heart and soul what deeds of heroism may come! what feats of daring!—achievements that thrill the whole world and move the heart of heaven! It is a precious heritage that we have in human biography. Man, however, does not always employ his daring soul in the right way. What is the most daring thing ever done? Why, surely it is here—in that a man will rob God. And it is not true courage that leads him to do that; it is foolhardiness, with emphasis on the first syllable of the word. It is the coward who robs God, for he knows not what he is doing. But let us look at the question in a larger sense, and see how we may be guilty of this terrible crime. All robbery of God proceeds from our failure to acknowledge the one great fact of God's sovereignty. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." "It is He that hath made us: we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture." In theory we acknowledge all this; but how about its practical bearing on our everyday life? Have we a reverent and beautiful sense of God's ownership, leading to the hallowing of all our thoughts, deeds, and possessions? Do we ever talk about having money of our own, forgetting that every mite of it is God's? We even go so far as to say that we "will be master in our own house," forgetting that the house is not ours, and that "One is our Master, even Christ." What we need, then, nowadays is a clearer sense of God's sovereignty. We shall not tread so haughtily and bear ourselves so proudly, we shall not be so careless and irreverent in our lives, when we realise vividly the authority and presence of the Lord of all. What a terrible charge the psalmist brings against certain people!—"God is not in all their thoughts." Unless we are to rob God of His right, He must be in all our thoughts, the great moral Force in all our work and duty, keeping us in fine integrity and honour. In pleasure He must be "the spring of all our joys, the life of our delights," and then we shall take no harm whatever pleasure we engage in. And in sorrow He must be our first and only thought; then "grief and fear and care shall fly as clouds before the midday sun." Will a man rob God? Yes, unless he have the fear of God continually before him. "The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes." That is the message of every transgression ever committed. If men had the fear of God before their eyes they would never sin against Him. An article in one of the papers a while ago spoke of "the degeneracy of wills." In the olden time a man began his will thus: "In the name of God, Amen." But now we begin abruptly: "This is the last will and testament." It is not simply that we are short of time, and cannot afford the roundabout phrases of a bygone day; it is that we have not the sense of reverence in the measure that we ought to have it—we do not live with the holy dread and mighty awe of the great old saints. Will a man rob God? Yes, if he withhold his love, gratitude, and obedience from Him. These great affections of the heart were bestowed upon us that they might be given to some worthy object. Are they just to be spent upon a few inferior objects around us, and to be denied to One in whom is all perfect excellence, goodness, and beauty? Does not the love of God to us call loudly for our love in return? Does not all the mercy of the past lay irresistible claim to our fervent gratitude? Does not every precept of God's law require our obedience? If we do not give it, shall we not be robbing with the basest, boldest robbery Him to whom our more than all is due? The man who robs God steals from himself. God needs nothing of ours to make Him any richer; it is simply for our own sakes that He makes the great demand. Give your little all, and the return shall be in full measure, pressed down, and running over. Withhold, and you stand to gain nothing and to lose all. (*W. A. L. Taylor, B.A.*)

Ver. 10. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse.—*God's storehouse*:—The contents of this book show that, in the time of Malachi, religion was in a very low condition. The people robbed God by keeping back the tithes and offerings, and the priests polluted God's altar. They offered to God what they dared not to have offered to a human governor, and what a human governor would not have accepted at their hands. And yet they seemed unconscious of the evil of their conduct. Sin so blinds the eyes and blunts the conscience that men often do wrong, and scarcely know that they are doing it. But sin brings its own punishment. God blighted their fields and blemished their flocks, so that the

land groaned beneath the curse. And the only way to remove the evil was to turn from the evil of their ways. I. THE ORIGIN AND MEANING OF TITHES. It was the tenth part of the produce of the soil, and the increase of the flock, or the income of the individual. It was not simply a Mosaic institution. See Jacob's vow at Bethel. Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek. God seems to have instituted this claim, to be a constant acknowledgment on our part of our dependence upon Him for all that we possess. God claims an absolute ownership of the soil and all its produce, and He claimed this constant acknowledgment of His ownership at the hands of men. Tithes were used at first to maintain the ordinances of religion, and to supply the wants of the poor, the fatherless, and the widow, who have ever been the objects of God's care. In addition to these tithes, there were also freewill offerings. Many, of their own free will, gave far beyond the minimum stipulated. Perhaps it was never intended, even under the Jewish economy, that the tithe should be exacted by force. It is evident that it was often withholden. The tithe is certainly not to be exacted by law under the present economy. Yet surely less cannot be expected of us than of the Jews. The earth is still the Lord's, and He demands the same acknowledgment from us that He did from them. It is God that sends sunshine and shower, and causes the seed to germinate and spring up. Is God amply repaid, as the owner of the land, and for His toil, when you give Him the tenth, and that, perhaps, grudgingly? But it is not simply your substance, but yourself, also, that belongs to God. You are not your own. Then surely there ought to be an acknowledgment of His ownership. Have you even tithed yourself for God? Where is the storehouse into which these tithes are to be brought? Where is God's storehouse? The storehouse is just where the tithes are needed. You need to tithe your time and thought for the culture of your own heart and life, if they are to be as a well-kept garden, beautiful unto God. You need to tithe your time for the good of your family, if your house is to be well ordered, and your children trained up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. You need to tithe your time, and thought, and affection, to meet the claims of society—the ignorant and degraded around you loudly call for help. The storehouse for your substance may be found in the homes of the widow, and the orphan, and the poor, and the destitute. II. THE BLESSING HERE PROMISED. Opening the windows has, no doubt, reference to sunshine and showers, which produce the harvest. But every good gift is from above, and, therefore, this expression may symbolise the way in which every blessing is bestowed upon us. How easy it would be for God thus to pour down His blessing upon us till there be not room enough to receive it. This is true of temporal blessing. It is equally true in relation to the spiritual blessing. If we were to comply with the conditions God has here named, how easy it would be for Him to fill this house. This is especially true in relation to personal blessing. In Him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. You see then the way in which God's blessing can be obtained. You shut heaven or you open it, by the attitude you assume in relation to God. He will ultimately be to you what you persist in being to Him. You may, too, in many ways, prevent or procure blessings for others. (*A. Clark.*) *Bringing in the tithes*.—1. It is objected, that we are not Jews, and that the command is, therefore, obsolete. But the occasion of tithing, like that of the Lord's day, is found in permanent, unchanging facts, the glory of God and the needs of man. The occasion for tithing is even more urgent to-day than of old, as the work of religion is to be extended throughout the globe. 2. It is objected, that this law of tithing, like the laws concerning sacrifice and circumcision, has been repealed. But this is not true. There is not a syllable in the New Testament which, either directly or indirectly, repeals the law of the tithe. 3. It is objected, that every man is to give "as he purposeth in his heart, and as the Lord hath prospered him," and this is a virtual repeal of the tithe. On the contrary, it really confirms the principle of tithing. We are to give by "purpose"; that is, deliberately, systematically—not according to whim or accident. 4. It may be said, "I am not limited to a tenth, but, like Zaccheus, I may give half, or, like the apostles, all." So much the better. There is no objection to the rule. "Thank-offerings were always commended." 5. The worst objection is, "I cannot afford it." There is the real obstacle—selfishness. But "I want to save for old age." Yes, and for eternity, too. Do not save for your children by robbing God. What shall it profit a man if he gain the tithes, and lose his soul? (*M. V. Crouse.*) *Prove Me now herewith.*—God put to the proof:—Far higher than the heavens are above the earth is our God above men;

and yet He speaks to men, not merely after the manner of men, so far as that manner is good, but often with a tenderness, a gentleness, and a freedom of which many men are utterly incapable. Here, to assist Nehemiah in the restoration of the worship of God, Malachi is directed to say to the people, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse . . . and prove Me now herewith," &c. The consecration of a tenth of the produce of property and of toil is of earlier date than the establishment of the Mosaic economy. The custom was adopted by Divine direction in the Levitical dispensation, and was enforced by Divine commandments. God here complains of neglect with respect to this said ordinance, which indicated a careless, undevout, and irreligious spirit among the people; and on account of this, God had withheld His blessing and smitten Israel with a curse. God's requirements are, in principle and spirit, very similar in all ages, and the omissions, and defects, and faults of the people of God are, in times even far distant from each other, not unlike. 1. God has ever connected the enjoyment and use of certain blessings with the observance of His ordinances, and with obedience to His requirements. We may trace the connection of obedience with our salvation. The obedience of the children of Israel had nothing whatever to do with their election. In like manner our obedience has nothing whatever to do with the provision made for our redemption. I am born again, not because I have obeyed, but that I may obey. I am pardoned and justified, not because I have obeyed, but that I may be in a position to be trained for obedience. What has the obedience of a child to do with his relation to his father? This obedience does not earn or procure, or in any sense purchase and obtain our salvation, but it is the working out of that salvation, so far as our experience and our inward consciousness and enjoyment of that salvation are concerned. Let us therefore distinctly understand this at starting. But look further, and look at certain institutions and ordinances. Just as there is a close connection between the enjoyment of pardon,—the deliverance of our souls from the dominion of sin, and the confession of our sins to God, so there is a close connection between peace of mind, freedom from care, and obedience evidenced in earnest, importunate, and continued supplication. 2. Although God has thus connected blessedness with obedience, and with the observance of His ordinances, the people of God have often neglected them—neglected institutions founded for their benefit, and neglected Divine precepts and prohibitions: and this neglect is traceable to various sources. Sometimes neglect arises from ignorance. How can a man know the mind of God concerning him, who does not search his Bible? But a man may read the Bible, and still be ignorant. Hearing you may not understand, and seeking you may not find. Neglect arises from thoughtlessness and carelessness, and from indolence. 3. Such neglect often brings spiritual adversity, and sometimes exposes to sore affliction. If we have not all the spiritual blessings which God has promised, why are they not in our possession? The connection which God has ordained between obedience and blessedness cannot be severed. Our spiritual adversity, therefore, cannot be traceable to God. The cause can only be in ourselves; and it will be often found in some neglect,—not in the commission of something wrong, but in the omission of duties that we Christians think lightly of. We have restrained prayer, therefore our anxiety and our unrest. We have not acknowledged our sins, therefore our sense of guilt and our fear. We have neglected the Scriptures, or forsaken the assembling of ourselves together. 4. Our awaking to the knowledge that we have not all that God has promised, should be immediately followed by searchings of heart. Here again the cause must be in ourselves. 5. Now say that neglect is discovered, it should be instantly followed by supplying the omission. Prove me—my love, my hand, my faithfulness. All these omissions, by God's grace, and the grace of the Spirit, may be supplied. (*Samuel Martin.*) *Heaven's windows*:—Belief in a heaven has been universal. Material good descends from the material heaven. The visible heavens are the type of the spiritual. I. WINDOWS ARE FOR LIGHT. Heaven is filled with unsullied light. Its light falls upon the earth. It ever gleams upon men in their benighted wanderings. II. WINDOWS ARE FOR HEALTH. The atmosphere of heaven is pure. The inhabitants never say, "I am sick." Man's moral health on earth is from the heavenly influences that descend upon him. III. WINDOWS ARE FOR THE INTERCHANGE OF SENTIMENT, OBSERVATION, AND THE GLANCES OF AFFECTION. The inhabitants of heaven are interested in men. Men are penitent, angels rejoice. Men look up to God, and He regards them from His lofty dwelling-place. He manifests His love to their hearts. IV. WINDOWS ARE FOR THE EXCLUSION OF NOXIOUS

VAPOURS AND REPTILES. Earth's evils cannot enter heaven. Men may enter, but not their sins. Whatever may defile other worlds in God's universe, nothing can defile this one. V. WINDOWS ARE FOR BEAUTY. Whether of glass or of lattice-work, they ornament earth's palaces and temples. Heaven is full of beauty. The incomplete descriptions that are given sometimes ravish us. (*W. Osborne Lilley.*) *An overflowing blessing* :—Not room enough in our hearts! They are limitless in their sense of need. 1. Sense of poverty. God's title-deed expresses limitless ownership. 2. Sense of bereavement. God fills this with assurance of immortal reunions. 3. Sense of ignorance. God promises the Spirit to "lead you into all truth." 4. Sense of sin. "If sin abound, grace doth much more abound." 5. Sense of uselessness in purpose. Life's energies drained into self, as the Jordan into the Dead Sea, instead of the desires flowing out to bless mankind. 6. Sense of little service with the best intentions. God makes a Christian useful beyond his ability, his planning, and his knowledge. (*Homiletic Monthly.*) *Giving as an expression of gratitude* :—I was once staying with a woman whose husband was sick and out of employment when she received a letter from C. H. Spurgeon containing a five-pound note and these few cheery words, "A little something just to keep the pot boiling." I changed the note for her into gold, and taking one half-sovereign up, she said, "This must go into the green purse," and straightway produced from an underneath pocket, a faded green purse into which the small yellow coin was dropped. I asked her why she separated her money in that way, and she answered, "This is God's purse, we always put aside a tenth." "But," said I, "God does not require this from you in your present circumstances." "No," was her answer, and a beautiful light came upon her face, "He may not, but it is our joy to do it. See how good He has been! I never asked Mr. Spurgeon to help us, nor did I even tell him that we were in a corner. It would be selfish to spend all this on ourselves; where would be our gratitude if we did?" (*Charlotte Skinner.*) *Blessing comes by giving* :—In the olden days, when spring-time came, the Grand Duke of Venice, with attendant nobles and innumerable priests, used to go to the last point of land, and there, standing on the shores of the Adriatic, throw a gold jewelled ring into the ocean. It was called "Marrying Venice to the Sea." In the same days when the Nile was at its height, the dam was broken connecting the river with the canals, and as the water rushed into its new channels, a living woman was thrown into the mad stream to become the bride of the Nile. In each ceremony there was the idea that blessing came by giving; the ring made Venice the queen of the seas—the woman brought fertility to a whole nation. (*Ibid.*) *Proportionate giving* :—When Mr. Marshall the publisher was a young man of eighteen, he heard a sermon by the late Rev. Baldwin Brown, which dealt chiefly with the stewardship of wealth. He left the church determined that henceforth whatever money he had got, whether it was much or little, he would always put aside one-tenth for the Lord before he devoted any of it to his own use. This he continued to do for some years. After a time he found himself giving away more money than many of his friends who had much greater incomes. Some of them expostulated with him, and, as his wont was, he took the question to the Lord in prayer. "Here," said he, "I have given away, believing it to be my duty, for purposes which I regard as yours, one-tenth of my income. Am I doing what is right? Will you give me a sign?" In the year 1852 he devised the first illustrated programme for a public funeral that had ever appeared in London—that of the Duke of Wellington. Now he prayed to God: "I am publishing this programme; it may succeed, it may fail. May I ask that, in connection with the publication of this programme, you will give me a sign that will give me clearly to understand whether I am to go on giving, to curtail my subscriptions, or what I shall do?" Well, it turned out that the programme was a great success. And then comes the most remarkable thing. When the balance-sheet came to be made up for that programme, Mr. Marshall found to his astonishment that the net profits that he had realised amounted, to the very penny, to the sum which he had given away since his eighteenth year! When he compared the figures, and found that they exactly corresponded, he felt that his prayer had been answered; and, as he put it in his own quaint way, "I saw that the Lord was determined never to be in debt with me, so I went ahead." Afterwards, as his wealth multiplied, he increased the proportion. *Proportionate giving* :—1. That faithful and proportionate giving will be rewarded with superabundant spiritual blessing. The statement does not require proof, since experience has stamped it already as an axiom. Other things being equal,

that Christian who opens the broadest outlet for charity will find the widest inlet for the Spirit. The health of a human body depends upon its exhalations as well as upon its inhalations. It is reported that a boy who was to personate a shining cherub in a play, on being covered over with a coating of gold-leaf, which entirely closed the pores of the skin, died in consequence, before relief could be afforded. Woe to the Christian who gets so gold-leafed over with his wealth, that the pores of his sympathy are shut, and the outgoings of his charity restrained ! He is thenceforth dead spiritually, though he may have a name to live. 2. That faithful and proportionate giving will be rewarded with abundant temporal prosperity. "Honour the Lord with thy substance and with the first-fruits of all thine increase : so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine" (Prov. iii. 9, 10). This is but one specimen of many from the Old Testament. "Give, and it shall be given unto you ; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom" (Luke vi. 38). Let us now throw light upon this subject from a few inserted leaves from a pastor's notebook. One says, "I knew a widow of limited means who was remarkable for her liberality to benevolent objects. But a sad change came into her by an unexpected legacy which made her wealthy, and then her contributions began to fall below the amount of her straitened finances. Once she volunteered : now she only gives when importuned, and then it is as meagre as if the fountains of gratitude had dried up. Once when asked by her pastor to help a cause dear to her heart in her comparative poverty, and to which she gave five dollars then, now she proffers twenty-five cents. Her pastor called her attention to the surprising and ominous change. 'Ah,' she said, 'when day by day I looked to God for my bread, I had enough to spare ; now I have to look to my ample income, and I am all the time haunted with the fear of losing it, and coming to want. I had the guinea heart when I had the shilling means, now I have the guinea means and the shilling heart.' It is a fearful risk to heart and soul to become suddenly rich. This is one of the reasons why God lets many of His best children acquire wealth so slowly, so that it may not be a snare to them, may not chill their benevolence ; that when wealth comes, the fever of ambitious grasping may be cooled, and that benevolence may overtake avarice." Now the only way to avoid this peril is to cultivate two habits, and let them grow side by side,—the habit of economy and the habit of charity. If one's economy grows steadily and alone, it will tend to dry up his charity ; if one's charity grows steadily, it will dry up his means, unless balanced by the other virtue of economy. Therefore, let both grow together, then our giving will increase just in proportion to our getting. (*J. A. Gordon, D.D.*) *Money and the blessing* :—We have brought the gifts into the storehouse ; now look out for the opening of the heavens. The first blessing that will come will be one of prayer. The spirit of prayer poured out will be continuous. Prayer is the chalice in which we fetch the water from the rock. It is the ladder on which we climb up to pick the grapes hanging over the wall of heaven. It is the fire that warms the frigid soul. Prayer is the lever. The Divine promise is the fulcrum. Earnest prayer is always answered. Another blessing will be a spirit of work. Not a Christian here but will be anxious about somebody else. The Church was never in such a fair way for a blessing as now. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *Prove Me now* :—1. With regard to the pardon of our sin for Christ's sake. 2. With regard to the purifying influence of the Gospel. 3. With regard to our guidance in the investigation of religious truth. 4. With regard to the supply of our temporal wants. 5. With regard to the happiness of personal religion. 6. With regard to answers to prayer. (*G. Brooks.*) *Conditional blessing* :—The Hon. C. Rhodes, in a recent meeting, told his audience that the extension of British power in Africa had been the one object of his life for years. For this he had lived and laboured. To him would come the purpose of his life, if in South Africa he might see the British flag waving over a free and united empire. A noble ambition, truly, for a patriotic heart, and worthy of the great efforts made for its accomplishment. The prophet Malachi was engaged in a nobler mission still. Far more worthy, in conception and results, was the work of winning an apostate nation back to God. It was no easy task. The work of the reformer never is. Divine love and courage made Malachi a patriotic saint, and led him boldly to attack the evils of the sinful nation in which he lived. It is to one of his most courageous messages that we would direct attention. I. THE GRAVE ACCUSATION MADE BY GOD AGAINST THIS PEOPLE—"Will a man rob God ? Yet ye have robbed Me." This accusation was a startling one. Whoever would

have thought that men would rob God? They might rob their fellows, but surely they would never rob the Lord. As Malachi uttered these words they made a great sensation. I imagine all Jerusalem was in an uproar over his utterance. The merchants forgot their merchandise as they discussed it in the bazaars. Priests gathered with scribes in solemn council, and agreed that the man who had made such a statement was mad. Yet this message was absolutely true. They were committing the awful sin of robbing God: and when the excitement and anger had died down they were forced to admit its truth. Men are robbing God in like manner to-day. God says, "Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price," and yet they withhold themselves from Him. Is not that robbery? The Holy Ghost speaks, "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?" Yet instead of permitting Him to dwell there, its rooms are filled with sinful guests. Is not that robbery also? You say these are strong, stout words. True! but God's messages are never vague or uncertain. Great evils demand powerful remedies. Hence God calls robbery, robbery, and sin, sin. He puts His finger upon the plague spot, and says, "That is where you are wrong." The cupboard of your life may be shut to others, and looks like some fair adornment on the wall. He knows the secret spring, and reveals the skeleton of thy sin which lies hidden within. "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me." II. THE SAD RESULT OF SUCH A SINFUL COURSE—"Ye are cursed with a curse," &c. In the south of Scotland there stands the ruin of a famous abbey. Its broken columns and arched windows, its trellised doorways and roofless aisles, its damp chapels and deserted altar, all speak sadly of a former glory and a departed greatness. The curse of man has fallen upon it. Methinks, that as Malachi looked upon the life of his countrymen he saw only a ruin which shadowed forth its former beauty and greatness. Decay was stamped upon it. Its worship had become an abomination. "Ye offer," said Jehovah, "polluted bread upon Mine altar." "The table of the Lord is contemptible" (chap. i. 7). God's covenant was despised (i. 6). Justice and judgment were perverted. The sorcerer, the adulterer, the false-swearer, and the oppressor fattened upon the woes of others (iii. 5). Israel was a moral ruin and a spiritual desolation. She was despised by men and cursed by God. It is an awful thing to fall beneath God's curse; and yet every soul which robs God has that curse upon him. History tells us that wherever the axe of Richard the Lion-hearted swung, the stoutest mail was splintered like matchwood, and the bravest men went down. God is a "man of war": the "Lord of Hosts" is His name. "He taketh up the isles as a very little thing." His strong arm can make the choicest defences a ruined heap. He shall utterly destroy His foes. Men shall look for them, and they shall not be found. Hast thou wondered why thy soul hath not prospered? Is God's curse resting upon thee? How can it prosper when it is robbing God? III. THE JUST DEMAND WHICH GOD MAKES—"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house." In the preceding verse you will notice that God complains of robbery from two sources, *i.e.*, tithes and offerings. The tithing God requires: the offerings were freewill gifts over and above the tithes. Hence in this demand God speaks of tithes only. Under the Jewish economy everything connected with life and worship was built up upon one great principle, *i.e.*, ownership by God. Whilst they remained true it never failed. The land was His, and so its first-fruits, whether of corn, fruit, or cattle, had to be redeemed by an offering to Him. The first-born of children were His, and they, too, had to be redeemed. The same principle ran through their worship. Whenever they appeared before Him they brought an offering. If they were too poor to give a bullock, they gave a lamb; if too poor for this, they brought pigeons or turtle doves. If to the tithes there are added these offerings, then a very modest calculation shows that every pious Jew must have given about one-seventh of his entire income to the Lord. It was only when their spiritual life grew dim that these offerings and tithings ceased. But, says some one, "God does not demand such things to-day; we are not under law, but under grace." True; but as Christ is better than Moses, and grace is laden with richer blessings than the law, our generosity ought to flow out in yet larger abundance; for the greater the blessing the greater the gratitude, and the greater the gratitude the greater the gifts. However much conditions change, principles remain. Tithes meant at least three things. 1. They meant money. The produce of the field was the Jews' money. It might be corn, fruit, oxen, sheep, or *אשרה*; but it was in these that his wealth consisted, and of these

he gave his tenth to the Lord. To-day the coin of the realm is the medium of circulating wealth, but the principle of devoting some portion of it to the Lord is the same. 2. Tithes meant time. If the produce represented money, the cultivation of it represented time. The ploughing, harrowing, sowing, &c., which the successful farmer had to do, made great demands upon his time. If you would bring all the tithes, your time will not be exempted. Let me put this truth in another form. Suppose it took five minutes to pay a visit to a home. Then if fifty Christians gave this one-tenth of time per day to visitation, they could pay no less than 900 visits daily. 3. Tithes meant talent. The man who would succeed in cultivation must use his talents in mastering and applying the principles of agriculture. God asks the produce and the time, but He demands the talents also. Have you the talent of speech? God wants it. Of song? He requires it. Of organisation? He asks it. Of literary ability? He will use it. Of humbler working power? He seeks it, and if you withhold it you are robbing God. "Bring ye all the tithes"—not one, but all. IV. THE ABUNDANT BLESSING WHICH GOD PROMISES TO THOSE WHO OBEY HIM—"A blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it." The figure is that of a great flood. Just as the banks of a river are unable to hold the waters in flood-time, so will God bless the person who obeys Him. He will fill to overflowing such an one with Divine gifts. The seraphic Fletcher had to cry out, "Lord, stay Thy hand." This blessing means—1. Prosperity. "And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts" (iii. 11). 2. Honour. "And all nations shall call you blessed" (iii. 12). 3. Happiness. "And ye shall be a delightful land, saith the Lord of hosts" (iii. 12). How attractive would such a people be. To such would men cry, "We will go with you, for God is with you." Too long has God's Israel been satisfied with leanness, barrenness, dearth, and death. Worldliness, rationalism, and formalism are eating out her life. As it is with the Church, so it is with every individual. The Church's life is the exact counterpart of the individuals who compose it. Recently I heard it stated that means were being invented to stop the rain from falling in certain districts. Whether such a thing is possible I cannot say. But this I know, that unless you bring all the tithes into the storehouse you will shut up God's heaven of blessing, and there will be famine in your soul. God wants to bless. (*F. Inwood.*) *Tithes brought into the storehouse*:—In this part of the Divine Word we have first a duty prescribed, and secondly a promise containing high encouragement to its performance. The prescription of duty is expressed in these words, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts," and the promise follows, "if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." God's ancient people had, in the days of Malachi, greatly failed in doing this duty, and here God charges them with robbery of no ordinary kind. Tithes were only a part of the contributions of their worldly substance which the Israelites were required to devote to the service of God; and as a leading part, they seem to be employed in the text as a part for the whole. There was very much required of them besides the tithes. They were to bring the first fruits, the male firstlings of all clean beasts, and the redemption price of such as were unclean. It does not appear, however, that coercive measures were employed to enforce the furnishing of the various kinds of offerings, except by exclusion from participating in spiritual privileges, which in many cases followed as a necessary consequence of failure in this duty. The kings and rulers in Israel are not reproved for not employing power and authority to enforce the payment of tithes or other offerings. This seems to have been left between God and the consciences of individuals. I. Let us advert to the LAW OF PROPORTION IN THIS MATTER. Here it may be remarked—1. That our offerings should bear a proportion to our resources. This was the law under the Old Testament, and it is so under the New. Hence the apostolic injunction, "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him" (1 Cor. xvi. 2). This truth is also taught in these words—"If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not" (2 Cor. viii. 12). 2. Remark that our offerings are to bear a proportion to the exigencies of the public cause of God. These are different at different times. When the tabernacle was constructed in the wilderness, which by God's special appoint-

ment was to be formed in many of its parts of costly materials, a very large demand was made on the resources of the Israelites, which was met by an unwonted measure of liberality, even till there was more than sufficient for the work. 3. There is also to be a proportion between what is contributed to the treasury of the Lord and expended on other objects. It is in this respect that there is a very general failure in this duty. God had to complain of His ancient people, by the prophet Haggai, that they dwelt in their ceiled houses while His house lay waste. And perhaps there is nothing in which true Christians fail more than in the disproportion between what they give freely for other objects—not always necessary objects—and what they devote to God as His portion, and for the promotion of His cause. 4. There is to be a proportion of its kind between the offering and the glory and claims of that God to whom it is presented. II. OF THE SPIRIT IN WHICH OFFERINGS SHOULD BE PRESENTED TO THE LORD. 1. This will manifest itself in giving God the first share of our worldly increase. This is no doubt one thing taught in the prescription of the first fruits. This is expressly taught in these words, “Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase” (Prov. iii. 9). 2. It is to be rendered willingly (2 Cor. ix. 7). 3. We are to esteem it an honour and a privilege to be called and enabled to make offerings of our temporal substance to the Lord. David felt deeply how great an honour and privilege it was to have the heart and the ability to perform this duty, when he and his people contributed liberally to the building of the Temple (1 Chron. xxix. 13, 14). 4. This should be rendered as an expression, though small, very small, of our gratitude to God (2 Cor. viii. 9). What blessedness would they have in the performance of this duty; first, in the purposes of their heart regarding it, and then in fulfilling them, having fellowship with God in all. Though the immediate and special subject of the text plainly is literal tithes and other external offerings, these offerings, however costly, behoved to be accompanied with such offerings as are spiritual, in order to acceptance with God. Without the spiritual the literal could not be offered in a right spirit. This kind of tithes must also be brought into the storehouse. Here there are the offerings of prayer and of praise, of Bible reading and spiritual meditation; the offerings of worship to God in the closet, in the family, and in the public assembly, as well as those of Sabbath sanctification, self-examination, and fasting; the observance of the Lord’s Supper, and personal and social vowing. From this subject learn—1. One thing which has a special influence in drawing down an abundant temporal blessing on individuals and a people is a due rendering of literal offerings to the promotion of the cause of God. 2. One thing which has special influence in drawing down the curse of God on the worldly interests of individuals or a people is the withholding of a due measure of literal offerings from God. (*Original Secession Magazine*.) *Systematic giving*:—I. The first proposition that lies at the basis of this challenge is: THERE IS A CLOSE CONNECTION BETWEEN RELIGION AND PROSPERITY. I do not mean spiritual prosperity, but prosperity in the material things of life. There is a close and intimate relationship between the righteousness which is enjoined upon us of the Lord and the prosperity which is promised to follow. The Old Testament makes no secret about it; it does not mince matters. Irrespective of all appeals to motives of selfishness, and the fact that it lays itself open to reproach from critical and cynical people, it boldly and plainly declares that if the children of Israel will be obedient to the covenant and keep the commands God has enjoined upon them, they shall be rewarded in return with plenty, with prosperity, with an abundance of happiness and peace. All the history of all the nations of the earth confirms that declaration, at any rate from national standpoints. The nations that rise to pre-eminence rise in virtue of their righteousness. No nation has ever fallen through external forces. It has first of all been honeycombed and undermined with inward deterioration, and then when the first breath came from without, it was sufficient to bring about its overthrow and ruin. And England will never fall if England is true to the tradition of godliness and of honour. When it comes to personal matters, the same principle must apply. But immediately difficulties appear. We recall at once the Book of Job. We remember the 37th Psalm. These have their explanation in the Providence of God. But notwithstanding these, the general rule holds good that religion tends to prosperity. I remember when the only son of a distinguished mayor of one of the largest cities in the North of England got converted. His father was not troubled with too much seriousness in matters of religion. He was one of the keenest of business men,

and one of the most level-headed fellows in the country. He shook hands with me as I sat in the private room, and said: "Mr. Chadwick, what has happened to my lad to-night is worth more than you think. I would have given £100,000 for it." I thought he was not serious until I looked up and saw the tears in his eyes. He repeated it. "The commercial value to the lad is worth more than £100,000," he said. I found out he was not far wrong. I have met with more than one father who would have given more than £100,000 if he could have guaranteed his son's conversion, and it would have been cheap at the price. Godliness is profitable to the life that now is, as well as to that which is to come. I am not going to contend that every man who becomes a Christian will become a millionaire; I am not convinced that being a millionaire is a sure indication of prosperity. Barney Barnato was a millionaire, and at last he jumped into the sea to cool his brain! If a man to make millions sacrifices his soul his millions are bought at too big a price. Neither am I going to contend that all Christian men will be equally prosperous. If a man is born with only ninepence to the shilling, that is threepence short. Christ can never make up the threepence short, and he will always be short, converted or not converted. My contention is that God can do more with ninepence than the devil can do with half a crown; and that there is nothing in this world so calculated to make the best of a man as the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ, intelligently grasped and enthusiastically lived. Of course, you will ask me, what about the good men who do not get on? Well, there are lots of them, and they are problems. But I have never known a good man fail to get on because of his religion. A great many people go on the assumption that religion can enable them to dispense with the common principles of success. That can never be. If a man brings cattle to the market when the fair is over he will not succeed, and he must blame himself that he did not get up sooner in the morning. His religion should be manifested by promptitude, and not by pious expressions. Religion never makes up for laziness. Religion never makes up for bad workmanship and lack of punctuality. I would not give much for the religion which does not make a man a better worker and a more punctual workman. It is not brain that is wanted, but things coupled with character. That which commands the highest price in the market to-day is efficiency and trustworthiness. It is the greatest insult to this generation to say it is impossible for a man to maintain his integrity and get on. He may not get on very fast, but he will have a peaceful life and be prosperous if there is a God in heaven and truth in the Book. II. THERE IS A CLOSE CONNECTION BETWEEN WHAT A MAN GIVES AND WHAT HE GETS. Some men will never lose less until they give more. God calls for the whole tithe, not for a tithe. I believe people who give much lose much of the blessing of it, because they give contrary to the principles laid down in the Bible. They often give as the result of impulse or rivalry and competition. God has never let go His right to the things material. Everything a man gets God snips a bit out of it, to remind the man that he did not get it by his own skill and wit. God gave it to him, and man is not the proprietor but the steward. And the principle laid down is this—that a man has got to settle between himself and his God what the proportion ought to be which he should give to God. I think a tithe is a generous maximum for the poor and a mean minimum for the rich. Unless a man cultivates a habit of systematic giving when he has not much to give, he will give little when he is rich. (*S. Chadwick.*)

Ver. 12. *Ye shall be a delightful land, saith the Lord of hosts.—The delightful land* :—It is not necessary to inquire minutely into the original application of these words. Enough that Christianity belongs to countries as well as individuals; and that the Church acts mightily upon every land to make it delightful. It is more pertinent to observe that the promise follows a description of the efficacy of prayer, and includes the full blessing which God can pour out upon any people. What then are some of the heavenly and spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus necessary to make this land of ours delightful in the eyes of the Lord of hosts? I. A LAND IS DELIGHTFUL THAT IS PURELY AND ADEQUATELY SUPPLIED WITH CHRIST'S GOSPEL. It is a delightful land to the tourist, if the scenery be fine and the air pure; to the economist, if trade and commerce flourish, and social arrangements tend to the accumulation of capital; to the worldly philanthropist, where employment is good, pauperism low, laws reasonably fair and equal, and the refinements of civilisation widely spread over the surface of the people. To the disciple of Jesus Christ a different standard everywhere

presents itself. The spiritual aspect of every community first engrosses his attention and sympathies. To him the radical want is the Gospel—the Gospel with its humbling discoveries of man's fallen and lost estate by nature, and with its blessed proclamation of recovery by Christ. Without this there is no pardon for the people's sins, no comfort for their sorrows, no return to the image of God, or meetness for death, judgment, and eternity. A delightful land we shall not be till the famine of the Word of God has everywhere come to an end—till not only in city and town and hamlet, all that have ears to hear may hear, but may rest assured of hearing the same glad tidings of great joy. II. THAT RIGHTLY PRIZES CHRIST'S ORDINANCES. While it is certainly true that in proportion to the multiplication of Gospel agencies spiritual blessing follows as a general rule, it by no means follows to the degree that ought to have been witnessed. There is sad neglect of the great salvation, neglect which only the Spirit of God can overcome—neglect which expresses and registers itself by man's treatment of the ordinances of salvation. Who can follow the outwardly devout to their dwellings, and record what proportion refuse to honour God there? Who can pursue them to their closets, and see how many or how few walk with God and live in the presence of Christ? III. THAT MULTIPLIES EXAMPLES OF CHRIST'S CONVERTING GRACE. Take away conversion and you take away Christianity. The two watchwords of evangelical religion are—the atonement and the new birth. With regard to the mode of conversion, it is confessedly various. The time may come, which some anticipate, when conversion shall be generally noiseless and gradual, effected in the early dawn of life, as the result of pious training, when the Spirit of God shall copiously descend as morning dew, and leave a blessing for all the coming day. But to some conversion must come as a wave of the sea, with a shock and an agitation. There must be a struggle between the old and the new—between self and Christ. The soul in such a conflict may be expected to be shaken to its centre, with fear, and shame, and sadness, ere faith come to its relief, and love toward the Crucified One gain the victory. The conversions which are going on within the circle of Christian influence make up the true history of the world. They are the events which are noted in the register of God, where the ordinary incidents of human history have no place. It is not the first birth of any man that glorifies God or satisfies Christ. Without the second it is an abortion and a catastrophe. IV. THAT MAINTAINS A HIGH AND GENERAL STANDARD OF CONFORMITY TO THE IMAGE OF CHRIST. Conversion is nothing save as a step to sanctification. And sanctification is resemblance to Christ. The ultimate design of Christ's mission was to multiply Himself; to stamp Himself upon the minds, the hearts, and the lives of men! Such a conformity is indeed defective in every case: still, under the training of the Spirit, forms of moral loveliness have appeared, and are appearing, which differ radically from those which the world saw before Christ, or which it is capable of producing where His name is disowned. Would it not be a result of incalculable blessedness, were the higher standard of Christian life found in some to be more widely diffused, still more were a marked and decisive impress of Christian piety to become universal, or to approach to universality? The transformation of the professing Church into a visibly living body would certainly act on the world as life from the dead. Regenerate character to God's noblest work. V. THAT ASSISTS IN BRINGING OTHER LANDS TO CHRIST. This was one attraction of ancient Israel to God. He saw in it the focus of blessing; the central point whence the light of His glory was everywhere to spread till the whole dark orb was illuminated. Such is Christian light that like that of the sun, it cannot be seen but by its own diffused and propagated rays. How can Africa, India, China, the South Seas ever call us blessed, unless we teach them our blessedness, and make them share it? (*John Cairns, D.D.*) A delightful land:—Apply to our own land, which the people of all other lands deem blessed, and which in itself is delightful. Different views of a country are taken by the tourist, artist, naturalist, economist, philanthropist, and Christian. Compare our land with others in regard to its spiritual condition and privileges. 1. An adequate supply of pure Gospel ordinances. 2. An appreciative attendance on the faithful administration of them. 3. A gratifying result in the conversion of sinners and the edification of believers. 4. An earnest effort to supply the whole land with them. 5. A zealous endeavour to extend to all lands the full blessings of them. (*Wm. Ormiston, D.D.*)

Ver. 14. *Ye have said, It is vain to serve God.—The service God demands:*

—Those who were the immediate objects of the prophet's ministry had departed from the service of God. The priests having broken their covenant, the people were ruined by their vile example, and went back from God by a perpetual backsliding. **I. THE NATURE OF THAT SERVICE WHICH GOD DEMANDS.** 1. Our service to God must be sincere. All true religion ceases when the heart is not right with God. 2. Our Christian service must be scriptural. 3. This service must be uniform. There is, in matters of true religion, a balance power—always keeping its possessor in happy and perfect equality. 4. In this service you must be diligent. 5. In this service you must be employed until you die. Having once put your hand to the plough, you are not to look back. **II. THE ADVANTAGES OF THAT SERVICE.** 1. It gives, in return, the richest blessings. The Christian service gives us liberty, and liberty of the highest kind; for, if the Son make you free, then are you free indeed. So rich are the blessings this service bestows, that we cannot speak their worth; and so numerous, that to tell their vast amount our efforts are all vain. 2. Another advantage is elevation and honour. 3. This service brings contentment. 4. This service takes away the fear of death. 5. This service will be rewarded in heaven. Apply to four descriptions of persons. (1) You who are not engaged in this service. (2) Those who have just entered on this service. (3) Those who were once engaged in this service; but have left it. (4) You who are old servants in this good cause. (*R. Croxson.*) *Religion delineated and depreciated*.—**I. RELIGION DELINEATED.** Three expressions used to represent it. 1. To serve God. A great difference between serving God and serving man. In the one case the servant benefits the master, in the other the sole benefit is the servant's. In the one the service is estimated by work actually done; in the other by work earnestly purposed. In the one there is a surrender of freedom; in the other there is an attainment of it. He who engages to serve man must surrender some portion of his liberty; he who serves God alone, secures the highest freedom. 2. To keep His ordinance. This is only a branch of the service, or, perhaps, the method of doing it. God has ordinances or institutes, some are moral, some are ceremonial; the latter may cease to bind, the former are everlastingly in force. 3. To walk mournfully before the Lord. To "walk" before the Lord is religion in perfection, religion in heaven. It implies an abiding consciousness of the Divine presence, and continual progress in the Divine will. Walking "mournfully" characterises the religion of earth; it is associated with penitence, contrition, &c. The walk of religion is only mournful here. **II. HERE WE HAVE PRACTICAL RELIGION DEPRECIATED.** "Ye have said, It is vain to serve God, and what profit is it," &c. 1. Men say this when religion does not answer their secular expectations. Many take up with religion in these days because of the secular good they expect will accrue from their profession of it; if the good come not they think it vain. 2. Men say this when they see the truly religious in poverty and affliction. Asaph saw this when he said, "I have washed my hands in vain." 3. Men say this when they have taken up religion from selfish motives. A man who takes up with religion for the sake of good will get no good out of it; nay, will get disappointment, for "he that seeketh his life shall lose it." No truly religious man has said religion is vain, he feels it to be its own reward—the highest reward. In truth, it is the only service on earth that will not prove vain. (*Homilist.*) *Is religion useless?*—The charge here is, that they who sin, prosper. A similar complaint common to all ages. God takes it as a charge against Himself. **I. THE CHARGE.** Those who profess to serve God complain that there is no "profit." They are not happy—not blessed. What is the inference? That the proud, the self-willed, self-confident, self-complacent, are "happy." "The tempters of God," who practically set Him at defiance—dare Him to do the worst—are delivered. Happiness and visible advantage are connected with rebellion. **II. EXAMINE THE FACTS.** 1. The religion itself is not that which God requires, and which He has promised to bless. 2. The happiness is only fleshly, imperfect. The deliverance is present and temporal. The happiness is not true—not of the whole man. See the true servant of God; pardoned, spiritually renewed, glorifying God in body and spirit. See him in the peace and joy of his soul. See him walking under the guardianship of providence. Dying in hope. Carried to Abraham's bosom. Accepted in the judgment. Admitted into heaven. Will you say then, "It is vain to serve God," and that there is no profit in walking before Him? (*G. Cubitt.*) *Unacceptable sacrifices*.—The law was not only a typical institution; it was a system of government appointed and administered

by God Himself. It contains, therefore, references to the great principles, rules, and characteristics of acceptable obedience. The text refers to priests, but not exclusively. It describes the union of formal piety—something must be offered; avarice, producing unwillingness to offer what God required, as being too costly; and cunning, devising an expedient, namely, to “offer the torn, the lame, and the sick.” Thus they brought an offering, but it was unacceptable, and, instead of a blessing, produced a curse. Lessons—1. God requires that we offer Him a sacrifice. 2. Rightly offered, He accepts the offering, and blesses the offerer. 3. While there are those who will offer nothing, there are others who seek to reconcile duty with their own carnal interests. They seek not spiritual preparation for duty, they present partial, formal service, while they live in habitual disobedience. 4. Such persons are, as far as their object is concerned, “deceivers.” Actually they cannot deceive God. Practically, and in their own intention, they act as though they could. 5. They are “accursed.” God accepts not their sacrifice. They have no positive blessing. If you would acceptably sacrifice, you must give yourselves up entirely to God. For this, spiritual preparation is requisite. You must have spiritual regeneration, healing your soul, that your offering may be acceptable. Thus prepared, the whole must be given, in holy obedience, holy exercises. Your formal religion confesses that something is necessary. You are self-condemned. Your religion, such as it is, aggravates your guilt. (*Ibid.*) *Accusing God*:—They bring a twofold accusation against God, that they received no reward for their piety when they faithfully discharged their duty towards God, and also that it was better with the ungodly and the despisers of God than with them. We hence see how reproachfully they exaggerated what they deemed the injustice of God, at least how they themselves imagined that He disappointed the just of their deserved reward, and that He favoured the ungodly and the wicked as though He was pleased with them, as though He intended the more to exasperate the sorrow of His own servants, who, though they faithfully worshipped, yet saw that they did so in vain, as God concealed Himself, and did not reward their services. That the good also are tempted by thoughts of this kind, is no wonder, when the state of things in the world is in greater confusion (*Eccles. ix. 2*). There is really no occasion for indignation and envy offered to us, but as God designedly tries our faith by such confusions, we must remember that we must exercise patience. Let us learn to form a right judgment as to what our life is, and then let us bear in mind how many are the reasons why God should sometimes deal roughly with us. Thus all our envying will cease, and our minds will be prepared calmly to obey. In short, these considerations will check whatever perverseness there may be in us, so that neither our wicked thoughts nor our words will be so strong as to rise in rebellion against God. (*John Calvin.*) *The worshipping service required of Christians*:—The Jews were required by the Levitical law to offer unto God the best of their flock in sacrifice. This they did in their happiest and purest times. In the age of Malachi their worship had greatly degenerated. It had become, in fact, a totally hypocritical service. Heavy judgments are denounced against them by the prophet for this contempt of God. First, the rejection of their service. Next the abolition of their Church, State, and privileges, and the transfer of them to the Gentiles. And a withering curse upon them, both individually and at length nationally, for their hypocrisy. These things happened to them as examples to us, the people of God under the new dispensation. God requires the best of us, and of what belongs to us. We stand engaged to render this to Him by the acceptance of His covenant. **I. THE NATURE OF THE REQUISITION WHICH GOD HERE MAKES.** 1. We must serve Him with our best powers. First and chiefly the powers of the mind. Bodily service, apart from any interest taken in it by the mind, is of little worth. God requires the “heart.” We must worship Him in spirit, for He is a Spirit. By the spirit we are to understand the mind with all its powers. The body is the altar, but the spirit is the oblation. The spirit includes memory, judgment, and affections. Bodily service, as the offspring and expression of the mind, is required, and is highly acceptable. 2. We must give Him the best season of life. This is the season of youth. Then our powers are fresh and vigorous; and then we are most beset by other suitors. 3. We must give Him the best portion of our time. Religion must not be regarded as a relaxation, but prosecuted as a business—the great business of life. It is termed a calling and a work. 4. We must give to God the best of our talents and substance. We ought, as Christians, to surpass others in common charity

and benevolence; for grace is to improve and heighten all human virtues, as well as to improve those that are Divine. II. THE REASONS BY WHICH THIS REQUISITION OF OUR BEST IN THE SERVICE OF GOD IS ENFORCED. God will only accept the best, for the following reasons—1. His greatness. God is a great king, for the extent of His dominions, the number of His servants, and the reverence paid to Him by them. For the information He receives of our service. For the numerous methods in which He can express His displeasure. 2. His goodness enforces His claim. What have we that we have not received? All the faculties of our mind and organs and members of our body we owe to Him. The same may be said of our substance. To Him we are indebted for the ability, the health, the industry by which it was obtained. 3. The credit of our religion demands this service. This ought to be dear to us; and it is to be maintained and promoted by such a service as has been specified. And how is a religion advantaged when a just picture is given of it in the lives and tempers of its recipients! 4. The evils avoided and the benefits obtained by compliance with the demand, enforce its obligation. How fearful the communication of Christ to the lukewarm Church of Laodicea. What encouraging promises, in the Scripture, meet those who are careful, diligent, and devout in the service of God! Improvement—1. Let all see that they are properly capacitated for this service. In order to this, a twofold change must take place: in our state—in our character. 2. Let us be thankful for the existence of public worship among us, and seek after its improvement and extension. 3. Let us hail with a spirit of religious joy and co-operation the approaching diffusion of Gospel-worship all over the world. (*J. Leischild, D.D.*)

Vers. 16, 17. Then they that feared the Lord.—*The fear of God a power-principle*:—The events which, from their importance and prominence in the sacred annals, may be classed as marking successive epochs in the development of the Divine purpose, were preceded by periods of conflicting moral forces and unpropitious influences. But the darkest moral night has witnessed the birth-throes of giant thoughts, and the conception of mightiest schemes for the furtherance of human weal. The state of the Israelitish people contemporaneous with the events detailed in our text was in some respects the saddest in all their history. But despite all this the world was wheeling into the light of Messiah's day. The apostasy of those days, and the signs of coming wonders discerned upon the face of the spiritual heavens, caused all who feared the Lord to speak often one to another, that they might keep themselves mindful of the evil forces around them, mindful of the near approach of the Ancient of days, and that an effectual door might be kept open for His royal entrance. These of themselves were but a small and inconsiderable band, yet representatives of eternal truth, and inheritors of richest promises. But God works His highest purposes and reveals His deepest thoughts with the least of human help. 1. We have abundant reason for assuming that the fear of the Lord is a power-principle in the life of grace. This power has and will ever be felt as a regulative influence in the highest and lowest spheres of existence. It has asserted itself in gathering into available shape the dissipated strength of the spiritual and moral worlds, and in elevating man to a standard of purity, and to companionship with the angels of God. There is in nature a force that acts upon every molecule of matter, adjusting each to its proper place and relation, and grouping the whole into uniformity and shape. The fear-principle in the life of grace, in its regulative aspect, is analogous to this mysterious law of nature. It gives outline and motion to every thought and desire that brings the soul to God, produces harmony among the affections, where discord reigns; elevates moral conduct, and accelerates growth in the life of grace. The fear-principle becomes also a cohesive power. It draws into the firmest compact kindred spirits, and unites with the strongest bonds of sympathy those who have a common fear, a common hope, and a common faith. There is a sentiment of patriotism binding together the constituencies of parties and nations, that runs like links of steel through the bosoms of veterans gathered under a common flag—it is reverence for the honour, love for the name of country. And the fear of God—reverence for His law, and love for His love—binds His people together in allegiance more enduring than earth's strongest ties. The fear of the Lord also has resistive energy, for it wages ceaseless warfare against the evils environing the individual, or the community of faith. The activity growing out of these states and energies becomes expansive with the highest and

broadest significance. Every day of the soul's allegiance to God its frontiers became more invulnerable to attack and invasion. Spiritual growth is cumulative—as eternal as the life of God. And the God-fear power is aggressive. 2. There is a Divine recognition and support of the fear-power developed in the life of grace. "The Lord hearkened and heard." If the claims of earthly loyalty are recognised, and if they command support, how will not loyalty to the highest enlist the prowess of heaven, and the valour and prestige of angelic soldiery. 3. The ultimate end contemplated and achieved in this God-fear power is the glorious exaltation of man in the scale of being. "And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts." (*H. M. Dubosc.*) *Men that feared the Lord*:—I. THE PEOPLE MENTIONED. By the "fear of the Lord" we are not to understand slavish fear, which dreads the punishment rather than the sin which is the cause of the punishment; but a filial fear; a holy affection in the soul, whereby it is inclined to reverence God, and to approve of His words and ways. This fear is a new covenant blessing, and the gift of God. II. THE EMPLOYMENT THEY WERE ENGAGED IN. "They spake often one to another." Of the love of God; and if they had been Christians, we should have added, of the redemption in Christ, and of the operation of the Spirit. He who has a heart for God, has a mouth to speak *for* Him, as well as *to* Him. III. THE HONOUR CONFERRED ON THEM. "The Lord hearkened." This shows God's special regard for them; the notice He takes of them, and His approbation of them. "A book of remembrance was written." In allusion to kings that keep registers (*Ezra iv. 15*). (*S. Barnard.*) *Godly fear the distinguishing character of believers*:—Times of prevailing and abounding wickedness are seasons of painful trial to the people of God. I. SOME OF THE DISTINGUISHING FEATURES IN THE CHARACTER OF THE PEOPLE WHOM GOD CLAIMS AS HIS OWN. 1. They are described as those that "feared the Lord." Distinguish the fear of God which is of nature from that which is of grace. The most wicked and abandoned of men have their seasons of fear. They cannot shake off all dread of Him whose authority they venture to question, and whose laws they presume to disregard. Could we inspect the hearts of those that know not God, we should cease to estimate so highly their boasted felicity. But the true fear of the Lord arises from a different source, and produces different effects. It is that feeling which is spoken of in Scripture, as the beginning of wisdom, as a strong confidence, as a fountain of life. Those who possess it are described as objects of the peculiar favour and gracious protection of God. On account of its importance, as well as its actual effects, it is often put for the whole of religion, and considered as comprehending all its duties. They that fear the Lord are such as have not only the form, but the power of godliness. The fear of God dwells and rules in their souls, it forms their temper, and influences their conduct. 2. "They thought upon His name." It is a mark of the ungodly, that God is not in all his thoughts. But these delight to think upon a name endeared to them as the name of Him who has done wondrously for them. In seasons of painful and afflictive dispensations they delight to think upon God. They delight to recall the gracious thoughts of God towards them. The feeling is not a mere notion of God, or a transient feeling of His power and excellency: it is the habitual feeling of the soul, and a source of holy comfort and heavenly peace amidst the vicissitudes of life: it gives a sanctity even to our worldly employments, and renders our ordinary occupations a means of glorifying God. True believers set God always before them. 3. Those who "feared the Lord" also "spake often one to another." Conversation is a peculiar gift: it forms the chain of intercourse between man and man, and reminds us that we were born, not to waste our lives in selfish pleasures, or in unprofitable seclusion from the world. The Christian's duty consists, not in a life of separation from his fellow-creatures, but of active exertion for the benefit of all who are placed within the sphere of his influence. In order to promote these important purposes, he is furnished with the gift of speech, and is enabled to communicate with others on their necessities, and to invite from them reciprocal love and friendly intercourse. The talent only becomes valuable when it is employed for useful purposes. We do not say that the conversation of Christians will always be on the subject of religion, but true religion will always give a savour of grace to the conversation. There is a special sort of conversation which Christians enjoy with each other, which is doubtless spoken of in the text. They converse on the things of peace, and things wherewith they may be edified. They delight to speak of the glories of the Redeemer, and the blessedness of His saints. Believers, in their social intercourse, rise superior to the things of time, and converse on those of eternity.

II. THE GRACIOUS ATTENTION WITH WHICH THESE PERSONS WERE REGARDED BY GOD. "The Lord hearkened and heard it." Not only is God about our path, He is intimately present with our thoughts. As amongst men, things notable are recorded in a book of remembrance, so in the Eternal Mind are registered all the thoughts, words, and actions of men. Applications—1. Examine yourselves, prove yourselves by the test of this text. 2. Be watchful against a trifling, censorious spirit. 3. Study the Scriptures, which present you with such excellent examples. 4. Pray for grace. (*W. Mayers, M.A.*) *Men who feared the Lord*.—They were bad times when the prophet Malachi was sent forth upon his message. Profaneness was gone forth throughout the land. Men openly declared it was a vain and unprofitable thing to worship God. Even in those days there was a remnant according to the election of grace. I. THE CONDUCT OF THESE GODLY MEN. They "feared the Lord." Men may fear God in the sense of trembling at His judgments. The fear meant here is a holy reverential awe of God such as none but His own dear children entertain. These people looked up to Him with the deepest veneration as their Maker and their Saviour. They "served Him acceptably with reverence and godly fear." They are said to have "thought on the Lord's name." To think upon a name would be, in other cases, to think upon an empty sound. But to think on the Lord's name is a most profitable and delightful meditation. For His name is His nature; what the Lord is called, He is. This name—merciful and gracious—was written on their hearts and their affections. Look at their conduct. Doubtless their whole practice was consistent; but our attention is particularly drawn to the way in which their tongues were occupied. Their communications were serious and spiritual. They sought each other's company for the sake of sweet communion and profitable conversation. Two things gave value to all this holy conversation. It proceeded from the heart. They talked together in a very anxious and difficult time. It is an easy thing to talk religiously when religion is in fashion. II. THE GRACIOUS PURPOSES OF GOD RESPECTING THEM. However privately their conversations might be carried on, the ear of God was open to it all. If God hears, we may be sure God does not forget the pious conferences of His people. "A book of remembrance was written." The pious conversation of His servants is ever fresh in God's mind, as if it were written in a book, and the book were spread before Him. What doth God account to be His jewels? Not what men account so. His jewels are His people. The ornament He prizes is the "meek and quiet spirit" of the believer. When shall be the day when He shall make these jewels up? The day of judgment. He will shortly accomplish the number of His elect, and then He will make up His jewels. III. THE EFFECT ALL THIS WILL HAVE ON THE UNGODLY WORLD. "It is vain to serve God," said that ungodly generation. There is a day at hand, when another estimate shall be formed. When you shall see the Lord make up His jewels, esteeming every man as such who hath feared Him, thought upon Him, and confessed Him—then shall you perceive at last that there is a difference unspeakable between those who serve God, and those who serve Him not. Conclusion—Hold up this text before those of you who profess godliness as containing an example for imitation. You see how those ancient saints delighted in edifying conversation with each other, and how attentive the Lord was to it. Let the text reprove us and stir us up. (*A. Roberts, M.A.*) *God's people in a godless age*.—Malachi gives in this book of prophecy a fivefold picture of God; a fourfold picture of the sins of the priesthood; and a sevenfold picture of the sins of the people. God describes Himself as the sovereign God, who sees no reason beyond Himself for the bestowment of any blessing which He chooses to give. God is described as a God who makes Himself known as a master and as a father, to those who see Him as a sovereign, as the electing God. God commissions the prophet to hold Him up as a prayer-answering God. He was the maker of an eternal covenant. He is the God who more than repays the services of His servants. The first great sin of the priests is the offering of polluted bread, &c. They give to Him what they would be ashamed to give to their temporal rulers. Then they were desirous to enrich themselves by the profanation of God's religion. They would not do anything in God's service for nought. They wearied in God's service. They were not only going astray themselves, but causing others to go astray. The sins of the people are idolatry; impurity; a self-justifying spirit. Various dreadful crimes. Asking what profit shall we have if we serve God. Resisting an appealing God. In the text we have God's people in the midst of this apostasy of priests and people, in the midst of this neglect of God. God's

people are here described—I. BY THEIR PRINCIPLES. "They feared the Lord." The wicked, or unconverted, are kept from sin by fear of punishment. The master-principle in the breast of a righteous man is not a slavish fear, but the fear that arises from the knowledge of God; as a forgiving God—that arises from a consciousness that he has received incalculable blessings from God. It is connected with the consciousness that God has pardoned your sins, and has accepted you in the Beloved. II. BY THEIR EMPLOYMENT. 1. Their external employment. "They are speaking to one another." What about? About the moral troubles of their times. In the darkness of this world, Christians are to be known by their speaking to each other. 2. Their internal employment. They thought on the name of their God. The saints spoke of what they had been thinking, and brought it out as the centre of their union, as the nucleus around which they erected themselves. III. THEIR PRIVILEGES. God hearkened and heard those that thought and spoke of Him. He drew nigh; and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared Him. It was the Lamb's book of life, in which the saints were written from the foundation of the world. And I do not think it was their names that were written, but the evidences of their faith were written. The book which contains their names is written in eternity; and the book which contains the evidence of their faith was written in time. We all love to be thought of; it is a holy ambition to desire to be thought of by God. IV. THEIR HOPE. "They shall be Mine, when I make up My jewels." The great distinction shall be made in the day when Jesus Christ shall come—then those who knew Christ, who loved Christ, who kept watch for His appearance, shall be saved, as jewels are saved, in the day of danger. (*N. Armstrong.*) *The delineation of God's people:*—I. THEY FEARED THE LORD. There are those who are sometimes smitten with feelings of terror and horror when their conscience is tender, when some providential circumstances arouse them to consideration. They begin to feel, but it is temporary, it is not deep. The people of God fear Him with the fear of a child. As a child fears his father, so the child of God fears God. He fears not only His power, he fears His character. He fears lest his inconsistencies should bring disgrace upon His name and upon His religion. He feels what he owes to God—that he owes Him everything. The people of God, who fear the Lord, have a constant sense of His presence. That presence continually controls and directs them. And in their private doings, where no eye is upon them, they fear the Lord. II. THEY SPAKE OFTEN ONE TO ANOTHER. That is, they held conversation with each other. Those who are God's people will talk of God, they cannot help it. They talk of His honour, His work of salvation, and all the great redemptive themes. They talk of the attributes of Deity, as brought out in the great work of Christ. They talk of the sufferings of God's people. They gently reprove each other's faults and failings, faithfully dealing with each other. And they speak often one to another. They talk without restraint. Whenever they have opportunity, such things are their themes. III. THEY THOUGHT UPON HIS NAME. The name of God is the "I am"! His full name is given in Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. The people of God are a contemplative people. They study His character, His purposes, His grace: they study His attributes. They study the Word of God. They study themselves in their relations with God. (*Hugh Allen, M.A.*) *God and the good:*—I. GOOD MEN IN THEIR RELATION TO GOD. 1. They reverence Him. Malachi tells us that these old saints "feared the Lord." Not a slavish, but a filial fear, not a dread of His power, or His anger, but a holy awe of His majesty mingled with a loving admiration. Filial reverence lies at the basis of all true religion. 2. They think upon Him. "They thought upon His name." The name of God was His revealed character, His reputation. The intellect of the good is chiefly engaged in the contemplation of God as He is revealed in nature, history, the Bible, Christ. There is no higher theme of thought than this, not even for angels. 3. They talk about Him. "They spake often one to another." The chief theme of thought will always be the leading subject of converse. "Out of the heart the mouth speaketh." Souls, though constitutionally social, can only meet and mingle on a subject of common interest; the loftier and purer the subject, the closer and more exquisite the communion. As the rays can only meet in the sun, so souls can only meet in true fellowship in the name of God. This is the platform of genuine social intercourse. II. GOD IN RELATION TO GOOD MEN. 1. He hears their converse. "The Lord hearkened and heard it." All sounds in the creation vibrate in the Divine ear; the fall of the dewdrop as well as the thunder of the tempest; the sighs of

an infant as well as the choruses of eternity; the oath of the blasphemer as well as the prayer of the saint. But He pays special attention to the words of the good. They travel to Him as the cries of the babe to the heart of the mother. 2. He registers their history. "A book of remembrance was written before Him." He is represented as having recorded what He observes and hears. This book of remembrance before the Lord is no mere figure. The great universe is a book in which every sound uttered, every word spoken, are recorded. Science teaches that every syllable is printed imperishably in the surrounding air. Nature photographs not the mere features of the face, nor the form of the body, but every changing look, every passing thought, &c. 3. He pledges their salvation; which includes glory in the future, and protection in the present. His providence shall guard them with all the carefulness of a father's heart. (*Homilist.*) *Three-fold aspect of true sainthood*.—I. THE LIFE OF THE GOOD, AS IT IS MANIFESTED UPON EARTH. "Then they that feared the Lord." It is—1. Loyal. There is profound reverence; a filial, not a slavish fear. Not fearing the anger of God, but fearing to offend Him; not forsaking sin because it brings punishment, but because God hates it. Such fear of God will engender love, inspire faith, produce holiness, secure obedience. 2. It is social. "Spake often one to another." True piety is a cheerful, sympathetic thing; it does not destroy our social instincts, but intensifies and ennobles them. The natural tendency of the fear of the Lord in the heart is to link men together in the bonds of brotherhood, to hush the discord of society, and to lead us to bear each other's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. These believers spake often one to another—not of each other's failings—not for scandal or strife, but about the work of the Lord, and to each other's edification. 3. It was also secret. There was the inner as well as outer, the subjective as well as the objective life; they "thought upon His name." They were not all talk; they were not hypocrites—"talkatives";—they had heart religion. As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he; and as he thinks, he loves and lives. Our life must be of this sort to please God, for He looketh at the heart. We must not forsake the assembling of ourselves together; and our affections must be fixed on things above. II. THE LIFE OF THE GOOD, AS IT IS RECOGNISED IN HEAVEN. "And the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him." 1. It is known in heaven. God recognises those who fear Him, though they may be little and unknown, they are loved and prized by God. The Lord is represented as bending from His throne, and listening to the sounds that come from the earth; and as He hearkens, He hears and recognises the voice of His people, who hold sweet communion with each other, and hallowed communion with Himself; as by unseen electric wires, with inconceivable swiftness, holy thoughts and words flash to heaven, and enter the ear of the Most High. Our conversation is in heaven. 2. It is recorded there. God blots out the sins of His people from His book, but He keeps a book of remembrance for the virtues of His saints. We may forget our work of faith and labour of love, but God never forgets. III. THE LIFE OF THE GOOD, AS IT WILL BE CONSUMMATED IN THE LAST GREAT DAY. This shows—1. It will be crowned with the highest possible honour. We shall be owned as friends, and children, and companions of God for ever. 2. It will be crowned with the highest possible glory. "Jewels" are among a monarch's brightest and costliest things; and God speaks of His believing servants as His "jewels." (*F. W. Brown.*) *Genuine religion*.—Three things are noteworthy—I. THE ESSENCE of genuine religion. "They that feared the Lord." The men who fear God may be divided into two classes. 1. Those who fear Him with a slavish fear. The unrenewed millions when they think of Him at all dread Him, their guilty consciences invest Him with attributes of such horror that they shudder at the idea of Him, they flee from His presence. "I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid." All that is superstitious in the world, all that is barbaric in the religion of Christendom, spring from this dread of God. 2. Those who fear Him with a filial fear. The fear which a loving child has for a worthy and noble sire. There is, perhaps, always a kind of fear in connection with true love. We fear, not that the object will harm us, but that we may harm or displease the object. II. THE SOCIALITY of genuine religion. "Spake often one to another." We are social beings, and what interests us most has the most power in bringing us together. Nothing interests a religious man so much as religion. Spake no doubt in language of mutual instruction, mutual comfort, mutual exhortation. There is no force in the world so socialising as religion. III. THE WORTH of genuine religion. See what God does with the genuinely

religious. 1. He specially attends to them. "The Lord hearkened and heard it." 2. He claims them as His own. "And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts." 3. He appreciates them as precious. "In that day when I make up My jewels." The word here rendered jewels is in Exodus (xix. 5) rendered peculiar treasure. "They are peculiarly precious to Me." He knows the worth of their existence, the cost of their restoration, the greatness of their capabilities. 4. He distinguishes them from all others. (*Homilist.*) *The Lord's people*.—The temptations of the professing Church of God seem to have been much the same in all ages. One has been to neglect or forsake the assemblies of the Lord's people for worship and instruction. In old times there was the same tendency to weariness at the monotony of religious exercises, the same craving for novelty in the human heart, as now. In Malachi's days the world did not look with favour on religion; the world regarded religion as a mean and useless thing; the world had a good word for any one rather than for the humble followers of God, who knew and loved the truth. But, even then, there were those who were not ashamed to meet together, and encourage one another, in the ways of the Lord. I. **THE CHARACTER OF THE LORD'S PEOPLE.** The circumstances of life, and the positions in which they are placed, bring out the real character of men. So with regard to spiritual things, circumstances manifest the real character. Times of trial and opposition serve to show who has real grace, and who has only the semblance of it. Tribulation and persecution on account of the Word is in the Sacred Scriptures compared to the refiner's fire, which separates the dross from the pure gold. We ought to rejoice that, in the overruling power and grace of the great Head of the Church, it is turned into a means of good to them who are troubled, and that the wrath of man is made to praise Him, in the manifestation of His grace in His people, and in their refinement and establishment in the faith. In those trying times there were those who dared to go against the prevailing current of the world's opinion, and "spake often one to another." "They feared the Lord, and thought upon His name." Such are the Lord's people in every age. II. **THEIR PROSPECTS.** "They shall be Mine," &c. God's people are His property, His jewels. In the day to which they are looking forward, He will own them as His. Not make them His, but declare them to be His. (*G. Maxwell, B.A.*) *The inner circle of Church life*.—When Napoleon retreated from Moscow, a large part of his army perished in the cold and snow. When night came, a body of troops would kindle a little fire as best they could, and then lots would be cast for those who should occupy the places nearest the fire, and the cold was so intense that those in the outermost rows would be found frozen stiff in the morning. Now, in every Church, there are those who form the very centre—a circle within a circle—gathering close to the person of Christ. These enjoy the warmth of His spiritual presence, while those who content themselves with living at a distance from Christ are soon chilled and frozen in the keen atmosphere of worldliness which enswathes the Church. (*Watchword.*) *Spake often one to another.*—*Christian converse*.—We live in better times than were those of Malachi. Among us the influence of religion is acknowledged by the great majority of those with whom we associate. Placed then in more favourable circumstances, do we imitate the example of the pious Israelites? Do we speak one to another of the God whom we worship? It is true that, in the present state of society, religious topics cannot be introduced upon every occasion, or into every circle. Our Saviour Himself warned us against the folly and the danger of such a practice. But alas! by many religious conversation is regarded as an infringement upon the decencies of life; chilled with obstinate silence; or almost rebuked with a sneer. I. **TO THOSE WHO FEAR THE LORD IN SINCERITY AND TRUTH RELIGIOUS CONVERSATION IS NATURAL.** What dwells habitually in the mind, the lips will most frequently utter. The profession of each individual, and his customary modes of thought, almost irresistibly appear in his conversation. Shall the Christian be the only exception to this general law? The tradesman selects with care, and addresses with evident preference those to whom the secrets of his craft are known; with whom he may plan the means of abridging his labour and increasing his gains. And shall not the servants of Jesus Christ speak one to another of that work which their great Master hath given them to do? The "speech" even of a licentious man "betrayeth" him. To those who fear the Lord, the most natural subjects of conversation are those which religion supplies. By what inexplicable prejudice do they refuse to speak one to another of their eternal interests? In every other pursuit we seek eagerly the approbation of those whom we value. The hope of

their applause lightens our toil. Why should not the same amiable feelings, the same endearing aids, attend religion also? II. RELIGIOUS CONVERSATION IS PLEASANT TO THOSE WHO FEAR THE LORD IN SINCERITY. What is there sublime or amiable in the whole range of intellectual and moral speculation, with which religious feeling may not be united, and on which the conversation of the pious may not with propriety and with advantage dwell? In this wide range there is much that, while it advances our improvement, may minister also to our delight. The subjects of religious conversation, in themselves attractive and delightful, gain a new interest from the relation which connects them with their Author, and from the prospects which, through the Gospel, we are permitted to entertain. And our future destiny endears to us religious conversation. III. RELIGIOUS CONVERSATION IS USEFUL TO THOSE WHO FEAR THE LORD IN SINCERITY. The usefulness of any employment is not to be judged of by its conformity to the laws of fashion, its tendency to still the alarms of the suspicious, to avoid the sneer of the fool; or by its pleasing effects at the moment, while its final issue is bitter. Religious conversation may still be useful, although it may have been made at times the mask of hypocrisy, or the tool of spiritual pride. If the instrument in itself is valuable, the wise and the pious need not forego its exercise, though knaves have abused, and fools have misapplied it. The uses of conversation in our intellectual pursuits are acknowledged and sought with avidity. In proportion to the importance of the subjects about which religious conversation is employed, its usefulness increases. Happy would society be, and rapid our improvement, were we to receive as a national law the precept which was given to Israel of old, and made religion at once a theme of instruction and delight! Of that time let us hasten the approach, so far as our influence and example may extend. (*A. Brunton, D.D.*) *Religious conversation*.—It is the tendency of our time to decry what is called religious conversation. It is in great disrepute with those who desire to be thought sensible men; and, as a matter of fact, it has become almost extinct, except in certain narrow circles, where it survives in a form by no means calculated to attract others towards it. Many of those who most fail in making religious conversation profitable, have yet a good object in view in their attempts to cherish it. Many good motives have prompted the endeavour to impart a more decidedly Christian character to the language of society. But a failure it has often been. What with the difficulty of expressing in words the deepest feelings; what with the risk of overstating, and of misstating, impressions which, to be worth anything, must be exact, neither more nor less nor other than the precise truth; what with the ambiguity which hangs about so many characters as to their real decision for good, and the danger of saying before any that for which they may be unprepared or disinclined; what with the weariness of mind and body under which most men enter into society, and their consequent indisposition for such efforts of thought as are involved in the discussion of what we call serious subjects; what with the just delicacy which teaches them to refrain from the obtrusion of private thoughts upon any heart but their own, and the just dread too of seeming to any to be other or better than they are: the result of all these, and numberless other influences, is generally the same, namely, that the mention of religion is kept out of our daily intercourse with one another. Nevertheless, the text, amongst other passages of Scripture, forbids us to rest satisfied with a general absence of all reference to those things which, whether in youth or in age, are the only safety, the only happiness, and the only life of the soul. "Then." The context tells us that the time spoken of was an evil time. So prevalent was sin, so bold, and apparently so prosperous, that people were beginning to say, "It is vain to serve God." What profit is it that we have tried to serve Him, and have walked carefully and even mournfully before the Lord? This was a very short-sighted and a very wrong judgment; but it is one which even good men are prone to fall into, when they compare their own present comfort and disparagement with the apparent triumph and happiness of the ungodly. Mark the one characteristic of these people—they "feared the Lord." There are two kinds of fear, the servile and the filial; that kind which consists in dread, and that kind which consists in awe. It is a short and sufficient description of the good in any congregation, that they "fear God." In times of difficulty and discouragement they "spake often one to another." They tried the experiment of sympathy, of combined counsel, and combined action too. The meaning of the "Church" is, that God would give us in association a strength and a comfort which we cannot find in isolation; that He would have

us strengthen our brethren, and be strengthened in turn by our brethren, in the exercise of united acts of worship, and still more in the recognition at all times of a tie of friendship and of brotherhood which all must possess who have indeed one heavenly Father, one Divine Saviour, and one Holy Spirit. We do not half use these helps and strengths with which God has provided us. Here I would place the beginning of religious conversation. Here, in God's worship. Those who have heartily prayed together, praised God together, listened to God's Word together, cannot go forth, to neglect one another, to oppress one another, to tempt one another, without such a sense of guilt in doing so as would be absolutely intolerable. When it is once made present to your minds as a great object, that all should lead blameless Christian lives, and that all should at last see God, many other ways will suggest themselves, besides this, in which those who fear the Lord may speak often one to another. It may be done in the privacy of true friendship, when to one faithful ear you can confide something of your personal difficulties and temptations, and exchange that sympathy which is always strengthening even where it may seem to be rather the confession of weakness. "The Lord hearkened and heard it." If there are any—may there be many—who can think with comfort of that record of words spoken in His love and fear, must not others tremble when they think of their words? Who has been the better for our possessing the gift of speech? Let us judge ourselves, one and all, for indeed we have cause to do so, if perhaps in God's great mercy we may not be judged. Let us remember, one and all, who said that for every idle word which men should speak they should give account in the day of judgment. Of all the sayings written down from His lips in the book of God, none surely is so terrible in its sound as that which declares, "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." (*C. J. Vaughan, D.D.*) *Christian intercourse*.—Few persons are so unhappy as to be ignorant of the value of social intercourse, and as not to have realised its influence in heightening the enjoyments of human life, and mitigating its sorrows. This pleasure, like every other, is refined and elevated by the mutual experience of personal religion. Convinced that a free social intercourse, of a spiritual and experimental character, among Christians may be highly subservient to their advancement in religion, it is proposed to offer a few remarks adapted to direct its exercise and to promote its cultivation.

I. THE RIGHT EXERCISE OF SPIRITUAL INTERCOURSE AMONG CHRISTIANS. 1. The persons with whom it should be held. It should for the most part be restricted to those whom we can regard as the subjects of renewing grace. They who "feared God" spake to one another. On experimental religion, those who have never felt its power can have nothing to communicate; nor are they in general likely to feel any particular interest in the views of those who have. Free interchange of sentiment is not advisable indiscriminately with all who fear God. (1) It should be cultivated more especially with those to whom we are united in the fellowship of the Gospel. (2) And with those whose circumstances and habits are most nearly analogous to our own. This is true in reference to our standing in the Divine life, and to those of similar habits and in the same stations in society. (3) Such intercourse should be habitually cherished among those who are connected by the intimacies of domestic association. Such association presents not only the most frequent, but also the most appropriate opportunities for such intercourse.

II. THE SUBJECTS SUCH INTERCOURSE MAY PROFITABLY EMBRACE. 1. The peculiar spiritual or providential dispensations of which we may be the subjects. The proofs our own experience has furnished of the efficacy of prayer. 2. Subjects which have been brought before us in the public services of the sanctuary, or in the private perusal of the Word of God. 3. The general state of religion, more especially in our own neighbourhood and communion, and the means by which we may individually aid in its advancement.

III. THE SEASONS at which such intercourse may be appropriately entered on. "Spake often." The expression seems to imply that they took every opportunity, in the ordinary associations of friendship, to direct the attention of each other to sacred subjects. In conclusion, some considerations to enforce the cultivation of spiritual intercourse. 1. Such exercises have been attended by evident indications of Divine approbation. 2. Such intercourse is essential to the right exercise of Christian sympathy and affection. 3. It will be found highly conducive to our own spiritual advantage. Points in our experience we have thought fatally peculiar we shall find common to others as well; we may gain relief where they found it, we may learn to shun the snares by which they were endangered, and to pursue the means by which

their progress in the Divine life has been promoted. (*Essex Remembrancer.*) *Christian conversation* :—I. IT PLEASES GOD. It is plainly indicated that God is pleased when His people talk to each other tenderly about Him, that He listens, and not only listens, but makes record for future reward of all those who are so lovingly loyal. Why are Christians to-day so dumb? Love is not a dumb or silent thing. Love speaks. Then why these sealed lips? God listens while His children fondly talk of Him. He loves to see gratitude in our hearts; it greatly pleases Him to hear us talking one to another about His goodness. II. IT BLESSES US. Nothing does one's own heart so much good as speaking kindly of another. Expressing love ever increases it. III. IT BLESSES OTHERS. There are too many dumb Christians; for there is a vast power for good in our tongues if we will but use them aright. Many a soul has been led to Christ through the good words dropped in Christian conversation. (*G. B. F. Hallock.*) *Christian communion encouraged* :—I. THE CHARACTERS INDICATED. 1. They feared the Lord. There is a "slavish" fear, distinguished from "filial" fear. In the language of the Old Testament, the "fear of the Lord" means what may be called the entire religious principle, or the whole of inward religion. 2. They thought upon the name of the Lord. Names are signs used to distinguish one person from another. Usually they are arbitrary signs. But "the name of the Lord" expresses the essential qualities of His nature. Some of the names of God are Rock, Strength, Shepherd, Father, King. 3. They spake often one to another. On what particular subject we must gather from the circumstances of the case. They must have spoken of God's gracious dealings with them; of the oppositions they had to encounter; the deliverances they had experienced. They spake often, in ways of instruction, admonition, and encouragement. II. THE ADVANTAGES ENJOYED BY THOSE CHARACTERS. 1. Divine approbation. "The Lord hearkened and heard." He deigned to listen. 2. Divine security. "A book of remembrance was written." There was an imperishable impression of their case on the mind of God Himself. 3. Divine promise. "They shall be Mine," &c. (1) They are regarded as jewels. (2) When God shall "make up His jewels," shall gather them out from among the rubbish and refuse, He who now regards them as His children will spare them, will preserve them tenderly and effectually. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *Religious conversation recommended* :—I. THE DISPOSITION AND BEHAVIOUR OF THESE PIOUS PERSONS IN A TIME OF PREVAILING IRRELIGION. Their general character is that they "feared the Lord." As the general fruit of that Divine principle ruling in their hearts, they "spake often one to another." The subject of their conversation was the same with that of their thoughts, the name of God and His ways. As agreement in principles and affections, an union of interests and designs, naturally begets friendship amongst men, and is the foundation of mutual freedom in communicating their thoughts to each other, so true religion particularly is the firmest bond of union, the strongest and noblest cement of a lasting amity. There is, too, a good deal of reason why good men should speak often one to another in a time of abounding iniquity, because it is a means of strengthening the good dispositions which remain in themselves, and which otherwise may be in danger of being weakened and of perishing at last. As religion more than anything else in the mind laboureth against opposition both from temptations without and our own infirmities, it needs and receives peculiar benefit by the affectionate counsel of pious friends; and evil communication doth not more tend to corrupt good manners than good communication doth further to purify and raise them to perfection. Therefore Christians are earnestly exhorted by the sacred writers to be aiding and assisting to each other in this respect (Heb. iii. 12, 13). We see, then, the true reason of Christians' shyness in speaking one to another upon the affairs of religion, which is the faulty omission of a very important duty, an excellent means of increasing piety and virtue; and it is no otherwise to be accounted for than by the weakness of good affections. Great prudence is to be used in discoursing on religious subjects, and the tempers of men carefully considered, lest an indiscreet freedom be attended with bad consequences, and sacred things be exposed to the contempt of the profane. II. THE DISTINGUISHING REGARD GOD SHOWS TO THEM. He observes them attentively; they are at all times the objects of His peculiar care, and shall at last be highly honoured and happy in His favour. The figurative way of speaking is not intended to signify that God has any need of external evidence or means of finding out the truth: since at one direct view He beholds the most remote and most secret things. By Him actions are weighed. He has a more perfect knowledge

than men can possibly have by the strictest inquiry they can make. This intimacy of Divine knowledge of our very thoughts and most private communications with friends is to religious minds of the greatest moment to their comfort and support under their difficulties, and a powerful motive to preserve steadfastness in true piety. God's distinguishing regard is shown in His keeping "a book of remembrance." This is but after the manner of men, to show the infallible security of the Divine promises made in favour of the righteous, and the reward which shall be adjudged to them, fully proportioned, nay greatly exceeding, all the good they have done. God hath no need of registers which human governments have recourse to. God knows all past and future as well as present with equal clearness. The "book of remembrance" suggests His special notice of the conduct of His faithful servants, His keeping their actions in mind, and the undiminished perpetuity of His righteousness and goodness in all His proceedings towards them. Another instance of God's distinguishing regard is the promise that they shall "be His when He maketh up His jewels." Reference is to the appointed day of account: God will then most eminently make up His jewels, when He gathers the general assembly and Church of the first-born whose names are written in heaven. There are some differences between the conditions of men even in this world made by the interposition of God Himself as righteous Governor, which may be comprehended in His making up His jewels. It is now that God hath such pity for them that fear Him as to preserve them from many snares and calamities to which they are liable, and spare them as a father spareth his son. (*J. Abernethy, M.A.*)

The communion of saints:—However abandoned and wicked a people or nation may be, nevertheless God has reserved to Himself a seed to serve Him, a people to show forth His glory. The period to which the text alludes may be considered emblematical of the times in which we live; and it should be our object, as the professed people of God, to imitate the example of those who are so honourably mentioned by the prophet in the words before us.

I. THE DESCRIPTION HERE GIVEN OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD. 1. They are said to "fear the Lord." In order that we may fear the Lord we must know Him. The fear meant is that reverential, affectionate fear of God which is produced in the heart of the believer by the Holy Spirit. 2. They are those who meditate upon Him. "In the multitude of their thoughts within them His comforts delight their soul." 3. They are those who hold communion one with another. They "considered one another, to provoke unto love and good works." We can imagine them saying, "Come, all ye that fear the Lord, and we will tell you what He hath done for our souls."

II. THE APPROBATION WHICH GOD HERE TESTIFIES OF HIS PEOPLE. 1. He testifies His approbation by paying attention to their occupations. 2. By granting them a share in His remembrance. 3. By promising to recognise and spare them at the final day. "They shall be Mine when I make up My jewels." God even speaks of them as His "sons." Do we possess the characteristics which are here given of the people of God? May God, in His infinite mercy, place His fear within our hearts, and then the gracious promise of the text shall be ours. (*Henry Clarendon*.)

Religious fellowship:—

I. RELIGIOUS FELLOWSHIP CALLS INTO EXERCISE THE HIGHEST SYMPATHIES OF BEING. While men converse on secular subjects the fountain of their spiritual nature is sealed. When the topic is practical Christianity, the hidden individuality discloses its proportions, and you become acquainted with the genuine nature of the speaker. Three facts in relation to religious men. 1. They have the common centre of attraction. "They that feared the Lord." On the subject of experimental godliness all Christians can speak. Assemble round the manger of Bethlehem or the Cross of Calvary, and even the most untutored tongue is stirred to eloquence or music. 2. They have corresponding spiritual experiences. Every student of his own heart has been amazed and delighted to discover the harmony of religious feelings which exists throughout the Church. 3. They enjoy the inspiration of a common hope. They speak of their joint inheritance without any feeling of envy. The "fear" here is that which filial reverence so properly inspires. The child of God fears lest he should wound love so sensitive, or insult purity so dazzling; his fear relates less to the power that might crush him than to the mercy which has saved him.

II. RELIGIOUS FELLOWSHIP ATTRACTS THE BENIGNANT NOTICE OF GOD. Learn—1. The proximity of the Divine ear. God has so constructed the universe that every whisper in its remotest region resounds in the palace of Deity. Wondrous ear! The thunders of celestial song, the plaintive notes of sorrow, the sighings of secret

worship, the cries of extremity, and the doxologies of gratitude all force their way to that centre. Thy prayer will not ascend in vain. 2. The Divine record of human deeds. "A book of remembrance." There is a registry of names in heaven. Every man who "spake" will find his name inscribed in the chronicles of the sky. III. RELIGIOUS FELLOWSHIP NECESSITATES A CONTEMPLATION OF THE SUBLIMEST SUBJECTS. "That thought upon His name." Can you indicate a subject of more thrilling interest? Is boundless power sublime? The name of God is the expression of Omnipotence. Is infinite wisdom sublime? The name of God is the expression of Omniscience. Is there aught of sublimity in inimitable love? The name of God is the representative of ever-during and disinterested affection. There is no common-place in religion. The moment you mention the name of God you rise into the loftiest region of sublimity! Religious fellowship involves the highest style of conversation. IV. RELIGIOUS FELLOWSHIP WILL BE DISTINGUISHED BY THE MOST GLORIOUS RESULTS. "They shall be Mine." "I will spare them." 1. The qualification for these honours is entirely moral. All that is said of these people is, "They feared the Lord." "They thought on His name." 2. There is an appointed day of classification. God has jewels even amid the ruins of this shattered and degraded world. Concerning the fellowship indicated, four facts are clear. 1. It was cultivated with much frequency. "Spake often." 2. Its subjects are undiminished in sublimity. 3. It is demanded in circumstances no less exacting than those indicated in the context. 4. It has lost none of its attractiveness in the Divine estimation. The world may turn a deaf ear to your spiritual intercourse, but the Lord will hearken and preserve a memorial of your godly fellowship. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *Christian intercourse*.—In these days religion is spoken of controversially, historically, and politically. But let religion be introduced and treated experimentally, then it is at once undervalued. If any person venture to speak of the Lord's dealings with his soul, then the subject either excites ridicule amongst the company, or draws down upon the speaker the contemptuous pity of every hearer. This is the common course of things, but it is not universally so. Even in the days of the text there was a remnant of those who loved to speak of spiritual things, and to speak of them spiritually. I. THE PARTIES DESCRIBED. Those who "feared the Lord." Not with that slavish fear which exists in the minds of those who love sin, indulge in sin, and then only tremble when they think of the wages of sin. Reference is to those who, looking upon God as a Father, reverence Him and love Him, and would prefer themselves suffering any loss to offending One who had conferred such inestimable blessings on them. The true filial fear of God implies a correct knowledge of God's dealings with us, of His demands upon our affections, of His love as manifested in Christ, of the way of salvation, and the necessity of holiness. It implies also a willing obedience to God's commandments, a thankful acceptance of God's invitations, and a grateful endeavour to conform to the image of Jesus Christ. It also signifies an earnest desire to do everything to the praise and glory of God. They who fear the Lord are men who, making a profession of religion, mean what they say and say what they mean. II. THEIR CONDUCT. "Spake often one to another." Man is a social being. Few things contribute more to the encouragement of selfishness than solitude; and nothing is more opposed to the whole spirit of true religion than selfishness. If God has vouchsafed unto us the light of the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ we are neither nationally nor individually at liberty to hide that light under a bushel. Enforce the duty of religious conversation. 1. From the danger which naturally follows idle conversation. Idle words are sinful in themselves, and extremely sinful in their tendency. But what is the character of the common conversation of the day? 2. Our conversation is a test of the state of the heart. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." This is literally true. Illustrate by the man of pleasure, who talks about his sport; or the politician, who talks about his politics. Why, then, should any one condemn the zeal of the man of God, who would speak of the Lord's dealings with his soul? 3. We have the positive injunction of the Word of God. "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt." The duty is specially insisted on again and again in the Scriptures. The value of experimental conversation is incalculable. Yet it must be confessed, that silence upon experimental religion is generally practised. III. THE REWARD. The Lord "noted it down in a book of remembrance." In the great day, to your infinite surprise, you will find words recalled to your mind long since

forgotten by yourselves, but fresh as ever in the remembrance of that loving Father with whom we have to do. By way of caution let me say, do not think you must be safe because you speak upon religion. Though every converted man will speak of Christ, not every one who speaks of Christ is converted. Speaking upon religion without feeling is nothing less than hypocrisy. It seldom deceives man. It never deceives God. (*Montagu Villiers, M.A.*) *Discourse* :—Even in the most degenerate ages God never suffered the light of truth to be completely banished from the earth. We observe also, that where and when sinners have been most determined in their opposition to God, the servants of God have ever been most bold and resolute. 1. We learn from the words of the text that it is the duty of Christians at all times to stand by and support each other, especially in times of abounding iniquity. This was the conduct of these Jewish servants of God, and was highly approved of by the Almighty. The progress of sin has, in every age, been advanced by the determined union of its supporters. God has appointed a way by which all this may be met and overcome, namely, a determined union amongst all the followers of the Lamb. Though the number of Christians has ever been small in comparison of the overwhelming masses of ungodly men, yet truth and righteousness must in due time prevail, and the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the seas. There is no doubt a decided and close union among real Christians, whether it is externally visible or not. It is not only the duty of all Christians to feel a deep interest in each other's prosperity, but they cannot be Christians without feeling such an interest; and what is required is, that this union be as open and manifest as it is real and unalterable. The ministers of truth are especially bound to stand up for the cause of God in stormy times. Theirs is the post of responsibility and danger. They are the standard-bearers. But still, all Christians are bound, as they value God and truth, a glorious eternity, and the immortal souls of their brethren, to aid their ministerial efforts, by speaking often one to another words of encouragement, consolation and reproof. We might go over all the different situations in which a Christian may be placed, and show how the words of a friend may inspire with comfort; for as iron sharpeneth iron, so doth the face of a man the countenance of his friend. In all circumstances it is the duty of Christians to speak one to another; for a word fitly spoken, how good it is; and this is one of the means appointed by God for saving souls from death, and promoting the sanctification of His people. 2. God not merely remembers, but will reward those who thus promote the salvation of His people, and retain their holiness amidst abounding iniquity, and in illustrating this point the great advantage of holiness will appear. Decided Christians are exceedingly precious in the sight of God. God gives us to believe that when at last He comes down to exhibit to the world His glorious majesty, and when all the princes of many generations must meet together, and all the potentates of hell must come to see the glorious spectacle—nothing fairer will there be, nothing more precious and beautiful, nothing which illustrates more the dignity and glory of His power, His love, and His attributes, than the members of the Christian Church, fair and glorious, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing. Or take the other figure. We all know how tender is the affection of parents for their children. It reigns amongst all the creatures of God. Even the utmost cruelty, the most base ingratitude, is unable to quench a father's love. And the eternal Jehovah gives us to believe that, as parents write the names of their children in their sacred books, so He writes the names of His on the palms of His hands; they are ever before Him. "I will spare them as a man spareth his son that serveth him." The time is fast approaching when the reign of delusion will end for ever; when this strange scene, in which holiness is oppressed and sin apparently triumphant, shall change, light coming out of darkness, order out of confusion, the wicked being driven away in their wickedness, the chosen ones of God brought forth from their obscurity, that they may shine as the jewels in our Saviour's crown, as the stars for ever and ever. (*James Begg, A.M.*) "*Speaking to one another*" of holy things :—These persons speak of God and God's dealings, because this is the subject they are thinking upon; because their hearts are full of God and His doings; because they reverence and fear God. How many thus spoke to one another in Malachi's days we do not know. If it was the duty of God's servants, before the appearing of Christ, thus to keep up their hopes and strengthen one another, ought not God's servants, now that He has appeared, now to speak to one another

about the performances and promises of Christ? That surely is our duty. If our hearts are full of Christ, can we help talking about Christ to those with whom we constantly live? The speaking about God and Christ, about religion and heaven, I am recommending, is the speaking of them in plain, natural, hearty language; the speaking of them because you think of them, and feel deeply their importance. To speak about these things in phrases imitated from others is a vile and almost profane practice; it is certain to lead to self-deceit, and the mistake of talking for doing, of sounds for realities, of lip-religion for heart-religion. No talking comes from the heart, or goes to the heart, that is not plain, natural, and unforced. Regularly maintained silence is impossible if you feel deeply. If you are regularly silent, you do not feel deeply. (*T. K. Arnold.*)

Christian fellowship in a backsliding Church.—The temple was built when Malachi wrote, and the Divine ordinances were established there; but few were devout and sincere worshippers. The priests were given to secularising tendencies; many professed worshippers were guilty of sacrilege. This is a dark picture. It is relieved by the few “zealous for the Lord of hosts.” These, by their invincible faith in God, by the oneness of their unity, and by the holiness and frequency of their fellowship, rebuked the infidelity of the period. I. TRUE PIETY MAY EXIST IN A CORRUPT CHURCH. This Church was corrupt. The priests were unfaithful to their sacred trust. The people were guilty of treacherous dealing, of departing from the Divine ordinance, and of seeking to justify this manifold wickedness before God. But a few had genuine piety. 1. They “feared the Lord.” This was a filial fear. The sinner fears God because of the penal consequences of sin. The fear of the Christian springs from different considerations, filial not slavish. 2. They “thought upon His name.” Here we have devout meditation. (1) Pious meditation is possible to all. (2) It is profitable to all. Our piety will be dwarfed if this duty is neglected. “His name.” Every appellation of Jehovah is calculated to inspire the Christian with confidence and courage. II. CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP MAY BE MAINTAINED IN A DEGENERATE SOCIETY. These pious Jews had communion with each other. 1. They “spoke one to another” words of encouragement. There may be fellowship without words. There is a heart fellowship. Then the countenance speaks. 2. They spoke “often.” Then they must have assembled often. The topics of conversation are not recorded, but “out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh.” III. GOD ENCOURAGES THE FAITHFUL TO MAINTAIN CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP IN THE TIME OF THE CHURCH’S DEGENERACY. 1. He delights in their fellowship; listens to and permanently records their conversation. 2. He rewards with present security and eternal salvation. They are God’s “jewels” in the highest sense, who are faithful when many in the Church backslide. (*E. D. Solomon.*)

Christian friendship.—I. THE TIMES OF MALACHI. The nation had sunk into a state of political degradation, and had become successively subject to the Persians, Syrians, Romans. It is precisely that political state in which national virtues do not thrive, and national decay is sure. Illustrate—Italy, Spain. There was a want of unity, manhood, and simple virtues. It was a state in which there was no visible Divine interference. Except this solitary voice of Malachi, prophecy had hushed her harp. What was given to Israel in that period? Retrospect, in the sublime past which God had given her for her experience. Prospect, in the expectation of better times. And between these two there was a pause. They were left by God to use the grace and knowledge already given by Him. This is parallel to God’s usual modes of dealing. A pause after every revelation until the next. So in the natural world, so in human life; between its marked lessons there is a pause in which we live upon past experience—looking back and looking on. We live in the world’s fourth great pause. Miracles have ceased. Prophecy is silent. The Son of God is ascended. Apostles are no longer here to apply infallible judgment to each new circumstance as it arises. We are left to the great Gospel principles which have been already given, and which are to be our food till the next flood of God’s Spirit, the next revelation—that which is known as the Second Advent. II. THE CONDUCT OF DIFFERENT CLASSES IN THESE EVIL TIMES. 1. Some lived recklessly. 2. Others lived uselessly, because despairingly. 3. A few compared with one another their hopes, and sought strength in Christian communion and fellowship. This communion of saints is twofold: it includes church fellowship and personal friendships. Christian friendship is a blessing, as the interchange of Christian hope and Christian feeling. And it is a mighty

instrument in guarding against temptation. It is a safeguard in the way of example, and also a standard of opinion. Cultivate familiar intimacy only with those who love God and good. (*F. W. Robertson.*) *Christian friendship*.—To the majority of the nation of Israel God seemed to have utterly forsaken His people, and few believed Malachi as he faithfully proclaimed God's intention of sending a Messenger, a Refiner, a Purifier, in the person of the Messiah, who was to fulfil the prophecies of the last and of all previous prophets. This prevailing unbelief was the cause, as it always is, of widespread wickedness. Malachi's picture of his time is a dark one. Nevertheless, a remnant was left. A few did believe in the coming of Christ, and lived in preparation for the Refiner's fire. What were the means which, by God's grace, enabled them to resist the temptations of an unbelieving and a wicked generation? Holy friendship. Knowing that union is strength in religious as well as in secular things, they formed close friendships one with another, and often spoke together of their hopes and fears. In forming friendships, young people would do well to remember that the friendship of the bad, or of those who never try to live at all above their world, is enmity against God. Another rule is not to choose friends on a low principle and from a low motive. The best definition of a friend is, "He who makes you do what you can." It is by their unconscious influence that friends help every moment to mar or make our characters. Our Lord did not so much enjoin it as take it for granted that His followers would always strengthen and encourage each other by praying and speaking together. Those who are Christians in earnest gradually lead one another on to higher views of life and duty; a knowledge of their mutual faults makes them unreserved to each other; they are not afraid of saying all that is in their hearts; they make known to each other their particular difficulties and temptations; they feel that they are engaged in the same struggle; and each is often able to give assistance to the other on one point, whilst by others he may himself require to be aided in his turn. (*E. J. Hardy, M.A.*) *Religious conversation*.—There was something, even in those times, which is worthy of our imitation. They spake of religion, of God and duty. The subject in which men have a common interest is religion. The subject is all-important and momentous. It is important as our intellectual and immortal nature. If it becomes us to speak often to one another on the business of this fleeting life, it much more becomes us to speak often one to another on the business of a life that will never end. But notwithstanding the importance of religion, there is comparatively little religious conversation. Much of what has been so termed has been perverted. It has been worn as a mask by hypocrisy. It has cherished and manifested the complacency of spiritual pride. It has served as a vehicle for denunciation and anathematising to bigotry and intolerance. It has fostered the religion of the fancy, cold in heart and powerless in conduct. Then in the domestic circle, in the confidential hour, let religion have its place. Conversation has great influence upon conduct. But let us not forget that "for everything there is a season." We are at all seasons to be religious; but there are times when religious topics may not be well introduced. While the Christian should watch for opportunities to advance the cause of religion, he should be careful not to expose it to the ribaldry of profaneness or the sneer of folly. (*C. Lowell.*) *Religious conversation an evidence of the general Christian temper and spirit*.—In these words we have it plainly signified to us—I. THAT SERIOUS CONFERENCE AMONGST GOOD PERSONS IS PECULIARLY NEEDFUL IN THOUGHTLESS AND IRRELIGIOUS TIMES. If we express no concern for the interests of piety and virtue in our words we shall be justly suspected of having but little in our thoughts. We should learn to judge of ourselves by our common talk, as well as by our actions. By speaking seriously on proper occasions we shall bind ourselves to act so, else the inconsistency will shame us. We are strangely apt to grow languid and flat in our good inclinations; it is therefore important that we should stir up each other, which a word in season or a mere hint may do surprisingly. Even where we can receive little instruction we may enjoy great satisfaction from intimacy of acquaintance with those who think and act and hope and expect as we do. Some society we must have. On seeking that of good persons we shall have less need to spend much of our time with the bad; and be less hurt by that portion which we are obliged to give up to them. It is not necessary that the whole conversation of religious persons, when they are together, be on the subject of religion. The bare choice of such company and acquaintance is, of itself, a mutual incitement to persevere and be active.

Their discourse, on every subject, will be regulated by the laws of religion. But we need not be so shy, as we commonly are, on the head of religion. II. THAT GOD OBSERVES, AND WILL REWARD IT. He hears indeed everything, and forgets nothing. The prophet means that He takes a gracious notice of this particularly, among other good actions of His servants. Persons may, by concealing to which side they belong, escape some little persecution, and secure some little interests; but while the disposer of all things gives them their desire in these respects, He sends leanness into their souls. Our religion is not to be dissembled but avowed. Application to present occasion. Beneficial as pious discourse and consultation is in general, the benefit may both be increased to ourselves and to others by our uniting into regular societies for the more constant intercourse of mutual edification and support of religious behaviour. (*Archbishop Secker.*) *The faithful in dark days*:—History has few darker pictures than the closing scenes of the Jewish dispensation. Reading the record, we watch the death-agony of a world. Judaism, like all noble things which have abased and degraded themselves, died a hard and terrible death. The heathen world was full enough of suffering; but its anguish was unto life, however sharp the birth pangs; the anguish of the Jewish state was unto death, and fearful were the throes. Malachi lived when the nation was far advanced on the apostate's path. The next great act in the Divine drama would be the coming of the great and terrible "day of the Lord." But amidst the dissolute and reprobate throng there were a few men of Divine mould; like the soul in the flesh, they kept it from rotting utterly. In the darkest hours of human history God is never without a few to serve Him; the more loyally, the more intensely, because of the impiety and profligacy around. There are but a few in any age that live after the divinest pattern; whose springs are all in God, whose hopes are all in heaven; who know that their mission in the world is ministry; who live, like Christ, that they may bless and save. Such have a communion with the Lord, and with each other, of which the world knows nothing. Godliness is here presented as the firm basis of confederation and communion. The godly are truly confederate, and they alone. There is no purer joy than that which springs from the discovery of like-mindedness, mind meeting mind, and heart meeting heart in sympathy. Man yearns to be confederate with man. There is but one confederation which is real and solid to the depths, the confederation of godly souls for godly ends. All other combinations perish. In every evil confederation there is the principle of discord. There is schism in every unholy alliance. This is the godly enterprise of every age, to demonstrate the vital force of godly confederacy. Such know what speech means. Speech, like friendship, is essentially holy, and lends not all its strength to the uses of sin. Evil cannot speak out. The faithful can speak and speak out; their words ring true as the metal of their own spirits. They speak often one to another; their speech fans the flame of love and resolution, and lays up for the sterner times of trial rich stores of consolation and hope. Nor are we left to guess at their themes. They thought upon His name; the reality of the existence, and the reign of the righteous and almighty Lord. 1. His holy name. 2. His awful name. 3. His precious promises. 4. His immutable truth. Thus they strengthened themselves. Thus they made confederacy and communion; a confederacy which did not perish in the wreck, but was prolonged through ages, and brought forth out of its bosom the promised Messiah, the Saviour of the world. (*Baldwin Brown, B.A.*) *Christians in conversation*:—They that feared the Lord spake often one with another. It is strange, one has said, that what is every man's chief concern should be so few men's conversation. How we shrink from talk about the soul and eternity, about the pilgrim way and the celestial city, about God and Christ! What a poor book Bunyan's great allegory would be, if the travellers to Zion never had opened their hearts to each other as they paced the King's high road. The book to which I owe so much had scarcely been worth the reading. What a different life Bunyan himself would have led, if the Lord's people had had nothing to say to one another about His grace to them. It was, you remember, the talk of three or four poor women sitting in the sun on Bedford Street, who spake as if joy did make them speak, it was this which convinced him that he was still outside the family and the fold of the Good Shepherd. There may be listeners of whom I am not aware, when I recount the great things my Saviour has done. There is one Listener of whom I can be sure. The Lord hearkens and hears, and a book of remembrance is written before Him. (*A. Smellie.*) *Christianity, a social religion*:—When

Wesley the great preacher was returning to Oxford, tired and discouraged with his work, and with strong leanings towards a life of seclusion, he travelled some miles to see a "serious man." "Sir," said this person in words which Wesley never forgot, "you tell me you wish to serve God and go to heaven. Remember you cannot serve Him alone, you must find companions and help them, the Bible knows nothing of solitary religion." Wesley joined the "Holy Club," and his subsequent institution of societies shows how apt a learner he was. **A book of remembrance was written.**—*Memory*:—There is reason to believe that memory never loses anything, but that it retains, and may reproduce, when the right string is touched, every thought, impression, and event of our whole past lives. The well-ascertained phenomena of delirium, insanity, and other unusual forms of consciousness, furnish ample demonstration of this statement. In our usual state of mind, things do not indeed return to us uncalled, nor yet do they come at once when sought, but obey certain laws of suggestion or association, which retard the action of the memory, as the balance-wheel does the motions of a watch. But in certain conditions of consciousness, the balance-wheel is taken off, the usual laws of suggestion are suspended, the full flow of memory takes the place of the scanty jet of recollection, and the whole past rushes spontaneously upon the mind. But we need not go beyond our own familiar experience to verify this view. Revisit some scenes of early life, and what intensely vivid remembrances take shape, hue, and voice! The past never dies, though, in the common routine of life, we have to a degree the keys of memory in our own hands, and may admit or exclude recollections at pleasure. There are seasons, and those not rare, when, without the power of choice, we are liable to inundations from the good or evil, the sweet or bitter, of the past, promiscuously. In seasons of sorrow the past always utters its voices. When the hand of providence is heavy upon us, if the past has been stained with guilt, we need no inscription upon the wall to make our knees smite together and our souls tremble. There is nothing more true to universal experience than the self-reproaching communings of Joseph's brethren when they felt themselves surrounded by imminent perils in a strange land. A vast amount of remorse mingles with human grief, and drugs to the utmost with gall and wormwood the cup of sorrow. But compare, with the sad retrospect which providence forces upon the guilty, the rich reminiscences which crowded Job's mind, when health, riches, and children were all taken from him. Most of all, death, as it is passing the book of memory over to the register of eternity, rehearses its records in the ear fast closing to the outward world. Is it within our power to lay up remembrances that will give peace and pleasure? It is not events, but our own traits of character and conduct alone, that are capable of giving us anguish in the remote retrospect. It is astonishing how smooth the roughest ways of providence look at a little distance. If shadows gather about our dying bed, they will be shadows of our negligences, follies, and sins. But if our lives have been faithful, devout, and loving, then will the remembrance of what we were through the grace of God, and the testimony of a good conscience glancing to and fro through the years that are gone, give peace and triumph to our departing spirits, and enable us to feel that God is taking us to a rest for which He had first fitted us. A recent German writer, in a fictitious sketch, introduces a worthy youth as compiling a book of pleasant experiences to be read for his comfort at the hour of death. Such a book it concerns us all to write, not on paper, but on the surer and more lasting tablet of a memory that cannot die. Show the bearing this view of memory has on the doctrine of a future righteous retribution. St. John says: "I saw the dead, both small and great, stand before God. And the books were opened," &c. Out of what books can they be thus judged, except those of memory,—books written by themselves, but preserved by God, and opened at the solemn hour of death for their acquittal or condemnation? If the past is to be thus brought to light, may not memory be the prime minister of God's retributive justice,—the worm that never dies, the fire that is never quenched, in the sinner's soul,—the peace of God, that passeth understanding, to the pure and faithful spirit? Of the power of memory for good or evil, we have in this life ample experience from the torn and scattered leaves of its book, with which recollection furnishes us. Imagine the abandoned sinner full in the presence of his God, no sentence passed upon him but that which he is constrained to pass upon himself, no fire let loose upon him, but that which memory can kindle. Memory isolates him, makes him both afraid and ashamed to trust either God or man, bids him dread the frown of the

Almighty, and shrink from the scorn of his brethren. Pass to the right hand of the Judge. Contemplate a truly humble, devout, exemplary Christian, with the holy thoughts and good deeds of a life of piety spread out before him, not veiled, as they were on earth, by the self-abasement of a lowly spirit, but sparkling in heaven's pure sunlight, seen of angels, owned by the benignant Redeemer, approved by God the Judge of all. Moreover, as his earthly life is thus reviewed in heaven, he sees not only each act itself, but its happy, glorious, perhaps still widening and brightening results. Did he sow a seed of humble charity? He sees not the seed, but the tree which has sprung from it. Did he cast his bread upon the waters? He sees not the bread, but the hungering souls whom it has nourished. Did he labour, and pray, and live, for the salvation of souls? He sees not his efforts, but their fruits, going forth it may be, even for the healing of the nations. But it may be said, the best of men have been, to a greater or less degree, sinners; and if memory be perfect and entire, while the pious look back with pleasure on their good deeds, must not the remembrance of their folly and sin cloud their joy, and mingle strains of sadness with their songs of rapture? But surely to the awakened memory of the consistently virtuous, in the world to come, worthy and holy thoughts and deeds must so occupy the foreground, as to throw follies and sins completely into the shade. Then, too, against every disobedient purpose and act there will be written in the book of memory the cancelling vows of contrition that succeeded it, and the holy resolutions that forbade its repetition. The sins of the exemplary and devout will be to them in heaven as the sins of our infancy are to us now. If then a "book of remembrance" is kept, how vigilant the prospect of its pages being brought to light should make us—how prayerful against secret faults—how watchful against besetting sins! (*A. P. Peabody.*) *The book of remembrance*.—I. THE SAINTS' REMEMBRANCE OF GOD. 1. We have a common principle. The fear of the Lord was the bond that united those to whom the prophet here makes allusion. 2. There was frequent communion. There was an oft and repeated meeting of the faithful. We shall always find in the history of the Church of Christ that the most pious have ever been earnest and persevering in their public religious exercises. 3. We have a repeated confession. They spake of the things which pertained to God. The only Father-confessor to whom we should make known our wants, and confess our sins, is God. There was mutual instruction. There was great sympathy aroused. II. GOD'S REMEMBRANCE OF HIS SAINTS. 1. Special acts of piety are specially remembered. 2. The Almighty does not pass by the doings of men without any regard to the character of those doings. Our book of remembrance is being written. The life we lead will meet us as a resurrection of forgotten acts. (*H. G. Parrish, B.A.*) *God's book of remembrance*.—The prophet is here speaking of the conduct and reward of those who remained faithful to God at a time of great national apostasy. Such a time had, in the providence of God, been permitted to cast its dark shadow over the people of Israel. The course of their history shows that the recurrence of certain evils brought on, as by natural sequence, a repetition of punishment, or a fresh chastisement. Violated law brought in due time its appropriate punishment; and in this way God's moral government, as it were, rectified itself to the eyes of men. The transgressor never got off with impunity; but the present seemed to be an exception. The ungodly were allowed to go on in sin without calling down any token of Divine displeasure. They even prospered in sin. God's people had begun to think the service of God to be vanity. What profit had the righteous man in walking mournfully before the Lord? The prosperity of the wicked became a stumbling-block to the righteous. Those who continued faithful to God were perplexed when they saw the success of sin, and so they met to hold mutual intercourse, and to impart mutual encouragement. They would help each other to fathom the providential mystery. Our short-sightedness keeps us from seeing beyond the present, otherwise we would perceive a higher good than earthly greatness, and true success would be tested not by outward conditions, but by moral character. I. THE CONDUCT OF THE FAITHFUL AT A TIME OF APOSTASY. Instead of envying at the wicked, and bewailing their own condition, they met for mutual encouragement, and for the defence of God's righteous dealings against blasphemers. Their object was not only mutual encouragement, but the vindication of their God from the aspersions cast upon His name. What a beautiful picture is this of Christian fellowship and fidelity; and happily, even the darkest days of the Church have been brightened by examples

of a like kind. Illustrate—Catacombs, Waldenses, Covenanters, &c. God was subjecting these men who feared Him to a Divine test. They took their united stand on common ground—the fear of God. At the peril of their lives they bore testimony and were not ashamed. There are times when such men are specially needed. Men to stand up for the defence of the truth; not merely devout believers, but able apologists.

II. THE LORD KEPT A BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE FOR RECORDING THE NAMES AND DEEDS OF THE FAITHFUL. In speaking of a book, we do not insist on an actual volume. The expression is an accommodation to our modes of speech. He who is Omniscient needs no book to keep Him in mind of His people's services. Their deeds were as particularly recorded as if actually written in a book. The object of this record is to form the basis of judgment. According to what is written there, so will men be rewarded or punished. Nothing will be left unnoticed that will add to the final award. As a guarantee of the correctness of every entry in that book, we are assured that the Lord Himself hearkens and hears. Nothing will escape His searching scrutiny. The contents of this book may be regarded as a sort of moral diary, of which we ourselves are the unconscious recorders. By our conduct we are supplying material for each impression made upon it. We ourselves must be regarded as the writers. Surely this thought is fitted to impress us with the solemnity of life! The impression once made, no power of ours can blot it out. Seek, then, to do something that will keep the memory fragrant when you are gone, something for which God will own you at last.

III. THE REWARD PROMISED TO THE FAITHFUL. The faithful are likened to "jewels," and to "sons." The two ideas are "preciousness" and "likeness." They who were once polluted and impure are now as jewels, clean and bright, and they who were once rebels have now become sons. A jewel is a precious stone, ranked by its owner among his most valuable possessions. Its value depends partly on its nature, and partly on the labour bestowed on it in the process of refinement. What has God done for His people? They are now the crown-jewels of the King of kings. The highest reward of all is, that God's faithful people will be owned as sons. This involves that God's people will be like Him, and will be His heirs. The furnace of discipline will manifest the likeness by consuming the unlikeness. (*D. Merson, M.A., B.D.*)

The Lord's book of remembrance.—The fidelity and steadfastness of man must rest on the fidelity and steadfastness of God. "He is faithful who hath promised," is a principle which underlies the whole relation of God the Redeemer to our race. We have considered the condition of the faithful few in Malachi's dark days. The sadder their estate, the darker the night around them, the more closely did they associate for communion and concert. The Lord was not unobservant of them. It was the Lord for whom they were enduring, who nerved them to endure. Three main features of description.

I. THE BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE. Probably the rudiment of this idea is to be found in Ezra vi. 1-5. There was a roll found, on a critical occasion, "in the place which is in the province of the Medes," the remembrance of which the Jews would not willingly let die. What concerns us is the fundamental thought. It is precisely what the Lord declared of old to Moses, "I know thee by name, and thou hast found grace in My sight." Those who, like all these men, stake all on fidelity to God, are the upper ten thousand of the universe, the peerage of heaven, throughout eternity. God knows them by name as living persons. As friends He holds them dear. God's love is not for qualities, abstractions, any more than man's. He caused to be written in His book of remembrance, not a catalogue of their principles, but their names, their designation, as living human souls. Trampled in the mire on earth, their names should be read out in heaven.

II. THE RECOGNITION OF THEIR SONSHIP. Perhaps the saddest thought of the righteous, in the midst of an ungodly world, springs from the sense of their own imperfectness, the feebleness of their witness, the languor of their zeal, the poverty of their work. The word son—"his own son"—reassures. A father's love wears out and wanes not; a child's feeblest efforts please him better than a stranger's bravest work. "He will spare them," in the furnace of discipline; the Lord will temper its fierceness. In the battlefield of life, the Lord will be their strength and their shield. In the shadow of death, His rod and staff shall comfort them there. "They shall be Mine,"—Mine for ever, "in the day when I make up My jewels."

III. THE DAY WHEN THE BOOK SHALL BE BROUGHT FORTH. "Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just" is God's answer to the cry of many a faithful, patient spirit, who wins no recompense on earth but a cross. There is a life which can

only be justified at the resurrection of the just. There is a life which has its full recompense here. "But thou shalt be recompensed," man of many tears, cares, and sorrows, weary and heavy laden. Long have the gems been buried in dust and darkness, encased in crusts of stone, enveloped in shrouds of vanity. The day comes when the Lord shall rend the shroud and crush the crust to fragments, and reveal His jewels before the universal gaze. (*Baldwin Brown, B.A.*)

And that thought upon His name.—*Love to the name of the Lord*.—In a time of general corruption, when the priests themselves had depraved the law, and were enemies to true religion, and the common people were like them, there were a few of another spirit. Observe their character—such as "feared the Lord." What they did: "spake often one to another." They delighted in each other's good. How their minds were employed: "They thought upon His name." They were concerned for God's glory, and grieved over the dishonour of His name. What the Lord did for them: "He hearkened and heard." It was "written before Him," according to the custom of eastern kings, who kept records of all that was done for their honour.

I. WHAT IS MEANT BY THINKING ON THE NAME OF THE LORD IN A WAY THAT HE APPROVES? This expression is descriptive of the nature of true religion. What is repentance toward God, but thinking on His name with grief for having dishonoured it. What is faith in Christ, but thinking on His name with delight, as revealed in the Gospel. What is love to God, but thinking on His name affectionately, and with the highest satisfaction. More especially, it includes an earnest and habitual concern for God's cause and interest in the world, and for the spread of the Gospel.

1. If we think on the name of the Lord in a way that He approves, all we do in religion will be directed to His glory. **2.** We shall reckon no sacrifice too great for it. **3.** We shall seek our own spiritual advantage in subordination to it. If we take care of God's honour, He will take care of our peace.

II. IN WHAT MANNER DOES GOD REMEMBER THOSE WHO REMEMBER HIM AND THINK UPON HIS NAME? **1.** The Lord generally employs those who love His name as instruments in promoting His glory. **2.** In seeing His name glorified, they find their own reward. **3.** Their labours shall be remembered for good in this life, and even when they are gone to the grave. **4.** At the last day the Judge will read out their names. (1) There is no true religion but where the name of the Lord is loved and adored. (2) No hope of being useful in the cause of God without a portion of this spirit. (*The Preacher.*)

The Christian's thoughts of God, and God's estimate of the Christian.—

I. WHAT THE CHRISTIANS OF THAT DAY THOUGHT OF GOD. **1.** They "feared the Lord." In the Old Testament the true saints are described, not as those who love God, but as those who fear Him. In the New Testament saints are those who love God, rather than fear Him. The fear of the Lord is often used to express the whole of real religion, both in the holy affections which it communicates to the heart, and in the cheerful obedience which it produces on the life. It should never be forgotten that everything in religion is practical. Its great design is to conform us to the image of the Son of God. **2.** They "spake often one to another." No doubt they frequently conversed about their recent deliverance from captivity. Sometimes they might speak to each other in the language of caution. It frequently happens that others can see dangers when we ourselves are blind to them. Our Lord sent forth His disciples, two by two, that they might caution and encourage each other. We are to bear one another's burdens; but it requires much wisdom and humility to do this well. It is our duty, not only to administer reproof and caution, but also to receive them in the same spirit. Sometimes they spoke to each other in the language of encouragement. By conversation with our fellow-Christians, we find out that no temptation has taken us but such as is common to men. God has chosen all His people in the furnace of affliction. Christian conversation encourages the heart. But, in intercourse of this kind, a peculiar delicacy and sanctity of feeling must be maintained, or we shall injure rather than benefit each other. **3.** These people thought upon God's name. Our Saviour has told us, that "where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also." The bias of the Christian's affections is heavenward.

II. WHAT GOD THOUGHT OF THEM. He hearkened and heard. This means God attentively heard what His people said of Him to each other. What is it to which the Lord listens? He remembers His people. The saints are God's treasure. He spares them; rejoices over them; sanctifies them. He will spare them in the great day. There is much in this text encouraging to ministers, and much suggestive of self-inquiry. (*George Weight, B.A.*) *Christian*

conversation :—Bishop Thompson says, “Some Christians are like the rivers that flow into the Arctic Ocean—frozen over at the mouth.” Have we not reason to suspect that the occasion in both cases is the same—coldness? I. Christian conversation PLEASES GOD. It is plainly indicated that God is pleased when His people talk to each other tenderly about Him; that He listens. Why are Christians to-day so dumb? Love is not a dumb or silent thing. Love speaks. Why this hesitation when we speak of religion? Does it not seem strangely inconsistent in us? “The Lord hearkened and heard it.” He listened while His children fondly talked of Him. Does it not please you to overhear some kind word spoken of yourself? Do not think your Heavenly Father indifferent to praise. He loves to see gratitude in our hearts; it greatly pleases Him to hear us talking one to another about His goodness. II. Christian conversation BLESSES US. Nothing does one’s own heart so much good as speaking kindly of another. Expressing love ever increases it. III. Christian conversation BLESSES OTHERS. There are too many dumb Christians; for there is a vast power in our tongues if we will but use them aright. Who can estimate the power of kindly words to touch the heart and mould the life? (*Pulpit Treasury*.) *The book of God’s peers* :—This book of remembrance, like the jewels referred to in the next verse, was doubtless suggested by the customs of ancient courts. The king used to bring out and display his jewels on State occasions, and nearly every Eastern monarch appointed an official journalist to keep a record of passing events. He was called the Court chronicler, and his business was to write the history of his times, especially the notable names and incidents. There was little room for the annals of the poor or for anything that touched the life of the common people. Now the prophet lifts the thought above that Court chronicler and book to another Book which is written before the King of kings, and he intimates that the doings recorded there belong to a different class: socially, much lower; morally and religiously, far higher. The pages of that other book are not devoted to the men who fill the exalted stations and make a great display of wealth and power; because, as the prophet tells us, in those times the high places were ruled by injustice, immorality, and irreligion. But there were a few people whom the searching eyes of God followed with tender love and approval, for the most part obscure people, lost in the crowd, and remote from the world of fashion; people whom the Court scribe would dismiss as so much dirt. But they were the only objects of interest to the greater King, for they alone in those godless times were living soberly, righteously, reverently, walking humbly in the fear of God, keeping the old religious fires burning and bravely maintaining their hold on faith and prayer through obloquy and persecution. They were like the few in Sardis who had not defiled their garments. Now, I need not tell you that this is not the only mention in the sacred Scriptures of that Book of Remembrance. In fact, we hear of it more or less all through the Bible. It appears as far back as Moses, who spoke of those who are written in God’s Book; it is found more than once in the Psalms of David, who trusts that his very tears will be found written in the Book; it occurs in Isaiah and in other minor prophets, and it is always referred to, I think, as the Book which God keeps to record the doings and perhaps the sufferings also of His faithful ones who are forgotten or despised by the world. The thought is taken up and carried on by our blessed Lord Himself. Jesus says, “Their names are written in heaven”; and a dozen times at least in the Epistles and the Apocalypse there is mention made of certain unrecognised Christian workers, holy women and others, whose names are written in what is called the Book of Life, or the Lamb’s Book of Life. I venture to say to you this first, THAT THAT BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE MUST BY THIS TIME BE A PONDEROUS AND MANY-VOLUMED LIBRARY, if all the unchronicled workers and saints have been written down in it, because they are a company which no man can number. The saints whose names you find in the calendar and who figure in Church history are comparatively few, and they were not always the best and most saintly of their class. Some of them got canonised and admitted to the calendar by favouritism of pope and cardinal, and by what we vulgarly call backstairs influence, rather than by election and sanction of God. There were ten thousand times more, and perhaps better, saints whose names are only in heaven’s calendar; in fact, the real history of God’s kingdom has never been written by any human pen. You read the so-called history of the Church, ecclesiastical history, as produced by the labours and researches of a Mosheim or Neander, and it is often exceedingly unedifying reading and woefully disappointing. If it were the story of Christ’s

Church, it ought to be in the main the story of lowly, self-forgetting, Christ-like men and women. Instead of that, you find the greater part of those pages devoted to the record of ambitions, envyings, strifes, heresies. You find there the carnal, the secular, and the worldly themes almost everywhere predominant. The true and beautiful story of the Church is not written there or in any book which is accessible to us, it is only written in God's Book of Remembrance; for surely the real makers and builders and defenders of the Church have been in all ages the men and women who patiently suffered for it, earnestly laboured for it, without thinking of gain or distinction. Those in all ages have kept the Church alive, preserved it as the salt of the earth, the light of the world. And yet they are not even known by name. There were a few notable men, never to be forgotten—Cranmer, Latimer, Ridley, Hooker—but most of them were obscure—cobblers, bachelors, weavers, unlearned Bible readers, lay preachers—and beneath the notice of the scribe. Their names are written in letters of glory in God's Book of Remembrance. II. Now, so it has been all through Church history. I venture to say to you, secondly, that **THE SAME THING SUBSTANTIALLY IS TRUE TO-DAY.** Most of the noble and Christ-like deeds—all but an infinitesimal part of them—have no chance whatever of getting written down in any book except that unseen book on which the unseen hands are busy. Most of the brave, humble, self-denying lives which are spent in the service of Christ and humanity find no place whatever in the world's prints. I should think you all know that it is not always the best things that get most talked about; it is not always the grandest and divinest things that are pushed into notoriety and reported. A prayer-meeting is never reported; at least, I have never seen one reported. A round of visits among the sick, the sorrowful, and the dying—that never gets into print. A brave confession of Christ in the midst of an unbelieving company—nobody thinks of writing that down. If you are ambitious to have your names passed from mouth to mouth in the streets, and printed in large type in all the public journals, there are various ways of getting it done, some of them not too creditable. You can accomplish it by an extraordinary display of genius, or an extraordinary display of folly, and one will serve quite as well as the other. You won't do it by keeping the Ten Commandments, but you may do it by breaking some of them. III. Now, may I say to you, lastly, that **THIS CHEERING TRUTH CONTAINED IN OUR TEXT IS GIVEN TO BE AN INCENTIVE AND AN INSPIRATION TO ALL WHO ARE ENGAGED IN RELIGIOUS WORK, BUT ESPECIALLY TO THE LESS KNOWN AND TO THE UTTERLY UNDISTINGUISHED AMONG THEM,**—and they always form, as you know too well, the vast majority? Most of you have to continue in well-doing without the least chance of flattering human recognition. A few leaders in religious work do shine a little, perhaps, in the public eye; that is, the generals in a great army are sometimes put on a pedestal, and they gain a little glory, but the rank and file, the private soldiers who do the rough marching, and most of the rough fighting too, there is very little glory for them either in ordinary warfare or in the greater warfare of the Captain of our salvation. It is very true of most of you, that if you are anxious to gain human praise for your fidelity to Christ, and the work you do in His name, you will be disappointed. Quiet devotion to the service of the Lord Christ does not fetch the gallery, to say the least of it; it does not bring plaudits from the pit. It is human genius that wins human praise, or intellectual cleverness, sometimes mere showiness; it is smartness that secures successes in the business world. The man who wins a walking match, or a motor-race, or a horse-race will win a hundred times more popular favour for the time being than the man who spends his life as the Divine One did who went about doing good. If in Christ's work men are dependent at all upon these things they frequently fall into dejection. Now, just think what it means to have your names and labours written in that Book of Remembrance. Well, it certainly means this—though a vast number of people would be perfectly astounded to hear it—it means that an earnest, zealous, Christ-loving, Christ-serving life, and its works of patience and faith, are deemed by heaven the things best worth recording and best deserving to be kept in remembrance. In those higher courts they are not absorbed and excited with the things that we poor mortals go mad about. Possibly they are not so profoundly interested as we are in the movements of presidents and rulers, in the startling speeches of politicians, and in the prospects of political parties, and certainly not in the revelations of the criminal court, the scandals of high life, and the result of the latest pedestrian contest. No doubt heaven sees all these things, because nothing is hid from the

all-watchful eyes, but they stir no buzz of admiration in angelic circles, you may be sure. A young man in the city steadfastly resisting its temptations and keeping himself undefiled for Jesus' sake; a maiden bringing her life and laying it at the Master's feet, and vowing to love Him first and best; a girl in the shop or factory adorning her Christian profession amidst unchristian workmates; a business man holding his conscience and integrity amid all the shady doings and untruths of the market and commercial life: these are the things which the heavenly penmen note down. We sometimes talk and, maybe, think that this Book of Remembrance—I have often heard it referred to in that way—is kept to record the base and the evil things: your own failures, the inconsistencies of your Christian life, the darker things. I declare this: the book is never once referred to in that way in the Bible. God has no wish, you may be sure, to keep a record of all failing and bad things; He has no delight in beholding, dwelling upon them. He tells us, indeed, that when our sins are once forgiven He forgets them; they are cast into the depths of the sea, and come into His mind no more. No, it is the fair and the better things of the Christian life and labours that find a place in that great book. (*J. G. Greenhough.*)

Ver. 17. *In that day when I make up My jewels.*—*The Lord's jewels*.—How much people think of their jewels. Eastern people are even more fond of jewels than we are, and Eastern ladies are even more lavishly decked with them. How people value their jewels! They count them as their chiefest treasure, so God uses the figure to make us feel how highly He thinks of us, His redeemed ones, who are more and better to Him than men's jewels can be to them. I once knew a lady who was so passionately fond of her jewels that, when the rest of the household went to church, and the house was quiet, she would go up to her bedroom, lock the door, spread out all her pearls and diamonds upon the bed, and spend her time in admiring them, one after another. Poor, foolish woman! She could not take them with her through the grave. Our children are our jewels; the friends we love are our jewels; those whom we try to bless and save become precious to us as jewels. Then whom does God count among His jewels? I. THE PENITENT. Who is humble before God. The publican in the temple was one of the Lord's jewels. II. THE RETURNING. Who is a seeker after God. The prodigal was one of the Lord's jewels. III. THE CONSECRATED. Who is wholly God's. The apostle Paul was one of the Lord's jewels. God will take care of his jewels now, and in the great day. See Christ's prayer, "None of them is lost." (*Robert Tuck, B.A.*) *Jewels*.—1. God's jewels—His people. (1) For their rarity. (2) Their beauty. (3) Their value. (4) Their preservation. 2. The means by which He collects them. (1) His word and ordinances. (2) The dispensations of His providence. (3) The influence of His Holy Spirit. 3. The period when He shall make them up. (1) At the hour of death. (2) On the day of judgment. (*G. Brooks.*) *The fear of God rewarded*.—The expression used by the prophet conveys to us a strong idea of the pleasure which our Lord will Himself experience in executing this office of "making up His jewels." He will then "see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied." We trace the idea of pleasure in the term "jewels." And they are His jewels, for He has bought them with a price, and no less a price than that of His own most precious blood. The idea of pleasure on His part in the performance of this work is completed in the expression, "make up My jewels." We see Him rejoicing that the time is come, when to the gift of grace He may add that of glory; and finally exulting that not one "of all that the Father hath given Him" is wanting to His crown. As if we might want something more closely and readily applicable than this figurative language, He adds, "And I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." In what manner are they described, who are to be the passive subjects of His mercy in that day? The first characteristic is that they "feared the Lord." This fundamental grace of godly fear is the sure and safe road to the higher attainments of love. All who will be His "jewels" there, must fear Him in some degree here, that they may love Him in perfection hereafter. To know whether you fear Him, ask yourselves, and that with searching honesty, whether you shrink from an evil thought; whether you strive manfully against your imaginations when they set in the direction of lust, malice, or covetousness; or willingly float down the current to a certain distance, only taking pains to avoid the last precipice towards which it leads. If you face Him with that holy fear, which is the result of a living faith, you will prove it, not by your thoughts and actions only, but by your words.

"Then they that feared the Lord spoke often one to another." To such God says, "They shall be Mine." Is your conversation such as to warrant your entertaining a hope that you have an interest in this gracious promise? (*J. Marriot, A.M.*) *Believers are the jewels of Christ*:—I. GOD'S REGARD FOR HIS PEOPLE. They are described as God's "jewels," therefore dear and valuable to Him; those on whom He looks with complacency; they were dearly purchased, bought with a price, infinitely above all earthly treasures. He speaks of them in an endearing manner as "My jewels." The text also gives another token of Divine regard—His sparing mercy. Every parent will fully enter into the figure here used.

II. THE TIME APPOINTED FOR THE MANIFESTATION OF THIS REGARD. "In that day." It betokens either temporal visitation, the day of death, or the day of judgment. Probably the final day is meant, when He will vouchsafe a peculiar manifestation of His favour. III. THE SECURITY BY WHICH THIS PROMISE IS CONFIRMED. This security is not of man, but of God. "They shall be Mine."

(*W. Mayers, A.M.*) *Jehovah's jewels*:—I. THE PRECIOUS IN PRINCIPLE. Regard for the greatness of God. Obedience to the commands of God. Dread of the punishment of God. Trust in the mercy of God. Fear of God is the foundation of piety; it casts out all other fear. II. THE PRECIOUS IN PRACTICE. 1. Frequent religious association. They often met together apart from the world. An expression of spiritual separation from evil society. An index of devotedness to a common purpose. 2. Concentrated mental action. "Thought upon His name." Mind the greatest thing in man. The believer sees God in all things, and his meditation of Him is sweet. Constant mutual edification—"Speak often," &c. Information, counsel, warning, encouragement. III. THE PRECIOUS IN PRIVILEGE.

1. Divine attention. "God hearkened and heard it." 2. Divine remembrance. "And a book," etc. All the services of the good registered for compensation. 3. Divine promise. Tender treatment. "I will spare." Great honour. "They shall be Mine." Great destructiveness. "Then shall ye return." (*B. D. Johns.*)

The dignity of the people of God:—1. The people of God are dignified with the Divine approbation. 2. By the Divine solicitude. 3. By the Divine security. 4. By the Divine regard. They are to Him as jewels. 5. By a Divine promise. "I will spare them." Learn from this subject full confidence in God. He has made full provision for you in the obedience and death of Jesus. He will take care of you here, and glorify you with dignity hereafter. Also learn humility; for what maketh you to differ from others but the grace of God alone? (*Hugh Allen, M.A.*)

The making up of God's jewels:—The Lord makes up His jewels—1. By the word and ordinances of His grace. The word of inspiration is the grand instrument which the Lord uses for hewing His jewels out of the rock of corrupt nature, and bringing them from the dark mine of misery to the light of everlasting felicity. It is an instrument of great power. It commands holiness, supplies motives, and presents encouragements to the mind. The exercises of praise and prayer are admirably adapted to refine and polish the soul in the beauties of holiness. 2. By the operations and dispensations of His providence. Looking at providence on a comprehensive scale, redemption is its most striking and grand display. The darkest as well as the brightest aspects of providence are necessary to the making up of God's jewels. God's own saints are often the better for being afflicted. Trials are necessary to purify the Church from corruptions, to cleanse the heart, and rectify the life of individuals, and to beautify them both severally and collectively in time, and make their character shine in the light of eternity. 3. By the work and influences of His Spirit. The word and ordinances of grace, aided by the operation and dispensations of providence, can do nothing to convert or sanctify a single soul, unless the Spirit accompany them with His blessing. Just as the hammer, or the chisel, or the saw, or the file, without the hand of the mechanic, cannot hew a single jewel out of the quarry of nature, or polish it into beauty, so without the agency of the Holy Spirit, ordinances and providences, powerful instruments though they are, cannot convince a sinner of sin, or lead him from the paths of error into the way of God. The Holy Spirit dwells in the hearts of believers to polish and fit them for shining as jewels in the mediatorial crown of glory. Let all Christians then, make a right improvement, both for their own and their brethren's sake, of God's dealings. The more faith Christians exercise, the more godly will they become; and the more godly they are here, the brighter shall they shine hereafter in that world where everlasting peace reigns, and grace never declines, where the sun of glory never sets, and where the sky of blessedness is never overcast with clouds. (*John Shoolbraid.*)

The Lord's jewels:—I. HOW MAY THE SAINTS BE COM-

PARED TO JEWELS? The word translated "jewels" (*segullah*) signifies a treasure, a peculiar treasure, as the Church of the Jews compared to all the nations of the earth. The saints of God are more excellent in the sight of God than all other men. They may be compared to jewels—1. Because of their rarity. Jewels are only found in certain places, and only worn by certain persons. So the saints are said to be "a very little flock." 2. Because they cost the Lord Jesus very dear. Jewels are costly things. Being rare, they are enhanced in price. The Son of God redeemed these jewels by His own blood. This is a price of incalculable value. 3. Because He has an infinite esteem of them. They are His treasure, and His affections are where they are. Since they were purchased by the blood of His Son, they are precious in His sight and honourable. He thinks on them with approbation, He speaks of them, and to them, with delight. 4. Because He keeps them in safety. They are set on His heart and cannot be taken away.

II. HOW SHALL THE LORD MAKE UP HIS JEWELS? This refers either to His work in His jewels in time, or to His procedure at the day of judgment. It may refer to His work of grace in taking them all from the corrupted mass of human nature. He begins the work of sanctification in them, and brings it to a glorious issue. God refines His people by His Spirit, by His word, and by His providences, till they become without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. In the last sense of the declaration, they shall be made up, when their number is completed in the day of the Lord. And they shall all be presented perfect in holiness. III. WHAT IS THE DAY ON WHICH THE LORD SHALL MAKE UP HIS JEWELS? The great and notable day of the Lord. A day which shall be the end of time, the end of the world, and of the present system of things. A day for which saints are constantly preparing, for which they wait, which they love, and to which they are hastening. (*Leumas.*)

My jewels :—Here is an inspired truth, setting forth the relation subsisting between God and His people, and illustrating His love for, and joy in, them. I. GOD'S OWN ESTIMATION OF THE REAL VALUE OF A SINCERE CHRISTIAN. He calls them His "jewels" or "His peculiar treasure." All rare and beautiful and precious things in earth and heaven are employed as metaphorical of the value God puts upon His people and the affection He bears them. A Christian man is more than a "spirit," he is a redeemed and regenerated spirit. The value of a gem is not in its composition, but in its crystallisation. Even a diamond is composed mostly of carbon, but differs from the black coal of our furnaces only in this mysterious transfiguration. And a change analogous to this has every saved soul undergone. The spiritual man has, through gracious crystallisation, become a gem, reflecting Divine light, and thus fitted for a diadem. What marvel then that God counts His people more precious than the stars, and calls them "His peculiar treasure."

II. AN EXPLANATION OF GOD'S STRANGE TREATMENT OF HIS CHILDREN. The true believer may say, "If I am thus valued, why does He so afflict me?" The text suggests the answer. After finding or purchasing a gem, the next thing is to polish it. And this is always a gentle work. Of the rarer gems the ancients supposed the cutting and polishing impossible. The large diamonds which ornamented the imperial mantle of Charlemagne are yet preserved as uncut crystals. It was only later that men learned how the diamond might be cut, by attrition with another diamond, and polished on a wheel charged with diamond dust. And herein is found the only criterion of the true gem. The service of the Christian's afflictions is twofold. They prove and they polish the spiritual gem. 1. They are necessary to prove it. There are many counterfeits in religion. Any reliable test of godliness must have power to go beneath the outward show into the real essence. 2. Even when the piety is sincere, such afflictions are useful to develop and discipline it. Before the diamond is set in a kingly crown it must be roughly pressed on the diamond wheel. All afflictions are God's means of polishing. Here we are instructed as to the seeming partiality of God's treatment of different Christians, for men may be equally pious, and alike dear to our Heavenly Father, and yet their mortal experiences be widely dissimilar. Gems are of different degrees of hardness, and are to be set in different conditions. They require very variant cutting, and unequal polishing. So with the true people of God; one is only smoothed with a file, while another must be pressed on the grinding wheel. He will not grind His jewels more than they need. III. A PREDICTION OF THE FUTURE DIGNITY AND GLORY OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD. "In the day when I make up My jewels." The reference is to the great day of Christ's coming. The metaphor is of a mighty conqueror, who, having overthrown all enemies, appears laden with spoil, leading captive his foes, marching in triumph, magnificent in regalia, over

the royal highway. Then God's saints will be gathered to Christ, and God's "jewels" be made up as precious stones into a crown, or as stars into a constellation. In that great day of manifestation the moral rather than the natural attributes of God are to be especially glorified. It is only in the economy of grace that what we may term the Divine affections are perfectly displayed. Let this fair picture be hung in our chambers of imagery. This material universe is only a great platform, erected temporarily for the coronation of Immanuel, and the redeemed spirits of the just made perfect. "God's jewels,"—or as Isaiah has it, "God's crown of glory," "God's royal diadem." The richest gems blazing in the many crowns of Immanuel will be the souls of Christ's redeemed ones—these diamonds, dug from the black caverns of death—these pearls, brought up from the stormy depths of hell—these blood-bought, grace-preserved, grief-polished "jewels of God." (*Charles Wadsworth, D.D.*) *The jewels of the King:*—

1. Jewels represent superlative value. Nature's jewels differ from God's, which are conscious and immortal. And yet by valuable things God illustrates His appreciation of His children. 2. They represent surpassing beauty. Gems are nature's loveliest gifts. In God's sight natural pales before spiritual beauty. We are only beautiful when "the beauty of the Lord our God is upon us." God's brightest earthly jewels are yet incomplete. When the cutting and burnishing are finished, they are to shine as the stars forever. 3. They represent costly and self-sacrificing toil in their discovery and ownership. When a Brazilian slave finds a gem of seventeen carats, he wins his freedom. At what enormous cost God secures a soul! 4. Their worth and beauty represent the triumphs of science and art. Diamonds are never worn in the rough. God develops the worth and spiritual beauty of His children by the ministry of suffering. No lapidary ever knew so well when and where to cut a crown jewel as does our Heavenly Father. 5. The King will gather His gems into His royal palace. God has long loaned His jewels to the communities of earth. When the sun darkens, His angels are to gather them from every land and sea. (*S. V. Leech, D.D.*) *The Lord's jewels:*—

1. This title shows the estimation in which God holds His people. In the Bible, God avails Himself of one good or beautiful thing to describe another. The Christian is like a cedar in Lebanon, the most majestic and beautiful tree in the forest. Heaven is a city of golden walls and gates of pearl. So here, in like manner, He calls His people "jewels." The emerald, the ruby, and the diamond, are the most precious and costly things in nature. These are the things which God takes to illustrate the estimation in which He holds the good. He knows the capabilities of these immortal souls, that they can be "equal to the angels," through the redemption of His Son Jesus Christ. 2. This title, "jewels," suggests a reason why God's people are sometimes so exercised by the providences of God. When diamonds and other gems are first found, they are usually covered with a dark, rusty coating, every particle of which must be removed. This process is long and expensive. Their brilliancy cannot be fairly seen without it. The famous Koh-i-noor diamond was subjected to repolishing with the help of a steam-engine for twenty-three days and twelve hours each day. So it was with Job, and Joseph, and Jacob, and many others whom God chose as His jewels. This disciplinary process is still going on in the present age, in innumerable ways, by disease, loss of property, family afflictions, &c. Ill-treatment at the hand of one we have been accustomed to esteem is especially hard to endure. But it is needed. There is nothing that can polish the diamond like the diamond itself. Two diamonds are rubbed, the one upon the other, and the dust thus obtained is used for polishing. So, by the natural constitution of the soul, and the providence of God, there may be nothing so good for polishing as afflictions sent upon us by others. They may seem to have an opposite effect for a time; may seem to ruffle our temper, and make us rebellious and antagonistic; but, by and by, through the influence of the Holy Spirit, like the vegetable oil that is mixed with the diamond dust to polish the diamond,—the Holy Spirit working with these afflictions,—our tempers will be subdued, and the "peaceable fruits of righteousness" will be worked out thereby. 3. This name which the Lord applies to His people warrants us in the belief that God will never lose sight of any one of them. To say that God would surrender one of His people, permit him to fall away and be lost, is to declare a thing which is inconsistent for God to do. But does any one say, "Good! that just suits me; I am going to live just as I please, for I shall get home to heaven at last anyhow." Then be sure that you are one of His jewels. If you are not, the result may be terribly and eternally disastrous. The truth is, that no true child of God will make

any such resolution, or entertain such a thought. There are some who do wander away from God; not, however, with a deliberate purpose so to do, but because they have been led captive by the enemy. But God will never lose sight of His "jewel," but will follow him by His Spirit and His providences, making use of those things that are best calculated to bring a rational soul back again to the fold from whence it had wandered away. (*Homer M'Vay.*) *God's crown jewels*.—**I. THE NAME BY WHICH GOD CALLS HIS PEOPLE.** "My jewels." The comparison suggests—1. The preciousness of good people. Jewels are, on account of their intrinsic worth, or historic interest, the most valuable and highly prized things on earth. God alone can comprehend the value of a soul. He knows the price which was paid for his ransom. 2. Good people are compared to jewels on account of their beauty. How the diamond sparkles and flashes! But its beauty is eclipsed when compared with the beauty of holiness which God puts upon all His saints. That beauty is not fully disclosed on earth. 3. God's people are like jewels because they need so much polishing. While a single stain of sin remains upon our souls we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. Every trial the Spirit of God employs as a means of sanctifying us, and polishing us, to shine among the crown jewels of heaven. **II. GOD CLAIMS A SPECIAL PROPERTY IN GOOD MEN.** "They shall be Mine." All souls belong to Him by creation and preservation: but true believers are His by redemption. **III. GOD WATCHES OVER HIS PEOPLE, SO THAT NOT ONE OF THEM IS LOST.** "When I make up My jewels." They are widely scattered now, but He will bring them together by and by. On the day when He shall crown Immanuel Lord of all not one of them shall be missing. (*David Winters.*) *Crown jewels*.—The Lord Jesus has been gathering up His treasures for a good while, and on the great coronation day of the judgment He will, in the presence of the assembled universe, show that the good of all ages are His crown jewels. I speak to you of the jewel-finding, the jewel-grinding, the jewel-setting. You have noticed the great difference between jewels. Let not a Christian man envy another Christian man's experience. You open the king's casket, and you see jewels of all sizes, shapes, and colours. Do not worry because you don't have the faith of that man, or the praying qualities of this, or the singing qualities of another. The trouble is that you are not willing to be ordinary gold, you want to be gold of twenty-four carats. Notice jewel-grinding. Christian character, like black spots in an amethyst, must sometimes be cleared out by the flame; it must go through the furnace. Nearly all God's jewels are crystallised tears. You can tell God's jewel, as the lapidary tells the diamond. If the breath of temptation comes on it, and soon vanishes, it is a real diamond. Note the jewel-setting. The lapidary gets the gems in the right shape, gathers them on his table, and then puts them into head-bands, or hilts of swords, or into crowns. The Lord Jesus will gather up His people, and before the assembled universe their splendour shall shine forth. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *Gem formation*.—In nature there is hardly a stone that is not capable of crystallising into something purer and brighter than its normal state. Coal, by a slightly different arrangement of its particles, is capable of becoming the radiant diamond. The slag cast out from the furnace as useless waste, forms into globular masses of radiating crystals. The very mud on the road, trampled under foot as the type of all impurity, can be changed by chemical art into metals and gems of surpassing beauty. God can make jewels out of the most worthless rubbish. Let the cases of John Newton, of the woman that was a sinner, of the thief upon the cross, of Augustine, of John Bunyan, of Colonel Gardiner, and of thousands more, bear witness to the almighty power of the alchemy of Divine grace. It only requires a supreme surrender of ourselves into the hands of the Holy Spirit to ensure the Scripture assurance, "They shall be Mine in that day when I make up My jewels." (*Cyclopædia of Nature Teachings.*) *A name for God's people*.—The impiety and irreligion which so strongly marked the character, both of priests and people, in the days of this prophet, are concentrated, as it were, in verses 13–15. Amidst this general departure from God, others existed of a different description. Note—1. The endearing name here given to the people of God. "Jewels." "His jewels," or special treasure. Jewels are often purchased at an immense price. The people of God are "bought with a price." They may be called "jewels" from the comparative fewness of their number. And also from their glory and beauty. It is customary for the great and noble of the earth to adorn themselves with their jewels on particular occasions, and so the Lord glories in His people, and sets them "as a seal upon His heart," and has them "graven on the palms of His hands." 2. The expression, "When

I make up My jewels." These figurative words refer to the care and attention of the jeweller in polishing and arranging his jewels, so as to make them appear to the best advantage. So shall it be with the redeemed—God's jewels. 3. The time for making up the jewels is "that day." Either the day of the Christian's death, or the day of final judgment. 4. God says of His people, "They shall be Mine." Not that the people of God were ever, at any time, *not* His. The expression indicates some special sign of favour. (*D. Adams.*) *God and good men*.—I. Good men are PRECIOUS to God. They are here spoken of as "jewels." They are precious as loving children are precious to their parents. "Can a woman forget her sucking child?" &c. Precious. He knows—1. The worth of their existence. 2. The cost of their restoration. 3. The greatness of their capabilities. Great as God is, a really true man is precious in His sight. II. Good men are COLLECTED by God. "In that day when I make up My jewels." He will gather them together one day: they are now scattered abroad. By death He brings them together into a glorious social state, the Heavenly Jerusalem. III. Good men are CLAIMED by God. "They shall be Mine." They shall be sure to love Me and to serve the interests of My creation—My friends, My children, &c. (*Homilist.*) *My jewels*.—This is what God calls His people. I. SOME REASONS WHY CHRISTIANS ARE LIKE JEWELS. 1. Because jewels are very beautiful. God never made anything that looks more lovely than some jewels do. Christians are beautiful, but their beauty is not their own. When they learn to know Jesus, and to love and serve Him, they become like Him, and this is what makes them beautiful. 2. Jewels are very valuable. Therefore we call them *precious* stones. 3. Jewels are hard to polish. The men who polish are called lapidaries, from the Latin *lapis*, a stone. There are specks on us which must be removed by polishing, and this is always hard and trying work. Church and Sunday school may be regarded as God's polishing shop. (*R. Newton, D.D.*) *Divine jewels*.—I. THE DIGNITY OF THE TRULY GOOD. If we are His people, we are very dear to God. None of us can rightly estimate His wondrous love. God loves us so much that He cannot do without us. As a true-hearted man cares for his bride, so the Lord likens Himself to a lover who graves the name of his bride upon the palm of his hand. Some people are afraid this wonderful love will change as we change. No, God's love to us is the same to-day as when first we prayed. The Lord's forbearance and forgiveness is the most wonderful of His attributes. And God is very earnest in seeking His jewels. II. THE CERTAINTY OF THE FUTURE GLORY OF THE LORD'S PEOPLE. People are apt to imagine that because time moves slowly on, as if with leaden feet, that the great day here spoken of will not come. But it is sure to come to every one. We shall surely see the King of kings coming to judge men on the earth. (*W. Birch.*) *God's people regarded as His jewels*.—I. THE PEOPLE OF GOD, SUCH AS FEAR HIM, ARE HIS JEWELS. The fear of God is often put for all religion. They that fear Him are such as have not only the form, but the power of godliness. Such may be styled "jewels" as rare, and comparatively few: on account of their excellency; by reason of the place they have in God's value and esteem; and in His care: as He esteems Himself honoured by them, and greatly delights in them. God calls them "*My jewels*," as He is the efficient or maker of them: the owner and disposer of them; and as they are set apart for Himself. II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN "MAKING THEM UP"? This may be considered with reference either to their being at present dispersed and mixed with others, or imperfect as to themselves. It may mean His taking them out from the company of all others. God will collect all His people into one body. Or God's making them up may imply, finishing what concerns either soul or body, and making them completely happy, as to both, to all eternity. He will free them from all the imperfections of their present state. III. THERE IS A DAY COMING WHEREIN GOD WILL THUS MAKE UP HIS JEWELS. 1. The day of the saints' dissolution. 2. The day of the general resurrection. IV. HOW THEY SHALL BE THE LORD'S IN THAT DAY. Then they shall be proclaimed to be jewels—1. To testify His knowledge and approbation of them. 2. To shame and silence the hard censures to which they were liable from a malignant world. 3. This will tend to the greater confusion of the prince of darkness. 4. Such a declaration will invite an universal regard to the faithfulness of God, in what He promised to them, and engaged to do for them. V. THE TITLE UNDER WHICH GOD IS REPRESENTED AS RESOLVING UPON THE HAPPINESS OF HIS PEOPLE. "Saith the Lord of hosts." A foundation of hope and comfort. As He has power enough to engage for them. As He hath an absolute sway over all their enemies. It shows that the number of the finally saved will be great,

not small. (*D. Wilcox.*) *The Lord's jewels*.—The verse before the text contains the praise of a little company of Israelites who, in the midst of abounding iniquity, feared the Lord, and thought upon His name. A day comes when all such shall be known, and when the Lord shall make up His jewels. Are jewels with toil and danger and cost torn from earth's safe keeping? So are the Lord's chosen ones redeemed from the earth by the precious blood of God's dear Son. Are they procured by persevering search? So the Lord left heaven and came to earth to seek that which was lost. Are jewels gathered from all lands and from the isles of the sea? So are the Lord's chosen people. Do jewels of earth vary in their colour, their splendour, their worth? So are there among the Lord's people diversities of gifts, to each his proper place, to each his proper talent, to each at last a place in the Saviour's diadem, some to shine with meek and placid light, some with stronger and deeper brilliancy; but the brightest and best of all the fair jewels of the eternal world will be those who have most of the Saviour's image in them. Jewels are safely treasured, carefully deposited in the secret casket of their possessor, to be brought forth on the festive or the bridal day, and till that day arrives are little known to any one but their owner. So are the Lord's chosen ones in the secret place of the Most High. But in the day when the Lord makes up His jewels each shall be found in its proper setting, each shall shine with its proper lustre. (*W. H. Perkins.*) *God's jewels*.—More closely rendered, the passage is "They shall be My peculiar treasure in the day I am preparing." For one, I like the familiar phraseology in our common version. Christians are Christ's jewels. They are purchased by atoning blood; at an infinite price was this Divine ownership secured. As the pearls are only won from the depths of the sea by the dangerous dive of the fishers, so were the pearls for Messiah's crown brought up from the miry depths of depravity by the descent of that Divine Sufferer who came "to seek and to save the lost." The most brilliant and precious gem known to us is of the same chemical substance as the black and opaque coal of the mine. Crystallisation turns the carbon into the diamond. The grace of the Lord Jesus transforms an opaque soul, as black by nature as the jet, into a jewel which reflects the glory of Christ's countenance. All the lustre that the ripest Christian character possesses is but the reflection of the Sun of Righteousness. He who lives nearest to Jesus shines the brightest. The tarnish which makes some Christians no more sightly than a common pebble of the mire, comes from contact with an evil world. A "pearl cast before swine" is not more out of place than is a professed follower of Jesus in the society of scoffers, or in the haunts of revelry. Not all precious jewels glitter in conspicuous positions. The Master has His hidden ones; there are costly sapphires beneath coarse raiment, and up in the dingy attic of poverty. That self-denying daughter who wears out her youthful years in nursing a poor infirm mother, is a ruby of whom the Master saith, "Thou art Mine in the day when I gather My jewels." (*T. C. Cuyler.*) *God's estimate of Christian character*.—I. THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER AS ILLUSTRATED BY THE SIMILE OF THE TEXT—"Jewels." This is suggestive—1. Of the beauty of that character. God delights in all beauty, but most of all in that moral excellence which adorns His people. Let us seek to realise this perfection. Flaws in jewels greatly depreciate their value and mar their beauty; so do faults in Christians. 2. Of the strength of that character. Jewels are not easily broken, do not wear, do not fade. The religion of true Christians is not a fancy or a fashion, but a principle, habit, power. Tried by sorrow, sickness, temptation, persecution, it yields not. 3. Of the preciousness of that character. Jewels are of exceeding value, so are God's people. They are precious in their influence upon society, and society sometimes knows it. The saints are ever precious to God. Who shall tell how much He loves His people? II. LET US OBSERVE IN WHAT SENSE THE SAINTS ARE CALLED THE LORD'S JEWELS. "My jewels." 1. Because by Him they were rescued from a condition of impurity and darkness. A jewel may well be called his who risked his life to secure it. 2. Because to Him they owe their purity and glory. True saints feel that Christ has washed and perfected them, and they rejoice to give Him all the glory. 3. Because to Him they owe their protection and security. God takes care of His jewels (Job i. 10). "I give unto them eternal life, and none shall pluck them out of My hands." III. THE FUTURE GLORY AND DISTINCTION OF THE RIGHTEOUS. "They shall be Mine." 1. They shall be His confessedly. Now we return, and cannot discern between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not, but God shall then acknowledge us openly. He shall take the gem that may have been counted a mere offscouring,

and set it in His crown. 2. They shall be His unitedly. "Make up." God's people are scattered now, but then they shall be gathered together. 3. They shall be His overlastingly. "Made up." All trial over, and their state for ever settled in heaven. (*W. L. Watkinson.*) *The Redeemer's jewels*:—Little or nothing is known historically of the prophet Malachi. The time, the place, the circumstances of his birth are all unknown. We know nothing of his ancestors and nothing of his descendants, if he had any. Like a meteor he starts up suddenly in the horizon of the Church, and after running a brief career of exceeding brightness he disappears as suddenly, leaving no trace behind except the few pages of thrilling prophecy with which the Old Testament closes. His name signifies the messenger of Jehovah. It was a period of fearful religious degeneracy. But not all of the captives who returned from Babylon had corrupted themselves; there were some noble exceptions; a remnant was preserved, a few remained faithful to their covenant with Jehovah. To this faithful remnant our text refers. I. THE JEWELS. Where shall we search for them? Not above in the garnished heaven of sparkling worlds; not below in the mines of hidden wealth of gold and silver, where men toil hard and long to gain what they deem precious; not where the topaz, the coral, and the diamond sparkle; not in our national galleries thronged with rare products of nature and art; not in the museums, with their vast collection of valuable antiquities; not in the wardrobes and chests where the rich and noble lock up their lustrous gems and jewels, to be seen and worn only on high festivals. Not there must we look for Jehovah's precious treasures. We must look for them in souls that have put on Christ, men who have become partakers of the Divine nature, who have been created anew after the image of His Son. God estimates men not by their physical structure, not by their mental qualities, not by their learning or wealth, but by their harmony or disharmony with His will, by their sympathy or want of sympathy with His character and authority, by their dominant thoughts and feelings concerning Himself. "They feared the Lord"—not that guilty tormenting fear which drives man away from God, that shudders with remorse in His presence, that trembles beneath His frown, but that holy fear which reverently approaches God, that devoutly yearns for His fellowship, and yet is awed by a sense of His nearness, that fear which covets His favour, and whose highest heaven is to live in the light of His approval, that fear which remembers His covenant and submits to His kindly authority. "They thought upon His Name." Twice He had revealed that Name to their fathers; once to Moses as the "I Am," and once to Abraham as "I am God All-sufficient." To Moses He proclaimed what He is in Himself, the "I Am," the Self-contained, the Self-Existent, the Absolute, the Source of life and being. To Abraham He proclaimed what He is to His people, "God All-sufficient." The All-satisfying portion, the All in All. This Great Name was ever in the thought of the faithful remnant; they pondered over it as revealed to their fathers; they gloried in its infinite superiority to the gods of the heathen. "They spake often one to another." They not only thought about God in solitude and silence, but they cheered and strengthened one another in evil times by rehearsing together the wonderful things which God had done for them and for their fathers. It was no empty idle talk; it was so good that Jehovah hearkened and heard. II. THE COUNTING UP of His jewels. The text implies that a period is coming when the Lord of hosts will make up or count up His jewels. But why number them? 1. That the Redeemer may have the satisfaction of knowing how many. Of all the works of God, the great redemption by Christ is the greatest and costliest. He upholds all things by the word of His power. But He cannot redeem a lost race by a word of command or a fiat of His will. To redeem will cost Him an effort, a sacrifice, even the greatest sacrifice that God can make. On earth, under the pressure of an infinite sorrow, He was cheered by a glimpse of His future reward. For the joy set before Him He endured the Cross, despising the shame. He shall see His seed, a holy multitude which no man can number, and as He surveys them He will rejoice in them as witnesses that He has not laboured in vain. 2. He will count His jewels, that the intelligent universe may know how many, that Jesus Christ may give to hell as well as heaven, to demons as well as holy angels, to the lost as well as to the saved, evidence that redemption has not been a failure, but a complete success, a splendid triumph. When He makes up His jewels it will be found that there are more men in heaven than in hell. Jesus will have the majority. The minority would scarcely satisfy the great heart of Him who endured the Gethsemane agony and the shameful death of the Cross. 3. That Jesus

Christ may be assured that all the faithful are there, and that not one is wanting. The King whom the saints serve has His book of chronicles where the name of every faithful one and all his noble deeds are minutely recorded (Esther vi. 1-3). We find frequent allusions to this book of records in the Scriptures (Psa. lvi. 8; Heb. vi. 10; Rev. iii. 5; Luke x. 20). When the Lord of hosts makes up His jewels there will be something analogous to the calling of the roll. Jesus Christ has covenanted with the Father that He will keep all those committed to Him. There must be no ground for the Father in that day to charge the Son with unfaithfulness, with having lost one through inability or neglect. Jesus Christ has also covenanted with us that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. There must be no room in that day for a single soul to say, I believed in His Name, and yet He has not saved me.

III. The EXHIBITION OF HIS JEWELS. Having called the roll and ascertained that all the faithful ones are there, He will exhibit them, hold them up as His most magnificent trophies, His greatest, noblest work. Some of us are old enough to remember the first Great Exhibition of the Industries of all Nations in 1851. On the first entering that "Palace of all Nations" how impressive, how overwhelming the scene! We have had similar exhibitions since in Paris, Chicago, and elsewhere. Jesus Christ is going to have the greatest exhibition the universe has ever known. Throughout the centuries He has been preparing for it. In China, India, and Japan, on the continents of Europe, Africa, America, and Australia, in the islands of the sea, in northern latitudes among the Esquimaux and Laplanders, God's agents are building up characters and beautifying souls for the great exhibit. All nations will be represented in that vast gathering. On the Cross He made a public exhibition of the enemies He conquered. "Having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly." But when He comes on His throne of judgment He will exhibit His friends, make a show of them openly, that the intelligent universe may behold and admire His workmanship in the innumerable multitude He has saved and sanctified, the jewels He has burnished and made to flash with the beauty of God. There are the children of sorrow and afflictions on whom God has employed the chisel, the hammer, and the file to beautify and glorify them. Millions more of all climates and countries, of all nations and ages, will be there. Their names may not be registered in the chronicles of earth, or carved in enduring marble, but they are written in the chronicles of the King of saints, and He will publish them in high places in the hearing of the principalities and powers in that day when He makes up His jewels.

IV. The APPROPRIATING of them. "They are Mine." Under Roman law when a man received into his family a stranger and adopted him as a son two ceremonies were necessary; the one domestic the other legal, the one private the other public. The ceremony of adoption was first observed in the family, where the stranger was formally received and acknowledged as son in the presence of the entire household. But in order to make the new relation between the adopting father and the adopted son legal, the ceremony must also be observed publicly in the presence of civil authorities and witnesses. The saints here on earth are brought into the family of God, become members of the household of faith, receive the Spirit of adoption whereby they cry Abba, Father. This adoption is private; the knowledge of it is limited at first to God and the adopted believer. Afterwards it becomes known only to a limited circle of kindred spirits, to whom the adopted may communicate the joyful fact. It is not an event that the world cares to hear, or that awakens interest in any beyond the select few. But our text points to a period when there will be a public recognition of them as the sons of God. "In that day." This will not take place in this life, not at death, and not on the entrance of each soul into the heavenly world, but at the general resurrection. Until then only a fragment of the saintly nature will be glorified. The Old Testament saints are not to be perfected without us or before us; the New Testament saints are not to be perfected before the saints of the Old Covenant: we are to be perfected together. Abel, Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Noah, Moses, &c., will not be made perfect without us. See how changed, how transfigured they all are, how old things have passed away and all things have become new; they owe it all to Me and to My dying love, therefore they are all Mine. To-day they are to be crowned kings for ever. (*Richard Roberts.*)

Toucho-stones of character:—Cornelia's noble answer to the haughty princess who, on one occasion, visited her, is worthy of remembrance. Proudly displaying her own flashing jewels, her royal guest said, "And where are yours?" upon which the mother of the Gracchi, as proudly calling her children, said, "These

are my jewels." And He who sits upon the sapphire throne, and has round about Him a rainbow like unto an emerald, and who created all earth's riches for His own pleasure, yet places the highest value on the humble man, who, by faith in Christ Jesus, becomes a son of God. 1. Jewels are rare. In comparison with common stones there are very few of them. De la Bruyère says, "Next to sound judgment, diamonds and pearls are the rarest things to be met with." But rarer still are the true children of God. Not one man in fifty the world over is a true Christian. As, after all the search of the ages, there are not now more than one hundred great diamonds—a very small number when we think of the efforts put forth to discover them—so those who live the life more abundant are still in a very meagre minority. 2. For jewels are precious. "The richest merchandise of all" says Pliny, "and the most sovereign commodity throughout the world, are these pearls." In recent days, for the Arabian Pearl, £140,000 was offered and refused: and almost fabulous sums have been paid even for one precious stone. After the pearl, the ruby is far and away the most valuable, in proportion to its size; but never being found except in comparatively small fragments, has not had that halo of romance associated with it which has surrounded some diamonds. For instance, the Great Mogul Diamond, that "meteor amongst gems," which was lost in the Tartar invasion, was valued at £600,000; the Regent of Portugal is worth £400,000; the Orloff, £370,000; the Matan of Borneo, £269,000; the Koh-i-Noor, £140,000; while from Africa alone there come diamonds to the value of £5,000,000 each year. In the light of these things let us ponder the value God sets upon His chosen. Nothing is so excellent in the eyes of men but God compares His people to it. As precious stones are the aristocracy of minerals, Christians are the aristocracy of men. 3. Jewels, moreover, are pure. This, indeed, is the chief part of their value; for the degree of impurity in any stone is just the measure of its depreciation. The initial act of their formation is separation. Keep thyself pure, thou child of God. 4. And jewels are brilliant. The only difference between a black object and a brilliant one, say between a coal and a diamond, is in their disposal of light. The one receives the light, sucks it up, and selfishly keeps it. It thus becomes black. The other receives the light, but to reflect it back again from a hundred facets. This is the brilliant. And the worldly man, receiving the blessing of God, which He sends upon the just and the unjust, seeks not the glory of the Great Giver; while the true child of God, getting greater grace, finds his chief end in glorifying God and enjoying Him for ever. "This people," saith the Lord, "I have formed for Myself; they shall shew forth My praise." Sometimes we hear of a diamond shining in its own lustre, which is very considerable nonsense, for a diamond has no lustre of its own in which to shine. It is undoubtedly true that there are a few—a very few—diamonds which are phosphorescent for a little while in the dark; but even this cannot be called the inherent quality of the diamond; while the vast proportion of both diamonds and other jewels only flash forth in the "infallible lustre of crystalline beauty" when the light shines upon them. And though for many years it was thought that iridescence resided in the pearl, Sir David Brewster has clearly shown that the delicate striations on the pearl's surface are the sole cause of its radiance. Here the analogy lies close at hand. No light have we, and no brilliance, no lustre and no grace, until we come into the light of the Lord. 5. And with brilliance there is beauty. That is to say, in addition to the beauty of brilliance, there is the beauty of colour and form. Let the beauty of our God be upon us, O Lord, let the beauty of our God be upon us! 6. Jewels are durable. In a standard work this definition is given: "A gem is a real possession capable of affording pleasure to the wearer and spectator, and retaining an intrinsic and marketable value, undiminished by the lapse of time." Diamonds outlast dynasties, and seem as if nothing will impair their lustre. So gems, and not dew-drops, are chosen to represent the righteous who still hold on their way. 7. The seventh quality of perfection in jewels is that they are useful. They are used for boring through the rock; for cutting glass; for setting pivots; for pointing watches. But when thus working their beauty is hidden, while it is the triumph of a Christian to be most beautiful when most useful. (W. Y. Fullerton.) *Christians rarely combine all excellencies*:—It is a rare thing for a Christian, as it is for a gem, to combine all excellent qualities. Few jewels have more than two or three marks of distinction. If large they are lacking in lustre; if pure they are probably small; if well-coloured they may be of an awkward shape; if beautifully formed may not be very heavy. Perfection in precious stones is

almost unknown, and there are flaws even in the lives of the best Christians. (*Ibid.*) *Varieties of Christian character* :—And if there are different shapes in gems, there are various forms of Christian life and development. And if there are different colours in gems, there are also varieties in the attainments exhibited in personal conduct. Each Christian has his own place and power, and all exhibit the manifoldness of the grace of God. The gentle, tender believers having the graces of the Spirit most fully developed, are like the pearl; and you will remember that it is the pearls which get the place of honour at the entrance to the New Jerusalem; most valuable and most perfect, others enter by them. The enthusiastic disciples, full-blooded in their aggressive eagerness, are like the blushing ruby; while some live so far above earth and earthly things, and so near the sky that they resemble the deep velvety sapphire, “that stone like solid heaven in its blueness.” Others with spiritual insight, the seers of the Church, are akin to the most costly chrysoberyl or cat’s-eye, with its beautiful moving line of light; while the diamond, “fair as the star which ushers in the morn,” is the apt emblem of those who have clear and definite views of truth. Men with a fresh and constant Divine life are represented by the emerald, with its soft, clear green; and the royal magnificence of exalted Christian character by the purple amethyst. Where there is the rapture of intimate communion with God, we think of the golden jasper; and of the opal, “which hath in it the bright, fiery flame of the carbuncle, the fine refulgent purple of the amethyst, and a whole sea of the emerald’s green glory, and every one of them shining with an incredible mixture, and with much pleasure,” where there is the fully developed manhood of faith. While for simplicity, the onyx; and for solidity, the agate is the natural symbol. And if deficient in all these characteristics, there is still the long list of unmentioned jewels, where, without doubt, every true heart may find a place. It may be the blue lapis-lazuli, so much used in Italian churches; or the green malachite, so often met with in Russia; or the turquoise, which finds its home in Persia; or the chrysolite, now called peridot; or the bloodstone, or jade, or tourmaline, or hyacinth, or cairngorm, or coral, or crystal, or any other of the score still unnamed. Natural temperament very often determines the line of Christian development. A man with a delicate constitution is most likely to display the gentle side of Christianity; while the strong and vigorous, other things being equal, should be most energetic and enthusiastic. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 18. *And discern between the righteous and the wicked.*—*The characters of the righteous and the wicked contrasted* :—The time alluded to by the prophet appears to be the awful day of judgment. Then shall ye return, says he, or be converted to a full sense of your neglected duty and your past transgressions. The delusions of folly and self-love shall be removed; conscience shall then no longer be blinded by the corruption of reason, or overpowered by the violence of the passions; but vice shall appear in all its depravity; guilt shall be attended with all its terrors and remorse; and you “shall discern the striking contrast between the state of him that serveth God, and him that serveth Him not.” Without presuming to enter upon any imaginary description of the difference between the righteous and the wicked, in that future and invisible world to which we are all hastening, permit me to state some of the principal distinctions between “him that serveth God, and him that serveth Him not,” here, in this present life. Consider the superiority of the pious, in their intellectual powers, as well as in the good qualities and virtuous endowments of the mind. By the “pious” understand only those who admit, with grateful adoration, the glorious truths of revealed religion, and who endeavour to fulfil the duties of the Gospel of Christ from a steadfast belief in its holy sanctions. 1. The man who serves God may be said to possess a steady, elevated, and comprehensive mind. His belief is a strong and lively faith, implanted in early youth, founded on the first elements of reason, cherished from inclination, and deriving force from the influence of sentiment and the energy of the passions. He receives also that Divine revelation which graciously instructs him in the ways of His providence; enjoins his duty under various forms, and prescribes the reward of his due obedience. 2. The pious man, by frequent meditations on the Almighty Father, shows a natural relish for grandeur and sublimity. The mere worldling finds his little passions, his low thoughts and grovelling desires completely occupied with the pleasures and enjoyments which this present world affords. If he claim any pretensions to what is called a taste for the

sublime and beautiful, it is confined chiefly to the productions of art. At most, he admires only parts, not a whole; and looks with wonder at the mere creature, without raising his thoughts to the great Creator. The truly religious man is the very reverse of this. He can retire, as it were, within his own bosom, as into a sanctuary, and converse with God. Every species of excellence is admired in proportion as it approaches His wisdom, His goodness, or His power. 3. By "lifting up our hearts unto the Lord" in the fervour of prayer and thanksgiving it is impossible not to enjoy the highest sensibility of which the human soul is capable;—a sensibility very unlike the sickly offspring of a "worldly sorrow." The sensibility cherished by an habitual intercourse with God, purifies and ennobles the mind. 4. Akin to this intellectual enjoyment, is lively and impressive gratitude. It concerns both Divine and human obligations. 5. A constant sense of the benefits which he receives from God, prompts the pious man to imitate the Divine love, within the small circle of his power and abilities. Equally active is this Divine principle in promoting peace, in teaching forbearance, and in the forgiveness of injuries. 6. None but the pious man can have a proper sense of the dignity of his nature. Whatever the condition allotted to us here, however humble and dependent, we know that not all the world can estrange us from our Maker, or banish us from the presence of God. And nothing but sin can render the sense of this Divine presence afflicting, or leave us, in our sufferings, comfortless or degraded. 7. He who serves God with truth and fidelity will be endowed with a larger portion of fortitude than he who serveth Him not. It was proper that a life of discipline should abound with difficulties and dangers, temptations and calamities. They are the appointed measures of our virtue and obedience, and they form our spiritual warfare with the world. The pious man ever regards them as the means of improvement in righteousness and true holiness; as such, he submits to them with patience and resignation. Full of trust and confidence in the Divine wisdom and goodness, he learns "to suffer as a good soldier of Christ." If we take, therefore, from human life this grand principle of action—a principle that equally influences our hopes and fears—that gives steadiness of conduct, and fortitude of resolution in every situation, and that combines itself with all our nobler passions; is it not easy to perceive that we destroy the strongest support of moral duty, that we diminish the worth of every virtue, and poison the purest source of happiness in the human heart! Contrast, in conclusion, these two characters in the text, on the bed of sickness, and in the hour of death. (*J. Hewlett, B.A.*) *Two classes*.—I. THERE ARE TWO GREAT CLASSES INTO WHICH THE WHOLE HUMAN RACE MAY BE DIVIDED. 1. They are distinguished by their state. 2. They are distinguished by their character. II. THESE TWO CLASSES ARE NOW SO INTERMIXED AS TO OBSCURE THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THEM. 1. They are intermingled in the family circle. 2. They are intermingled in the arrangements of civil society. 3. They are intermingled in the house of God. 4. They are intermingled in the membership of the Church. III. THERE IS A PERIOD WHEN THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THESE TWO CLASSES SHALL BE RENDERED VISIBLE. 1. The season of temporal calamity. 2. The day of judgment. 3. Eternity. (*G. Brooks.*) *The obliteration of moral distinctions*.—It is a sad state of society when the faculty of moral discrimination is blunted. The minor prophets were appointed to rebuke just such religious degeneracy. 1. One sign of the practical obliteration of these vital distinctions may be seen in the prevailing depreciation of sound doctrine. Men try to mix truth with error, as though they were not inherently different. To depreciate the importance of discovering and embracing the truth undermines, also, the true basis of morals. Sincere convictions may thus be urged to justify crime, as the Spartans upheld secret theft, and David Hume secret adultery. 2. Another sign is found in the practical association of those that serve God and those that serve Him not. God decrees separation as the means of expressing and impressing these vital distinctions. (1) Many believers are only secret disciples. Their very success in practising Christian virtues is disastrous, fostering self-righteous hopes in worldly hearts, and leading men to confuse worldly morality with genuine piety. (2) Another thing which contributes to the confusion of godly and ungodly, is the fact, that many worldly men are professed disciples. Secret believers make the world seem more godly; unregenerate professors make the Church seem more worldly, and so there is double confusion. (3) Whatever relaxes the demand for godliness of character, lowers the standard of piety, and so lessens the contrast between righteous and

wicked. Besides secular influences, there are many ecclesiastic tendencies hostile to holy living. Ritualism furnishes one example. But the lack of holiness of heart is the main cause of the slight contrast between the servants of God and of mammon. Most earnestly, therefore, do we plead in God's name, for practical separation between the godly and the ungodly. (*Arthur T. Pierson, D.D.*) *Balaam and Saul, or consistent wickedness and inconsistent profession*:—It is wonderful to remark the numberless shades of character among wicked men: the various modes and ways which they have of acting against God. The character of Balaam was that of a very sinful man, in his mode of offending God. Strikingly different to him, yet equally offending God, is the character of Saul, King of Israel. The fact of a man's being raised up to bring about a certain end, does not excuse him in acting wrongly, if, to gain that end, he does act wickedly. We do not know now what God intends about us; yet we do know we can act rightly if we like, with God's grace. For instance, Pharaoh's conduct was doubtless overruled for good—to show forth His power. Still, Pharaoh acted calmly and coolly; he might have acted rightly if he liked. He was hardened because he neglected opportunities. In finding fault with Saul persons might say he could not help it. He was appointed for a punishment. 1. The announcement of Saul's being elevated to the throne of Israel came upon him suddenly; but seemingly without unsettling him. 2. Saul was not wanting in generosity and a feeling of gratitude. He was calm, high-minded, generous, and candid. A brave man he was without doubt. But take a deeper insight into Saul's character, and we shall find those deficiencies which he certainly had. The first duty of every man is the fear of God, a reverence for His Word, a love towards Him, a desire to obey Him, and all this would be most peculiarly the duty of the King of Israel. Saul "lacked this one thing." He was never under an abiding sense of religion, or what Scripture calls "the fear of God," however much he was sometimes softened and touched. His unbelief and fearlessness of God seem to have been shown by a contempt alike for prophet and priest. The immediate cause of his rejection was his impatience at the arrival of Samuel, and his own offering up of the sacrifice. He rejected Samuel, and had recourse to others instead. There was no profaneness, nor intentional irreverence in Saul's conduct. He finished his sad history by an open act of apostasy from God: in consulting the witch of Endor. Unbelief and wilfulness are ever deaf to the plainest commands, and produce a heart hardened against the most gracious influences. Balaam offers a singular contrast with Saul. The leading difference was: the one was under a strong, abiding sense and influence of religion and the fear of God; the other not. The one trembled before a God he was forced to confess; the other appeared to respect a Deity whom in heart he despised. Balaam knew what religion was; felt it, valued it, was convinced of it. Saul knew, but calmly scoffed at and despised all he knew. The one was the religious man grossly inconsistent; the other, the man with no religion, yet wearing it as a garb. Learn from this contrast—1. A character may be admirable, nay beautiful, without one spark of God's grace, and therefore all its moral excellence be nothing worth; it may shine in every virtue, amiability, disinterestedness, kindness, generosity, and benevolence. 2. Inconsistency in a professing religious man is nearly equally bad with the conduct of the unprofessing and open believer. (*E. Monro.*) *Consecration to God*:—I. WHAT CONSECRATION TO GOD IS. 1. It is not necessarily a seclusion from the fullest, largest life. Long before the Christian era, men saw obscurely the need of their turning life over from self, from itself, to the great Author of Life. This impulse wrought itself into the excesses of pagan monachism, which has left unmistakable traces in oldest historic records and in rock-hewn caves,—mute witnesses of vigil and macerations for centuries, and even millenniums before the coming of Christ. Separateness from the world, such as Christ taught, was not of the body, but of the spirit. He emphasised, with the utmost distinctness, the duty of closest contact. The purifying salt, the guiding light, and the useful talent could do their work for the world only at the shortest range. Sympathy and free mingling with men and women are a far closer copy of Jesus than is the solitariness of cloister, cave, or desert. 2. Consecration to God is full self-surrender to Him, not self-abandonment. Here is room for great mistakes. Never is a man more truly master of himself, more vigorously alive, more earnestly at work, than when he has given himself to God, and is, henceforth, in the Christian sense, not his own. There is no

diminution of being, no stinting of faculties, no abridgment of opportunities.

II. REASONS FOR CONSECRATION TO GOD. 1. Refusing, or failing in this, we rob God. Men's faculties find their rest, and possibilities of profitable exercise, only when intentionally and gladly used for their Creator. Time, talents, all that there is in and of life, belong to God by virtue of creation and preservation. 2. Disobedience is followed by penalty. For this sin Malachi pronounced a curse upon Israel. Israel is not alone in this. 3. The rewards of obedience. A general enfranchisement and empowering of faculties come to the soul when consecrated to God. Among the rewards of obedience, a prominent place should be given to the peace of mind which comes from harmony with God. Christian fellowship has glad rewards for those consecrated to the same Master. **III. HOW IS THIS CONSECRATION MADE?** 1. Deliberately. 2. Personally. 3. Affectionately. However full and irrevocable the surrender which the soul makes of itself, it is made gladly and lovingly. Meanwhile, till the day of reward comes, every burden is lightened, because borne for God; every sorrow is assuaged, because faith loves the hand that chastens; every dark cloud has a bright lining, every weariness sings of coming rest, disappointments point to the time, not far away, when every soul shall be satisfied, awaking in the Divine likeness. Consecration on earth transfigured and fulfilled in the glories of heaven. (*Sermons Monday Club.*)

CHAPTER IV.

VER. 1. All that do wickedly shall be stubble.—*The destruction of the wicked*.—It is matter of alarm and profound regret that this awful doctrine is so seldom preached in these days, at least with plainness and fidelity. Why is it? Surely not because the doctrine is not expressly and fully taught in the Scriptures; not because it was not taught by Christ Himself during His ministry; nor because it has not always held a prominent place in the creeds of Christendom; nor yet because it is contrary to reason and the constitution of the moral universe. There is no hope for the finally impenitent. Application—1. Since the everlasting punishment of the finally impenitent is clearly taught by Divine revelation, we are bound to accept it, reverently, submissively, and without criticism, however severe and terrible the aspect it wears toward the wicked. 2. Being an essential doctrine of the Scriptures, we are imperatively called upon to give it its due place and importance in the ministrations of the pulpit. The pulpit that dares to ignore it, or presumes to be more liberal and merciful than God in handling it, incurs a tremendous responsibility. 3. Christians are bound to have respect to it in all their prayers, and living, and intercourse with those who are unreconciled to God. 4. In view of a doom so certain, and so supremely dreadful to every unforgiven sinner, how earnestly should every man "work out his salvation with fear and trembling"! (*J. M. Sherwood, D.D.*)

Ver. 2. Shall the Sun of Righteousness arise.—*Sun-rising*.—There is only one sun in our system: and there is one Mediator between God and man. The vastness of the sun is surprising, but Jesus is the Lord of all. His greatness is unsearchable. The beauty and glory of the sun are such that we cannot wonder at its being made the subject of adoration. But He is fairer than the children of men. And all the angels of God worship Him. Consider the inestimable usefulness of this luminary. How he enlightens, warms, fructifies, adorns, blesses. What changes does he produce in garden, wood, and meadow! The sun that ripened Isaaac's corn ripens ours, and though he has shone for so many ages, he is undiminished, and as all-sufficient as ever. What an image of Him who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever! He that seeth the Sun of Righteousness, and believeth on Jesus, hath everlasting life. The rising of the sun is the finest spectacle in the creation. But when and how does the Sun of Righteousness arise? His coming was announced immediately after the Fall. His approach obscurely appeared in the types and services of the ceremonial law. In the clearer discoveries of the prophets, the morning was beginning to spread upon the mountains. At length He actually arose—

God sent forth His Son. He rises in the dispensation of the Gospel—in spiritual illumination—in renewed manifestations—in ordinances. But how will He arise in the irradiations of heaven!—in the morning of immortality; making a day to be sullied with no cloud, and followed with no evening shade! Then their sun shall no more go down. (*William Jay.*) *The Sun of Righteousness*.—As for the godly, He promises to send Christ unto them, bringing illumination, righteousness, healing, protection, and increase of grace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. 1. An infallible character of the truly godly is their reverence and holy fear (presumption being very contrary unto piety), and that not only of God's justice and terrible judgments, which the wicked may tremble at, but also of His name and whatsoever He reveals Himself by; His word being enough to make them tremble, and His goodness to make them fear. 2. Christ is the substance of the encouragement of the godly, as being unto His Church and children in a super-excellent manner, what the sun is to this inferior world, in enlightening all their darkness, illuminating all the inferior lights that shine in any measure, making all hid things patent, rejoicing, warning, cherishing, and ripening all fruits. "Unto you that fear My name, shall the sun arise." 3. Not only is every man by nature and without Christ, in a dark, disconsolate condition till He come to them, but His manifestation of Himself under the law was far inferior to that under the Gospel, which is far more clear, glorious, and comfortable, than the legal shadows were: for where Christ comes, "the sun ariseth" after a dark night; and this especially relates to His incarnation, which is sunlight in comparison of the Old Testament, which had but, as it were, moonlight. 4. That which makes Christ especially comfortable to the godly is, that He brings glorious righteousness to them, whereby they who durst not appear before God, become glorious and beautiful in the eyes of the Lord. He is the "Sun of Righteousness"—glorious righteousness—to them. 5. As these who get good of Christ will have many sores, and be made to feel the deadly wounds and diseases which every one by nature hath; so Christ is the only Physician to cure such sores, and deliver His people from all sickness of sin and misery. "He arises with healing." (*George Hutcheson.*) *The Sun of Righteousness*.—From the most glorious creature, "the sun," He expresses the most glorious Creator, "Christ Jesus," taking occasion to help our understandings in grace by natural things, and teaching us thereby to make a double use of the creatures, corporal and spiritual. Christ is compared to the sun—1. Because, as all light was gathered into the body of the sun, and from it derived to us, so it pleased God that in Him should the fulness of all excellency dwell. 2. As there is but one sun, so there is but one Sun of Righteousness. 3. As the sun is above the firmament, so Christ is exalted up on high, to convey His graces and virtues to all His creatures here below. 4. As the sun works largely in all things here below, so doth Christ. 5. As the sun is the fountain of light, and the eye of the world, so Christ is the fountain of all spiritual light. 6. As the sun directeth us whither to go and which way, so doth Christ teach us to go to heaven, and by what means; what duties to perform, what things to avoid, and what things to bear. 7. As the sun is pleasant, and darkness is terrible, so Christ is comfortable; for He makes all at peace where He comes; and He sends the Spirit the Comforter. 8. By the beams of the sun is conveyed influence to make things grow, and to distinguish between times and seasons. Thus Christ, by His power, makes all things cheerful, for He quickens the dead and dark soul. 9. The sun works these effects not by coming down to us, but by influence. 10. As the sun doth work freely, drawing up vapours to dissolve them into rain upon the earth, so doth Christ. He freely draws up our hearts to heaven. 11. As the sun shines upon all, but doth not heat all, so Christ is offered to all. 12. As the sun quickens and puts life into dead creatures, so shall Christ, by His power, quicken our dead bodies, and raise them up again. How shall we know whether Christ be to us a sun or not? If we find that we feel the heat and comfort of a Christian, it is a sign that Christ hath effectually shined on us. If Christ have shined upon any effectually, they will walk comely, as children of the light. Uses of this doctrine—(1) We should pity their estate that are still in darkness. (2) We should repair to Him, and conceive of Him as one having excellences suitable to our wants. The text describes this Sun as "with healing in His wings," or beams. In these beams there is a healing nature. Naturally, we are all sick and wounded. We should take notice of our diseases in time, and go to the healing God. Christ hath a medicine of His own, able to cure any disease, though never so desperate, any person, though never

so sick. Then why are we not healed? What means this that we are subject to these infirmities of ours? Some of Christ's works are all at once perfected, and some by degrees, by little and little. The text also promises, "Ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall." "You shall leap forth." Both expressions signify a cheerful moving. We need to grow up. What are means thereunto? 1. Purge and cleanse the soul of weakening matter. Practise the duty of repentance daily. 2. Come at good food. Digest comfortable truths. 3. Use exercise of holy duties. Take heed not to lightly esteem God's ordinance; but in reverence use all means for the strengthening of our faith, by the Word, sacraments, and prayer. How shall we know whether we are grown? If we relish the food of our souls, the Word of God; are able to bear great burdens of the infirmities of our brethren; able, like Samson, to break the green cords of pleasure and profits. Our growth in grace is seen in our performance of duties: if they be strongly, readily, and cheerfully performed. Text says, "Ye shall tread down the wicked." While the Jews obeyed God, they were a terror to the whole earth. The Church treadeth, &c., in regard of true judgment and discerning of the estates of the wicked. The Church tramples on all things that rule wicked men. The promise of the text is finally accomplished at the day of judgment. (*R. Sibbes.*) *Sunrise*.—I. WHO IS THIS SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS? 1. Jesus Christ, who is spoken of as "a light to lighten the Gentiles." 2. Light, a frequent Scripture symbol. The sun possesses some excellent properties above other luminaries. 3. The sun possesses the property of communicating light to all the other heavenly bodies. All men are indebted to the "light of the world" for everything that is good. Good men are called lights of the world. The Sun of Righteousness is the great source of light and heat to the soul. 4. Similar effects are produced on the moral world on the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, as are produced on the face of the earth by the rising of the natural sun. Darkness is dispersed, and mists and vapour give way before his powerful rays. When Christ, the true light, shines, moral darkness is dissipated, and in proportion as the true light is received, superstition, error, and ignorance die away. II. WHEN MAY THIS "SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS" BE SAID TO "ARISE"? 1. When the prophet says "shall arise," we are not to infer that He had never arisen before, but that a more abundant outbeaming of His light should be reflected upon the faithful. 2. "In the fulness of time, God sent forth His Son." 3. He arose from the dead. 4. He may be said to arise when He visits any place by His Gospel. 5. When He visits the souls of the children of men by His Spirit. III. THE MANNER IN WHICH HE IS SAID TO ARISE. "With healing in His wings." 1. Only upon those who fear the Lord: by penitents, and by His own children. 2. Penitents fear God, and seek His face. They shall be made whole, and saved from the guilt and power of sin. 3. The Lord's children serve Him with reverence and godly fear, and they too shall be saved from the pollution and indwelling of sin. (*B. Bailey.*) *The Sun of Righteousness*.—Nature is replete with types, shadows, or symbols of spiritual things. Our Lord is Himself called the Sun of Righteousness, because, in many respects, He bears the same relation to the moral universe which the sun sustains to the solar system. In this image, or symbol, there is a depth of meaning which does not at once strike the mind; and which, from age to age, continually deepens and expands, as science reveals more and more the intrinsic grandeur and glory of the sun. Plato says, "Light is the shadow of God." Scripture says, "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." An apostle says, "God is love." But yet is the brightness of this light and love so veiled and obscured to mortal vision that blessing, not blasting, everywhere follows in the track of their influence. The more we study the symbolism of Scripture the more are we lost in admiration of its richness, its fulness, its grandeur, and its beauty. 1. The sun is the central body of our system, by whose attractive influence all the planetary worlds are held in their orbits, and so kept from wandering into the outer darkness of infinite space. By Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, all worlds are kept in society with God, the great central light of the universe. For the Hebrew mind, this little earth of ours was the universe, around which the sun, moon, and stars revolved as the appendages and ornaments of its beauty. 2. The sun is the life of the natural world. Blot out the great luminary and all the beautiful forms of nature, both in the vegetable and animal kingdoms, would sink into one mass of universal decay and death. The Sun of Righteousness is the life of the spiritual world. "He lighteth every man that cometh into the world." 3. The sun is the only self-luminous body in our

system; from which all others derive their light of life. So it is a symbol of Him who is "the light of the world," the moral world. It is given to Christ, and to Christ alone, to have "light in Himself." 4. The natural sun is, like the Sun of Righteousness, limited in the beneficent effects of its influence. It is often made an objection to the religion of Jesus, that it does not save all men. The same objection might be urged against the natural sun. Behold the arid wastes and barren rocks, on which its light-giving rays fall in vain. So the Sun of Righteousness shines in vain upon all whose sins have rendered their hearts more than stony hard. But for all this He is the life-giving power of the moral world. 5. The Sun of Righteousness is, like the natural sun, the source, or rather the occasion, of many incidental evils. The natural sun, for example, in acting on the corruptions of the earth, often breeds those noxious vapours, or effluvia, which spread pestilence in the air we breathe. But is this the fault of the sun, or of the corruptions on which it acts? It is only in relation to Christ that men blame the physician for the disease He came to cure, and for the evil and malignant passions He came to eradicate or subdue. 6. For many weary, countless ages men sought an answer to this question: What is the foundation of the earth? After all their searching, it was discovered that the earth rested on nothing: it was suspended from the sun. Men have been seeking the foundation of society, but the everlasting, foolish search is all in vain, for the foundation of the moral world is nowhere. It is suspended from above. The Sun of Righteousness is its only point of support and rest. All the planetary worlds are like a magnificent chandelier, suspended from the sun; so are all social states, nay, all moral worlds, upheld and sustained by the Sun of Righteousness. 7. The sun is, by virtue of its transforming power, a magnificent type or symbol of Christ. The Divine power of Christ, working silently and unseen through all the ages, is fitly symbolised only by those stupendous agencies which, with such inconceivable grandeur, are ever at work on the magnificent theatre of the material universe. (1) It is "no task for suns to shine." And yet, by the pervasive force of the sun's rays, all the mighty changes of the earth are wrought, and all the wondrous harmonies produced. (2) The sun's rays are indeed His ministering angels, sent forth to minister to all things on earth. (3) Nor is the solid globe itself exempt from the transforming power of the sun's rays. All the stupendous coal strata of the globe are but so many entombed vegetable kingdoms of the past, all of which were reared and ruled by the mighty sun. It is not without significance that the great Reformer, or rather the great Transformer, of the moral world is called the Sun of Righteousness. 8. The power of the sun, by which all natural things are progressively developed, symbolises the corresponding power or influence of Christ in the development and progress of the moral world. The progress of Christianity is the progress of man. All real progress has been confined to Christian nations. 9. The Sun of Righteousness, like the natural sun, works silently, but efficiently, in the depths of His dominion, and acts on the secret springs or principles of its inner life. And a glance at the past is sufficient to inspire us with hope for the future. The kingdom of Christ, though once the least of all seeds, is now the greatest of all trees. Having its roots in faith, its vital principle is love, its blossoms are immortal hopes, and its fruit eternal life. (*R. Bledsoe.*) *The rising of the Sun of Righteousness*:—I. THE PERSONS TO WHOM THE PROMISE IS MADE. Those that fear the name of the Lord. By the "name" of God is meant the "character" of God. We have, in ourselves, no knowledge of the nature and character of God, and therefore cannot fear His name until He send forth the Spirit of truth into our hearts, to lead us into all truth. All the notions which we form of Him, before the Spirit of truth is in us, are as contrary to His true character as darkness is to light. While we are in this state of blindness we can have no real fear of God according to His Word. The true fear springs up with faith, and arises chiefly from the soul believing some part of God's Word, which the Holy Spirit carries home to the sinner's conscience to awaken him. This fear will be marked by a growing desire to know the true character of God. And this is not a feeling which passes away. The text does not speak of those that have feared the name of God, but of those that do fear it, i.e., continue to do so. It is not a passing fright, but a holy abiding fear. The marks of it are an abiding sense of sin, a desire to be taught of God, by searching the Word of God in order to know His name, or true character, and by praying for the teaching of the Spirit of truth. II. THE PROMISE ITSELF. The "Sun of Righteousness" shall

arise upon them "with healing in His wings." Jesus Christ is to the soul what the natural sun is to the earth. The sun gives light and warmth to the earth, by which its various fruits are brought forth and ripened. Jesus is especially the Sun of Righteousness, as being the fountain of all righteousness; of that perfect righteousness by which believers are testified in the sight of God. Jesus fulfilled all righteousness in His own person when manifest in the flesh, and was perfectly obedient to the will of God, even unto death. This perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed, or reckoned to believers, through faith, as if they had entirely fulfilled it themselves; and thus they are justified or made righteous in the sight of God. Jesus is also the fountain of the righteousness of sanctification. The mode in which the Sun of Righteousness arises upon the soul of His people is, by pouring into them more and more of the light of the Holy Spirit strengthening their faith, and enabling them to see that Christ, with all His blessings, and all His promises, is theirs. He thus also rises with healing in His wings, to heal the broken hearts of His people.

III. THE HAPPY EFFECT OF THE FULFILMENT OF THE PROMISES. "They shall grow up, as calves in the stall." The believer is enabled to go forth with peace and joy on his way to Zion. The blessed effect will be manifested both by the peace shed into the believer's soul, and by his growth in holiness. The rising of the Sun of Righteousness will also greatly promote the believer's growth in grace. The growth in size of calves, when fed in the stall, is very great; so shall the growth of believers be great. Apply subject to ourselves. Are there not too many amongst you who are entirely strangers to the fear of the name or character of God? Perhaps you have hitherto been brought only to *fear* God, and you walk in darkness. You should apply to yourselves this text: let the Sun of Righteousness rise on your souls with healing in His wings. If He rises on your soul you will have peace with God. (*H. Gipps, LL.D.*) *The Sun of Righteousness*:—This passage seems to refer principally to the second coming of our Lord; the text itself may be safely understood of His first coming in the flesh. It points out, primarily at least, the judgments to be brought upon the unbelieving and impenitent Jews.

I. THE COMING OF CHRIST, AS THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS RISING UPON THE WORLD. The most glorious object in creation is the fittest to represent the King of Glory. The sun is the great source of heat and life and light; of everything that is beautiful and beneficial. The Sun of Righteousness here is the Lord and Saviour Christ; the Lord and giver of life to His servants: a never-failing source of spiritual health and comfort to His servants. Whatever the sun is in the material world, that, and much more, in a spiritual sense, is the Lord to His Church. "Sun of Righteousness" may mean that He is perfectly just and righteous in Himself, and therefore discovers and rebukes sin, brings to light the hidden things of darkness and vice, and affords in Himself a perfect example of light and virtue, by which others may see and avoid their errors and failings. Or it may mean that, by His own righteousness, "He justifies many." This Sun arose when our Lord came into the world. He again rose in His resurrection. He will again rise when He comes in glory. And He may be said to rise upon each of us when by faith we receive Him into our souls.

II. THE SALVATION WHICH THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS BRINGS WITH HIM. "With healing in His wings." The Son of God came to earth as a Saviour. This character He maintained through the course of His ministry upon earth, during which He went about doing good. How did this Sun of Righteousness bring healing in His wings (or, as we should rather say, in His beams and rays) at His rising? 1. The most natural interpretation is, of the cures which He wrought upon the bodies of men. 2. The great act of salvation was bearing our sins in His own body on the tree. "By His stripes we are healed." This healing procured the pardon of our sins, and the grace of the Spirit of God, to enable us to fulfil the conditions required of us. Only by joining these two together can the salvation be regarded as complete. Notice how great is His mercy in administering comfort to the penitent. III. THE QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED OF THOSE TO WHOM THE SON OF GOD WILL PROVE A SAVIOUR. "You that fear My name." Religious fear of God is necessary to qualify a man to receive the healing grace of Christ. To the soul which has no fear Christ brings no healing. This is the state of the true Christian; in which his terrors are never so great as to extinguish his hopes, and his hopes never prevail so much as to make him confident and secure. (*T. Bowdler, A.M.*) *Sun of Righteousness*:—I. ILLUSTRATE THE COMPARISON OF OUR LORD JESUS

CHRIST TO A SUN. 1. His unapproachable pre-eminence. 2. His benign influence. 3. His relation to the whole world. II. DESCRIBE HIS RESTORATIVE OR REMEDIAL EFFICACY. In the world; in a country; in an individual. III. CONSIDER THE PERSONS TO WHOM HIS EFFICACY IS CONFINED. Who are they? And why are they the sole recipients of the promised blessing? Consider Christ—as the centre of the spiritual world; as the source of light; as the source of heat; as the object of attraction. (*G. Brooks.*) *Parallel between Christ and the sun*.—A parallel is drawn between Jesus Christ and the natural sun. 1. Before the rising of the natural sun there is darkness; until Jesus Christ arise or is apprehended there is darkness—moral and spiritual darkness. Look to the world before the coming of Christ: the heathen; the multitudes around us; any one of the unconverted; the place of outer darkness. 2. Jesus Christ, as the natural sun does, arose gradually. (1) He arose in the Scriptures, through the prophecies and promises, the types and sacrifices, until, in the development of God's providence, He appeared above the horizon. (2) He arose, in His own personal history, in the completion of His work, in His resurrection, in His ascension, in the gift of the Holy Spirit. (3) He rises in the souls of His people, on earth, in heaven, for ever. 3. Jesus Christ, like the natural sun, reveals or is the source of light. (1) He reveals God, perfections, purposes, past, future, creation, providence. (2) He reveals man, law, way of salvation, Gospel. (3) All time; eternity; the invisible worlds, and the paths to them. 4. Jesus Christ, like the natural sun, is the centre of a system. Of the material universe; and the moral and spiritual universe. Centre and sum of revealed truth of the Church. 5. Jesus Christ, like the natural sun, has His image reflected, both in the material and in the moral universe. 6. Is the source of enjoyment. He has all blessing; and admits to His own joy. 7. Is often concealed by clouds. (1) By a cloud of guilt on the conscience. (2) By a cloud of corruptions. (3) By a cloud of misrepresentations. 8. He dispenses His influence freely. "Without money and without price." 9. He hastens the process of decay and corruption. "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offence." (*James Stewart.*) *The Messiah as the Sun of Righteousness*.—That the promised Messiah should be termed the Sun of Righteousness may appear characteristic and appropriate. But what are we to understand by a sun with wings? What by those wings being endowed with the powers of healing? What mean we when we term the Messiah Sun of Righteousness, but that we, being by nature the heirs of God's curse, are through Christ reconciled to Him whom we had offended? What mean we by the wings of the sun? In Egypt a sun with wings was sculptured upon the gateways and monuments. Some regard the sign with a reference to the rays or beams of the luminous body itself. Others interpret it as representing that overhanging canopy of the heavens which bends, like a protecting arch above this lower globe of ours, brooding over it, so to speak, and sheltering it. Others explain the wings as betokening the swiftness with which the light of the sun traverses illimitable space. Others appropriate the term to the cooling breezes which in the East accompany the early sunrise. Those who have experienced the glare and weariness of an Eastern day may be better qualified than most of us to appreciate those first hours of cool and refreshing daylight which are appropriated to healthful exercise and the enjoyment of nature's loveliness. The period at which we celebrate the rising of the predicted Sun cannot convey real and fitting gladness to the hearts of those who do not entertain this chastened and holy fear of God's name. The verse preceding the text is full of woe and alarm for them that despise His loving-kindness and disobey His laws. Apt as is the image of the sun's rising and progress through the heavens, to represent the rising of the Sun of Righteousness and His increasing influences as He goes on His way, rejoicing, it is when He has reached His height that the metaphor fails us altogether. Slowly and surely the material orb sinks at last in the darkness. Herein we are taught the infinite inferiority of the sign to that which is signified thereby. (*T. Ainger, M.A.*) *The Sun of Righteousness*.—Why was it that God permitted His ancient people to be overwhelmed with such unheard of calamities? We have reason to believe it was simply because they rejected Christ, and the offers of mercy and salvation through Him. If God, however, take vengeance on the wicked, He will be favourable to the righteous, and spare them in the great day, as a father spareth his own son that serveth him. I. THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. There is but one Sun from whom proceeds righteousness, and that must be the Son of God. As Christ is the source of all spiritual life

and light, so by His sufferings and death He hath procured or merited righteousness. He is therefore the believer's justifying righteousness. II. HIS RISING ON GOD'S PEOPLE. Christ's face shines on His people and disperses their sorrows, but His face is dark towards sinners, for He is angry with the wicked every day. In the spiritual world, when Christ took on Him our flesh and was born in Bethlehem, then the light was come, and the glory of the Lord was risen upon us! This Sun still shines; He is still shining, in His Gospel and in the power of His Word. III. THE EFFECT OF HIS RISING. "With healing in His wings." Understanding this literally, we may see how Christ, as man, has arisen with healing in His wings. How many; yea, what multitudes did His hands heal of various maladies. This Sun is still shining. All our spiritual light is from Him. All our spiritual healing comes from the merit of His works. (*R. Horsfall.*) Our sun:—I. THE SUN. Of all the things the eye can see the most Christlike is the sun, for he is quite alone in our world. Nor rival, nor helper, nor partner has he. We have many stars, but only one sun. All light is in and from the sun. Yet even this glorious image of the light of the world fails in some ways; for the sun has its dark spots, but in Christ, our sun, is no darkness at all. The sun is the centre of all the worlds. Every star is held in its place by the attractive power of the sun. The sun is the grand river in this world. Our thoughts wax warm as we sum up all the benefits with which he fills our earth. You cannot overstate them. Science is every year finding fresh wonders in sunlight. All kinds of force come from the sun. As the sun gives according to a never-changing law, so Christ blesses only in a righteous way. II. THE SUN-RISING. Sunrise is probably the grandest sight in the world. In the East it is so magnificent as almost for the moment to make one a Parsee, a worshipper of the rising sun. Malachi was in the twilight, and you are in the daylight. To him the sun was beneath the horizon, sure harbinger of the wished-for day. You live in the Gospel-day. III. THE BLESSINGS CHRIST BRINGS TO MEN. As the sun destroys only darkness and its hateful brood, so Christ destroys only our miseries, and brings us all blessings. 1. Healing. The Easterns often carved a winged sun above the gateways of their temples. Malachi has a poet's quick eye for the glories of nature, and perhaps this also was in his mind,—the sun rises like a bird, with equal wings wide enough to cover the world. Malachi's meaning is, that as sunlight brings health to a diseased, dying world, so Christ brings health to our diseased, dying souls; and this healing comes to us with all the ease, swiftness, gentleness, and freshness of morning sunshine. This healing brings health, which shows itself in joyous activity. To healing and health Christ adds victory. (*James Wells, M.A.*) The blessings of the Sun of Righteousness:—I. THE PROMISE WHICH IS MADE. 1. The metaphor under which the coming of Christ is spoken of. The rising of the Sun of Righteousness. Malachi assimilates Christ's coming to that of the sun rising upon the earth. Is He not well entitled to this appellation? 2. The manner in which Jesus is to come to His saints. "With healing in His wings." It is a bold poetical figure used by the prophet for the beams or rays of the sun; and such bold painted figures are by no means uncommon with Eastern writers. II. THE PERSONS TO WHOM THIS PROMISE IS MADE. "To them who fear the name of the Lord." This expression is used in Scripture for religion in general. Without a certain mixture of fear, taking the term in its most literal signification, no worship can be acceptable to Jehovah. Without a certain mixture of fear, no worship can produce any deep or lasting impressions on the worshipper himself—no sanctifying effects on his heart and conscience. The term may, however, be limited and applied to some particular classes of saints. 1. To them who are spiritual mourners. 2. To them persecuted for the sake of religion. 3. To them who sit in heathen darkness. 4. To the elect on the day of judgment. To the righteous on that day Christ shall "arise with healing in His wings." To them shall He come with joy and songs of triumph. (*James Watson.*) Christ Jesus the Sun of Righteousness:—The great light which the Almighty Maker of the world set up in heaven to rule the day is the most glorious object in the whole visible creation of God. The worship of the sun, as it was the first, so it was assuredly the least degrading of all the idolatries by which men and nations have since been enslaved. Does the sun exhibit the glory of God? What, then, shall we say of Christ Jesus, in whom "dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"? Seen as an absolute God, and by the flashes of the law from Sinai, our God is a consuming fire: but we have the light of the knowledge of His saving glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

"In Him is light, and the light is the spiritual and everlasting life of men." By rising in the ancient promise He dispelled the midnight ignorance and utter hopelessness of guilty creatures; by rising in His own person, and glorious acts of grace, He chased away the dim shadows of the ceremonial law; by rising in Gospel ordinances He abolished the night of error and delusion; and by rising in His spiritual influences upon the believer's soul He says, "Let there be light, and there is light." The sun rises gradually over the earth; and so hath the Sun of Righteousness displayed His saving light. His first ray was cast upon this fallen earth when the promise of redemption was given to guilty man in paradise. The law and the prophets reflected it with increasing brightness until His advent. But it is only when that advent is spiritually and graciously made to a soul once darkened and dead in trespasses and sins that the true and efficacious light of salvation reaches him and renews him. Upon whom, then, will this bright and radiant Sun arise? Upon those who "fear the name" of God. This fear of God is produced by that work of regeneration which the Holy Spirit effects. The fear of the Lord is a gracious and heavenly state; not meritorious of any good at the hand of God, but a disposition which best subserves His great design of raising up and glorifying the riches of His undeserved love. He who thus evangelically fears the Lord is led to serious and solemn self-examination. If you fear God there is a deep, earnest, ardent, unceasing breathing of the soul for Christ, a constant application to His blood as its true Bethesda, its everlastingly appointed house of mercy, where the soul may be made whole. Note the blessing which shall attend those who fear the Lord. Sin is the cause of all spiritual darkness, because sin is the soul's separation from God. Christ comes with spiritual health, and with the abundance of spiritual peace: peace from the guilt of sin rising up to condemn, peace from the accusations of conscience, peace from the curse of the law, peace with the blessed Trinity, and peace with all who are one with Him. The material sin is the source of earth's fertility. And how free, how common, how accessible is the sun of the natural world, for all who live beneath it! (*R. P. Buddicom, M.A.*)

Christ as a sun.—I. OF THE METAPHORICAL REPRESENTATION OF CHRIST. Metaphors are useful. They arrest the attention: the imagination is engaged in discovering their beauty and admiring their aptitude, while they rivet themselves in the memory by the force with which they bring home to us the subject they are intended to illustrate. To illustrate Christ as the "Sun of Righteousness," consider the miserably benighted state in which the human race were in the days anterior to the Gospel dispensation. Jesus Christ, that "Sun of Righteousness," pure and spotless, is the author of all righteousness, whether imputed for justification or imparted in sanctification. When Christ rises in the soul He enlightens, quickens, and comforts.

II. WHAT IS MEANT BY "HEALING IN HIS WINGS"? The beams of this heavenly luminary may indeed be perceived by us, but do they pervade our hearts and lives? To fear the name is to reverence Him as God and man; to participate by faith in His incarnate sufferings; to accompany Him to the scene of His cruel death. It has its foundation in a deep sense of the enormity of sins, and a humbling conviction of our depravity. (*Samuel Crowther.*)

The Sun of Righteousness arising with healing in His wings.—I. THE CHARACTERS SPOKEN OF. The "name of the Lord" signifies the perfections of the glorious God of heaven—the greatness and goodness of the Lord—God Himself. It is the peculiar character of the people of God that they "fear His name." It is a fear of offending God, the tenderness of the child that fears to offend its parent. This fear is an abiding principle, and it is a practical principle; it operates upon the life. II. THE BLESSED PRIVILEGE OF THOSE THAT FEAR THE NAME OF GOD. The Sun of Righteousness is Immanuel, God with us. And He arose at His birth, because more conspicuous in His ministry; was eclipsed at His death, shone forth brighter after His resurrection and ascension, and attained His meridian splendour when the Jewish dispensation closed and the Christian dispensation was fully established. But the promise of our text is daily receiving its fulfilment in the hearts of God's believing people. The promise of the text, however, still awaits the consummation of its fulfilment. (*Benjamin Maturin, B.A.*)

The Sun of Righteousness.—I. THE PERSONS. Those that "fear the name of the Lord." Fear is the passion of our nature opposed to hope, and by it the author of our being guards us against danger. The "fear of the Lord" is the sublimest principle which can influence a soul. It casts out all other fear. Filial and godly fear is always accompanied with love. II. THE BLESSINGS. The Messiah should be, to the spiritual world,

what the sun is to the natural world. In this view we may regard Him as the source of light, fertility, comfort, and health. (*Peter Grant.*) *Christ, the Sun of Righteousness*.—Were I to adhere to the textual view of these words I should be shut up to consider what Christ's coming was to those who already had some true light, to those who already feared God and thought upon His name, and thus I should have mainly to set forth the superiority of Christianity to Judaism. But I shall make no apology for giving to this title "Sun of Righteousness" a wider application, and for considering not so much Christ's rising then and there upon Jewish cloudiness and dimness, as rather His arising from first to last upon the total darkness of our fallen world. I. THE NATURE OF CHRIST'S LIGHT, OR ENLIGHTENING POWER. 1. This light is saving light. In many parts of the Old Testament "righteousness" is used in nearly the same sense with "salvation." The salvation of God, resting on the perfect righteousness of God's own Son as the sinner's substitute, applied to believers in Him for justification, and in its gracious operation, terminated and completed by their willing return to personal righteousness and holiness of life,—this is what is here meant under the name of "righteousness" (Jer. xxiii. 6). We speak in our own language of the "sun of freedom" rising upon a country, or of the "sunshine of peace" revisiting it. But the light which here bursts upon a lost and guilty world is the saving light of righteousness. It announces to the condemned the hope of pardon, and shows the way; and it discloses with equal clearness the means of deliverance from the power and bondage of corruption. In Christ the whole salvation is contained, even as the sun reveals himself. In Him the guilty are righteous in law; in Him, and as subdued by His birth, they are righteous in fact. 2. This light is original light. The light of the sun is unborrowed. It is a mystery which our science has not yet solved, how this fountain is fed. But relatively to all sources of light that we know, it is higher and self-sustained. This images the nature of Christ's light, in contrast with all the knowledge of Divine things which comes to us from other quarters. 3. This light is pre-eminent light. The most glorious object in nature is the sun. The ancient world had its lights, we grant—its poets, philosophers, moralists, law-givers. But what were they in regard to righteousness or salvation? How much did they diffuse of the light of life? Christ was even pre-eminent above Jewish prophets, who had known and revealed God to men. They were but secondary lights. Their use was to point to Him. It is needless to assert Christ's pre-eminence over His own apostles and ministers and people. 4. This light is a universal light. What a universal blessing is sunshine! What an emblem of the Higher Light which is not less universal, though, for reasons which we cannot fathom, it is still beneath the horizon in many a wide region of the earth. Where it has shone, can the natural sun be more unrestricted and free? II. THE NATURE OF CHRIST'S HEALING INFLUENCE. By wings the prophet means the rays or influence of the sun. In addition to the influence of light we are now to take into account that of heat, of which, too, the sun is the centre. 1. Christ's healing power in relation to sin. What is wanted to moralise the whole community? Only one thing, the love of Christ in every man's heart. 2. Christ's healing extends to sorrow. This follows from the healing of sin. Every sin has its own sorrow, its remorse, its injuries to mind and heart, and often also to body and estate. 3. The influence of Christ's sunshine upon death. The natural sun lights all generations to their grave. How is Christ risen from the dead, risen with healing in His wings for all that sleep in Him! Oh, the glory of that victory over death, the last enemy, which the light of Christ's immortal countenance shall achieve! (*John Cairns, D.D.*) *Christ the Sun of Righteousness*.—We with the early Fathers take our Lord to be "the Sun of Righteousness." The mass of the sun being so vastly greater than that of all the planets and satellites taken together, constitutes it a suitable centre of light, heat, and gravitation; and therefore a striking emblem of Christ. Of the many points of resemblance we will examine two. The darkness which precedes the dawn, and the gradual growth of the light. These are seen—I. IN THE GROWTH OF CHRISTIANITY. At the dawn of Christianity there was a darkness like that of Egypt, "that might be felt." Darkness is the symbol of ignorance and sin. The intellectual greatness of the Augustan age is seen in its poets, philosophers, &c.; but the flowers grew on a marshy and rotten soil. Classical writers confirm St. Paul's testimony in Romans chap. i. to the awful moral degradation of the time. The "dayspring from on high" appears, and gradually asserts its power over the darkness. Christian teachers penetrated where the Roman

legions never trod. Persecution did not arrest the wave. When the northern barbarians overwhelmed the Roman Empire, they had to yield to a power greater than their own—that of the Cross. The glory of the meridian sun must fill the earth. II. IN THE GROWTH OF THE CHRISTIAN. Before conversion our hearts were “dark, void, and formless,” like the original world. The spirit of man is illumined by the “Sun of Righteousness,” and chaos becomes cosmos. This growth is gradual. Three stages of Christian growth. God calls, touches, blesses; which corresponds in some sort to assent, affiance, and assurance. Growth in religion is mainly characterised by thought of ourselves at its beginning, by consideration for others as we advance in holiness, and by a desire for the glory of God when more matured. Is Christ growing in us? We must be advancing or receding. If Christ be growing in us, certain effects will follow. His light will cleanse and purify; and shining from us, it will give us influence on others. (*J. S. Pilkington, M.A.*) *The rising of the Sun of Righteousness*:—All nature is laid under contribution to furnish emblems of Christ in His Person and offices. Text refers to the second advent. But the glory of the second will be the consummation of the grace of the first advent. It was the rising of the Sun of Righteousness when Christ appeared as the Light of the World revealing pardon, peace, liberty, and joy. It will be the rising in full meridian splendour, when He shall appear the second time, to complete the salvation of His saints and to be glorified in them. 1. What the sun is to the natural world, that Christ is in the spiritual, the source and centre of its light and life. 2. Christ is the Sun of Righteousness. He is Righteousness embodied, exhibited as a living reality. He fulfilled all righteousness. He makes His people righteous. As their justification, and as their sanctification and illumination. By His Spirit He imparts His own nature to them, creates them anew in righteousness and true holiness. 3. Christ rises “with healing in His wings.” The figure admits of a natural and beautiful interpretation. On certain coasts there sets in with the rising sun a balmy breeze which, because of its soothing and salubrious character, the residents call “the healer.” Regarding this with poetic fancy as winged zephyrs of the rising sun, the prophet speaks of the coming Messiah as a sun rising with healing in His wings. 4. “Grow up as calves” is better rendered, “bound as calves loosed from the stall.” Liberty and enlargement of heart, exultation and lightness of spirit, shall be to them on whom the Sun of Righteousness arises. The expression “go forth” denotes release. We know the exuberance of a young animal set free to range in the open pasturage. To them who “fear His name” the rising is with “healing in His wings.” But the sun in the heavens can smite, and scorch and slay. Oh, that terrible sunstroke, so fatal in the East! Christ’s coming may be to some a revelation of flaming fire taking vengeance. (*A. R. Symonds.*) *The Sun of Righteousness*:—I. THE BLESSINGS CHRIST IMPARTS, like those of the sun, ARE OF THE UTMOST VALUE. A sunless landscape is less dismal than a Christless soul; whilst a Christly soul has on it “a light that never shone on sea or land.” The blessings of the natural sun and of the Christ are, in many respects, similar. 1. They are enlightening. Sunrise means daylight. 2. They are restorative. “Healing,”—for does not the sun’s influence on drooping flower and faded face of human weakness but hint Christ’s influence on men’s hearts and lives? II. THE BLESSINGS CHRIST IMPARTS, like those of the sun, COME TO MEN IN A REMARKABLE MANNER. The sunrise and these “wings” combine to suggest—(1) Certainty; (2) Stillness; (3) Gentleness; (4) Swiftness. So Christ blesses. III. THE BLESSINGS CHRIST IMPARTS, like those of the sun, BRING BENEFITS THAT, IN A LARGE DEGREE, ARE UNIVERSAL. The sun shines on the evil and on the good. What spot of earth does it not, directly or indirectly, reach and bless? So many of Christ’s blessings bless all. Is there not through Him—(1) Prolonged probation for the whole human race? (2) “Means of grace” for multitudes still sinners? (3) Holy influences of thought and character that restrain and that tend to elevate? IV. THE BLESSINGS CHRIST IMPARTS, like those of the sun, DEMAND SPECIAL CONDITIONS FOR THEIR FULL APPROPRIATION. The best cultivated soil will best utilise the heat and light of the sun. So the soul that in steadfast faith and love turns to the Christ, and with intense desires drinks in all His truth and grace, will be the soul on which will be most evident the healing influences of the great Sun of Righteousness. (*Homilist.*) *A message for the faithful*:—Changed, indeed, are our days from those in which the words of the text were written. Since that time the Sun of Righteousness has arisen: Elias the prophet has come already, and they have done to him all that

they listed. The law of Moses, commanded in Horeb for all Israel, has been exchanged for the voice of One who speaks to us from heaven. And yet God's last words, as here recorded, are still substantially the same with those which He speaks to us to-day after the lapse of more than two-and-twenty centuries. 1. What is the great basis, here set before us, of all revelation? Behold, the day cometh. Everything is tending to one point; every act, every word of ours, is running on before us to that great end, the day of final reckoning. How difficult it is to believe this; how much more difficult still to act upon it! How often does sin triumph! The day cometh; a day revealed by fire; a fire not purifying but consuming to all the proud, yea, and all who do wickedly. And need we remind you who these are? They are all who say in their hearts,—not with their lips indeed, but in their hearts,—There is no God: all who live, that is, as if there was none; live without intercourse with Him; live without regard to His will and His approval. Take with you unto your new life this one great principle,—there is a day of judgment coming. 2. Then what force and interest will this first truth give to that which follows. He who is expecting the coming judgment can alone rejoice to hear of One who will enable him to meet it. "Unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in His wings." The prophet is speaking of a time when those who have served God in their generation shall find to their eternal comfort that they have not served Him in vain. This is the great blessedness of God's service, that all its difficulties and troubles come first: they lie on the surface; they beset its first entrance; diminishing commonly, or made by use lighter to bear, as life advances; and all ceasing absolutely when this life ends. A true Christian is on the winning side in the great battle. With what patience, then, should he who is called to suffer sometimes for his Christian faithfulness regard those who thus deal with him. 3. This for every one of us is the great lesson, that we look well to our hearts and lives, to the work which God has set us to do, and to the spirit in which we may do it. 4. There remains yet one portion of these last words of God by His prophets, which is scarcely less applicable to days when He has already spoken to us by His Son. "Behold, I will send Elijah," &c. The prophetic part of these words has already been fulfilled. The mission of the Baptist accomplished them. But the practical lesson which they contain is of unchangeable moment. You all know how large a part of your duty is connected, by God's wise appointment, with your parents. God accepts through them an obedience which cannot yet be paid consciously to Himself. God makes it one portion of your duty to Him to honour and obey them. Their approval He would have you to regard as your highest earthly reward; their comfort and happiness as your highest earthly object. (*Dean Vaughan.*) *Christ's first coming.*—There is a touch of sadness about the Book of Malachi. His are parting words, and they show how God's people had degenerated, had lost their fervour, and become content with a mere outward service. Malachi revealed the spiritual state of the people to themselves, denounced their sins, and warned them of judgment to come. But he does not leave them without hope. It is the manner of Hebrew prophecy to blend together different events which have relation to one another, and here we have words which belong to both comings of Christ. I. CHRIST'S FIRST COMING. Described under the image of the rising of the sun. This implies that the world was in a state of darkness before the Incarnation. The title which the prophet gives to Christ, "the Sun of Righteousness," marks one great purpose of His advent—illumination. "Healing in His wings," applies to the work of Christ, in body and soul. As the rays of the sun look like wings when they stretch out across the heavens, so this healing work of Christ extends, by means of His mystic body, the Church, far and wide over the nations. II. WHO PROFIT BY IT? 1. Light is diffusive. 2. But we may close our eyes against it, or hide from it. 3. Christ is the sun to those who fear His name. 4. Christ's light was convictive, as well as attractive. 5. Even our Lord's first coming was, in some sense, an act of judgment. Lessons—1. Realise the need of spiritual illumination. 2. Question ourselves how far the light and healing effects of Christ's coming have reached us, and how far our daily life is influenced by His presence. 3. To be clear about the fact whether He is a "swift witness" against us, or the "Sun of Righteousness," depends upon ourselves and our use of the grace which is given to us. (*The Thinker.*) *What Christ is made to believers.*—Jesus Christ is made unto us of God, a soul-heating, soul-warming sun. I. WHAT NEED HAVE WE OF THESE WARMING INFLUENCES FROM CHRIST, THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS? It is upon

the account of the coldness we are subject to in spiritual things. Some are key-cold, stone cold; dead in trespasses and sins. Even such as are spiritually alive, are subject to their cold fits. The causes of this spiritual coldness are—1. Some inward distemper prevailing in the soul. 2. From the season; night-time, and winter-time, are cooling times. When God withdraws, it is both night and winter to the soul. 3. From cooling circumstances, such as want of ordinances, engagement with carnal relations. The effects of spiritual coldness are—(1) Inward uneasiness. (2) Unfitness for action. (3) Unaptness to receive impressions, by the Word or by the rod. II. HOW IS HEAT AND WARMTH COMMUNICATED BY CHRIST TO THOSE THAT FEAR HIS NAME? In general, it is by His wings. In particular, He is a warming sun to us—1. By the immediate motions and comforts of His Holy Spirit. 2. By His Word and ordinances, though not without the Spirit. 3. By good society. And Jesus Christ is made a heavenly sun, with "healing" in His wings. Ours is a sick and wounded condition. Sick of the disease of natural corruption; sick of the wounds of actual sin. This is—(1) The alone healing. (2) It is all-healing. (3) It is healing at hand. And Jesus Christ is made a growth-furthering sun to us. "Grow up as calves." Can a tree or plant grow without warmth? And, finally, the Lord Jesus is a fruit-furthering sun. (*Philip Henry.*) *The inner world of the good*:—The "name of the Lord" means Himself, and to fear Him with a loving, filial reverence, is genuine godliness. We have here, in fact, a picture of their inner world. I. IT IS A WORLD OF SOLAR BRIGHTNESS. The "Sun of Righteousness" rises on the horizon of their souls. There are souls that are lighted by sparks of their own kindling, and by the gaseous blaze springing from the bogs of inner depravity. All such lights, whether in the forms of philosophic theories or religious creeds, are dim, partial, transitory. The soul of a good man is lighted by the sun. The sun—(1) Throws his beams over the whole heavens. (2) Reveals all objects in their true aspects and proportions. (3) Quickens all into life and beauty. (4) Is centre, holding the whole system in order. Christ is the light of the good. II. IT IS A WORLD OF DIVINE RECTITUDE. "Sun of Righteousness." "The kingdom of God is within." Eternal right is enthroned. God's will is the supreme law. The meat and drink of the godly soul are to do the will of their Father, who is in heaven. Such a soul is right—(1) In relation to itself. All its powers, passions, and impulses are rightly adjusted. Right—(2) In relation to the universe. It renders to others what it would that others should render unto it. Right—(3) In relation to God. The Best Being it loves the most, the Greatest Being it reverences the most, the Kindest Being it thanks the most. III. IT IS A WORLD OF REMEDIAL INFLUENCE. "With healing in His wings." The sun's beams are in Scripture called His wings. "The wings of the morning" (*Psa. cxxxix.*). The soul through sin is diseased. Its eyes are dim, its ears are heavy, its limbs are feeble, its very blood is poisoned. The godly man is under remedial influences. The beams of the "Sun of Righteousness" work off the disease, repair the constitution, and enable it to run without being weary, and to walk without being faint. There is a proverb among the Jews that as "the sun arises, the infirmities decrease." The flowers which drooped and languished all night, revive in the morning. The late Mr. Robinson, of Cambridge, called upon a friend just as he had received a letter from his son, who was surgeon on a vessel then lying off Smyrna. The son mentioned to his father, that every morning about sunrise a fresh gale of air blew from the sea across the land, and from its wholesomeness and utility in clearing the infected air, this wind was called the Doctor. Christ is the Physician of souls. IV. IT IS A WORLD OF BUOYANT ENERGY. "Ye shall go forth and grow up as calves of the stall." See the calf, which from its birth has been shut up in the stall, let forth for the first time into the green fields in May, how full of buoyant energy, it leaps and frolics and frisks. This is the figure employed here to represent the gladness with which the godly soul disports its faculties under the genial beams of the "Sun of Righteousness." Conclusion—What a transcendent good is religion! How blessed the soul that has come under its bright, benign, and heavenly influence. (*Homilist.*) *Progress in the religious life*:—They were before in darkness and disease; both of which confine. But the Sun of Righteousness arises, and with healing in His wings; and thus, the true light now shining, and health being restored, they become free and active—they go forth and grow up as calves of the stall. For even now they have not attained, they are not already perfect. Nor are they to remain what they are, but to increase with all the increase of God. We are not to deny what God has done

for our souls. But though we must not despise the day of small things, we are not to be satisfied with it. A day of greater things is attainable : and if we do not aspire after it, we have reason to suspect even the reality of our religion. Spiritual principles may be weak, but if they are Divine, they will evince it by a tendency to growth. The sacred writers express this progression by every kind of growth. By human growth ; vegetable growth ; and here we have animal growth. No creatures, perhaps, increase so rapidly and observably as calves, especially when they are well attended and fed, and for the very purpose of growth. We have been reminded, sometimes, of the truth of this image, by the spiritual reality. We have seen those who, in a little time, have surprised all around them, by their progress in the Divine life. But many of us have reason to exclaim, " My leanness, my leanness ! " How little progress have we made in religious knowledge, experience, practice, and usefulness, though we have possessed every advantage, and long enjoyed the means of grace. At present the comparison reproves us. But let it also excite and encourage. It not only reminds us of our duty, but of our privilege. This growth is not only commanded, but promised. It is therefore attainable—and we know the way to our resources. Jesus came, not only that we might have life, but have it more abundantly. (*William Jay.*) "*The Sun has risen*":—The natives of the now thoroughly Christianised Samoa Islands have commemorated the coming of the Gospel among them, and the remembrance of their friend, John Williams, who laid down his life on their behalf, by erecting a church on the spot where the missionary first landed. The motto chosen for inscription on the walls is simple and expressive, "*The Sun has risen.*" (*Missionary News.*) *Hopeful view of the future of the world*.—I do not know whether any of my hearers have ever gone up from Riffelburg to Gorner Grat, in the High Alps, to behold the sun rise. Every mountain catches the light according to the height which the upheaving forces that God set in motion have given it. First, the point of Monte Rosa is kissed by the morning beams, blushes for a moment, and forthwith stands clear in the light. Then the Bretthorn, and the dome of Mischabel, and the Matterhorn, and twenty other grand mountains, embracing the distant Jung Frau, receive each in its turn the gladdening rays, bask each for a brief space, and then remain bathed in sunlight. Meanwhile the valleys between lie down dark and dismal as death. But the light which has risen is the light of the morning ; and these shadows are even now lessening, and we are sure they will soon altogether vanish. Such is the hopeful view I take of our world. " Darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people ; but God's light hath broken forth in the morning, and to them who sat in darkness a great light has arisen." Already I see favoured spots illumined by it ; Great Britain and her spreading colonies, and Prussia extending her influence, and the United States, with her broad territory and her rapidly increasing population, stand in the light ; and I see, not twenty, but a hundred points of light, striking up in our scattered mission stations, in old continents and secluded isles and barren deserts, according as God's grace and man's heaven-kindled love have favoured them. And much as I was enraptured with that grand Alpine scene, and shouted irrepressibly as I surveyed it, I am still more elevated, and I feel as if I could cry aloud for joy, when I hear of light advancing from point to point, and penetrating deeper and deeper into the darkness which we are sure is at last to be dispelled, to allow our earth to stand clear in the light of the Sun of Righteousness. (*J. M'Cosh.*) *Properties of light*.—Light is purifying ; let sunshine into a dark cellar, and it soon becomes pure. Light is vivifying ; expose a withered plant from a dark room to the sun, and it colours up. Light is power ; all sources of fuel are directly from the sun, coming in rays of light. Light is joyous ; nothing contributes so much to making a brilliant assembly as a flood of light upon it. Light is comforting ; a dark day is always a gloomy day, but a burst of sunshine brings a cheer. Light is strengthening ; a puny child may grow strong if he can play in the sunshine. So you should get into the light that streams from the Sun of Righteousness. His presence purifies the heart, energises the mind, brightens the life, cheers the spirits, and strengthens the whole man. (*Sunday Companion.*) *The Sun of Righteousness*.—I. HIS ONENESS. In the universe there is infinite variety and abundant repetition. In our world many rivers roll their waters into many seas ; many mountains attract the many clouds which are born out of many deeps. Above and around us are many worlds ; many stars twinkle over many watchers. But there is for us only one Sun, unique in splendour and in power. There is

but one Jesus, the only begotten Son of God. There is no other name given under heaven, or among men; only one all-meritorious Saviour. II. CENTRALNESS. Our solar system holds its place in the mechanism of the heavens by revolving in silent grandeur round the central sun. That sun is the pivot and point round which, in smooth, unbroken harmony, the mighty worlds are ever moving in their courses, linked and ordered by the law of gravitation; so is Jesus the true centre of the soul. Apart from Him, the soul, like an erratic meteor, a wandering star, flies ever away from the central point of bliss, to be finally lost and shattered in awful night. The true believer is bound to Jesus by the mightier law of love. Round Him, in the orbit of light and duty, he revolves for ever, subject to the law of righteousness, and brightened with the beatific beams of grace. III. LIGHT. The moon, bright though her beams are, and radiant her beauty, has no inherent illuminating power. The stars that make obeisance to their fiery lord borrow their glory from this central source, and shed a reflected lustre on the world below. The coal dug out of its subterranean bed, and all other sources of artificial light, have drawn their resources from this central reservoir. So with Jesus. "It pleased the Father, that in Him should all fulness dwell." "I am the light of the world." As the sun chases the gloom, scatters the clouds, conquers the night, and floods the worlds with day, so He banishes the night of nature, the darkness of ignorance, the clouds of doubt and fear, the gloomy shades of death. IV. LIFE. The sun is the great quickener. Winter, made by its absence, is the time of death; bird and beast are sluggish, and comparatively inert; tree and plant and flower are paralysed by an icy grasp. With the returning sun comes the germinating seed, the bursting bud, the swiftly circulating sap, and a marvellous activity pervades creation. So Jesus raises dead souls to life, and quickens the soul of man into hale and thriving resurrection. "I am the Life," He says. V. BEAUTY. The sun is the greatest artist. His magic pencil gives the sky its peerless blue, robes nature in emerald vestments, silvers every lake and stream, and paints in fairest hues the flowers that gem the earth. Spring-tide's green, summer's flush, autumn's gold, and winter's white, all are the offspring of his magic pencil, while the sun itself is more glorious than they all. So Jesus Christ is Himself the "fairest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely." He invests with moral excellence and spiritual beauty all that His love shines down upon. He invests the believing soul with the garment of praise and the beauty of holiness. VI. GLADNESS. "The sun," says the Psalmist, "rejoices as a strong man to run a race." It is a type of perfect happiness. A happy face is said to be a "sunny" countenance; gladness is oft called "sunshine." All nature breaks into song under the sun's influence; the tiniest insect dances in his beams; the weary invalid welcomes the first rosy salutation of the morning. Jesus is the joy-giver. VII. PERFECTNESS. The sun is the great ripener. It brings all the processes of nature to perfection. It finds the leaf an imprisoned embryo in russet husk and shell, and continues to expand and beautify it until it flutters in perfect growth on plant or tree. It touches the green bud, and never rests until it shines upon the perfect flower. It nurses the fruit till it drops ripe and mellow into October's lap. It undertakes charge of the green corn-blade, and never ceases until the golden harvest bends to the reaper's scythe. So Jesus is the Great Perfecter; and in the believer's nature the good seed of the kingdom is nursed and nurtured until, as Job has it, he becomes a "shock of corn ripe for the garner." He that pardons and He that sanctifies is all of one. VIII. FULLNESS. The sun's resources never fail. What liberal largess he has conferred on the world! What harvests he has ripened! What mountain snows he has melted into crystal streams! What flowers he has painted! What spirits he has gladdened since first his mission was begun! and yet his eye is not dim nor his natural strength abated! So with Jesus. "It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell!" IX. UNIVERSALNESS. "His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of the earth: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof." It bronzes the brow of the rude Fijian, reddens the skin of the Indian warrior, blackens the negro's swarthy face, and wraps the world in its benevolent embrace. "I am the light of the world," says Jesus. His saving beams have blest humanity in all its tribes, from shivering Esquimaux to sweltering Ethiopian. He tasted death for every man. X. IMPARTIALNESS. The sun makes no selection. Where it can shine it will. It beautifies the garden, and smiles upon the desert. It glorifies the rose, and flings a halo round the thistle. It flashes on the crystal lakes, and shimmers on the stagnant pool. It gleams on the topmost oak leaf, and shines on the

humblest violet. It burnishes silk and rags alike. "Whosoever" is the widespread word of Jesus too. "If any man thirst," &c. Wealthy Nicodemus or Joseph, poor Bartimeus or the woman by the well. This Sun of Righteousness, does He shine on you? He is your one centre of life and light; the one source of gladness, beauty, and perfection. (*J. Jackson Wray.*)

Ver. 4. Remember ye the law of Moses.—*Moses defended*.—Of all the books of the Old Testament, the first five books are the most vital. The Pentateuch is not a branch of the tree of revelation; it is one of the very roots. If objectors must attack some portion of the Old Testament, let them assail the Book of Kings, the writings of Solomon, the prophecies of Daniel, the glories of Ezekiel, the sublimities of the Book of Job, for these, though inspired, are not of such vital importance; but of the foundation truths of Genesis, we say, "Touch not, handle not." If the writings of Moses are not authentic; if the facts therein recorded are untrue; if, in fact, Moses in his offices and character, be a mere fiction of the brain, then the most tremendous results must necessarily follow. If such be the case, then the whole of revelation must be blotted out. If the Pentateuch suffer an eclipse, the New Testament suffers the same. You cannot have a partial eclipse. The Pentateuch and New Testament are woven together in one seamless robe. If you make a rend, you destroy the whole. The Epistles of St. Paul are full of Moses. If Moses falls, St. Paul falls with him, and all the glorious apostles. He that rejects the law must reject the Gospel also: for the law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. Moses spake of Christ, and testified of Christ. The man who rejects Moses must reject the Lord Himself. We have other witnesses to the authenticity of the Pentateuch than the inspired Word of God. The testimony of the rocks of Sinai, &c. (*Alfred Cay, A.K.C.*)

The law, its place and power.—In our text Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, shows that the fear of the Lord necessarily involves reverential regard for His law. This law is described as that which was given to Moses in Horeb, and the charge is given: "Remember ye the law." These words seal up the Old Testament revelation. Our text expresses a necessary, universal, and perpetual obligation: "Remember ye the law of Moses My servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb." In very many minds there are very hazy notions in reference to the relation of the Old Testament to the New, of the Mosaic to the Christian dispensation, of the law to the Gospel. It is quite true that there are statements in the New Testament which indicate that some old things had passed away, and that some new things had come. There is a sense in which the revelation of the Gospel is in contrast to that of the Old Testament—not, however, the contrast of contradiction, but rather of fuller and clearer development. We must remember that the term "law of Moses" is used in two senses—the one covering the whole Mosaic legislation, the other having special reference to what are called the "Ten Commandments." There were things in the legislation of Moses which were purely civil—which could apply only to the Jews as a nation. There were other things which were ceremonial—belonging to a dispensation which was symbolical, typical, and preparatory. All these things, national and ceremonial, passed away with the dawn of the new dispensation. But there was one part of the revelation given by Moses—and this the central and most important part—called distinctively "the law," the moral law, the ten commandments, which is of universal and perpetual obligation. I. THE LAW IS A GLORIOUS REVELATION OF THE CHARACTER AND WILL OF GOD. God is the Creator and Governor of the universe. He hath made all beings and things by His almighty power. He governs them according to His own infinite wisdom. Over material things and irrational creatures His control is a matter of forceful operation; but over all orders of rational, responsible beings His control is a moral government. This renders an intelligible revelation necessary. His moral nature is at once the source and the standard of all purity and beauty. The moral law reveals Him as the just and holy God, pointing out the way of duty and demanding obedience. This law is perfect. It reveals God's character, declares His will, and discloses the fundamental, unalterable principles of His moral government. II. THE LAW IS SUITED TO THE NATURE OF MAN, AND IS FITTED TO SECURE HIS HIGHEST DEVELOPMENT AND HAPPINESS. Man is a moral, responsible being, who was created in the image, and intended for the service and glory of God. 1. Likeness to the Divine character is essential to man's true development. The moral law, revealing the purity and beauty of God, or declaring His holy and righteous will,

sets before men the original pattern of their own character and the standard of their intended development. 2. Thus we may say also that obedience to the law of God is the necessary justification of man's existence. The holy and righteous God could not create a race of rebels intending that they should exist to be disloyal and disobedient. Man, coming under the power of sin, through rebellion and disobedience, forfeited his right to existence in the sight of God and among His creatures. The law declaring man's duty justifies his Divine sentence of condemnation and death upon transgressors. 3. Still more, it is absolutely certain that harmony with the will of God is essential to man's happiness. Holiness and happiness are in their very nature closely and inseparably linked together. III. THE LAW CAME STRAIGHT FROM GOD TO MAN. Man was not left to discover or reason it out for himself. The law is not a constitution agreed upon among men for self-government. This same law was given of God to Moses in Horeb. IV. THE LAW IS ENFORCED BY THE MOST POWERFUL SANCTIONS. To it are attached promises of blessing and reward, and threatenings of curse and punishment. V. THE LAW HAS NECESSARY, UNIVERSAL, AND PERPETUAL AUTHORITY. 1. Necessary. Man's obligation to keep the law does not depend upon his own profession or resolution. Some people excuse themselves in reference to a certain looseness of conduct by saying that they make no profession of religion, or that they have very liberal views. They say that it is quite proper and necessary that professing Christians should recognise the authority of the law, but they contend that every man has the right to judge for himself. This is all wrong; no man has the right to set his judgment or opinion or prejudice or wilfulness against the plain, positive precepts of the Divine law. The authority of the law is due to its Divine authorship. 2. Thus it must be evident that obligation to the moral law is universal. Wherever you find the moral faculty, the moral law has authority. 3. Thus also the authority of the law is perpetual. God cannot change. VI. THE LAW IS THE BASIS, AND SHALL BE THE CROWN AND GLORY OF THE GOSPEL. The Gospel did not destroy the law. It did not lower its standards. It was not intended as an apology for its severity. The Gospel honours and magnifies the law, declaring that it is holy, just, and good. The law could not pardon a transgression, therefore it could not give life and salvation to guilty sinners. It gave the knowledge of sin, measured the extent of man's weakness and the depth of his fall; thus it prepared for the exhibition of pardoning mercy and saving grace by showing the necessity for it. Then, again, the law determined the plan of salvation and the provisions necessary, so that in the exercise of mercy the Divine righteousness might be preserved and declared, so that God might be just in justifying every one that believeth. Still further, the condition of pardon and salvation under the Gospel—which is faith—is determined by the law. What is faith but the recognition and acceptance of the truth that Christ in our behalf made a full satisfaction to the law, and took away our guilt and cancelled the sentence of condemnation by the sacrifice of Himself? Thus we must see that the law is the basis of the Gospel—determining its plan and provisions and conditions of salvation. But there is more to be told. Through Christ Jesus come the renewal of man's nature and the gift of life and power, so that men who were dead in trespasses and sins, and under the carnal mind, and led captive by the devil at his will, are caused to love and delight in, and are enabled to obey the law. The law is always the same. The motives to obedience are higher and the power stronger, because of full satisfaction and reconciliation, and the free gift of life and salvation through the redemption of Christ. The crown and glory of the Gospel come to each man when the law of God is enthroned in his heart and manifested in his life and conduct. It is said that in ancient times some laws were put into verse, so that the people might learn to sing them. Through the grace and Spirit of Christ, God's law becomes poetry to us and His statutes a song. (*J. K. Wright, B.D.*)

VERS. 5, 6. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet.—*Malachi's predictions*:—Of the prophecies relating to the Messias some were so obscure, and had such an appearance of inconsistency, if applied to one and the same person, that they could not well be understood, till the event reconciled and unfolded them; for which obscurity many good reasons have been assigned. But it is reasonable to suppose, that as the time of Christ's coming drew nearer, the later predictions concerning Him should be more distinct and plain than the former. I. EXPLAIN THE PROPHECIES OF MALACHI RELATING TO THE MESSIAS.

The Jews, after their deliverance from Babylon, were free from idolatry, but in other respects they were base and wicked; and as unsettled people go from one extreme to another, they had exchanged a pagan superstition for a kind of religious libertinism and cold indifference; and this nation, which had once adored any and every idol, was become remiss in the worship of the true God. Malachi reproaches the Jews for their ingratitude to God, who had so lately showed them so much favour and mercy. He accuses them of irreligion and profaneness; he tells them that God abhorred their offerings, and would raise up to Himself better worshippers amongst the Gentiles. Then the prophet proceeds to declare the coming of a very considerable person. The passage indeed describes two persons. The messenger, and another person who, being called the Lord, and having a prophet to go before Him, must be one of the highest dignity. This same person is also called the "Angel of the Covenant." He is to come suddenly, and to come to His temple. He should make and confirm a covenant between God and men. Who may abide the day of His coming? How few will be found fit to appear before Him! He may be compared to fire which tries metals and purges them from dross, and to soap which cleanses garments; for He shall pass a just and impartial judgment upon the lives and doctrines of His people, distinguishing false opinions from the Word of God, and false appearances of holiness from true piety. He shall find religion greatly corrupted, and the priests and Levites as bad as those whom they should instruct; but He shall correct all that is faulty, and so reform the worship of God that it shall be again acceptable to Him. The day of His coming shall be destructive to the wicked. A new Elijah was to prepare His way. He was to make converts by his ministry, but not to produce a general messenger. II. THE COMPLETION OF THESE PREDICTIONS. Jesus fulfils these predictions. He came suddenly; came to His temple; was the messenger of the covenant; was a refiner's fire; purified the sons of Levi; freed the law and the worship of God from all defects and innovations, from all that was superfluous, burdensome, and temporary. Jesus Christ arose as a Sun of Righteousness with healing in His wings. His coming was truly the great and terrible day of the Lord. The prophecy of Elijah's coming was fulfilled in John the Baptist. He might be, not improperly, said to turn the hearts of the people, and to restore all things, as he did all that was requisite for that purpose. Elias in Malachi was to prepare the way of the Lord: to turn the hearts of men, and to call the Jews to amendment: not to cause a general conversion of the Jews; to convert several and thereby to save them from destruction. John the Baptist was like Elias in his prophetic office; in living in a corrupted age; in fervent zeal; in restoring decayed religion; in rebuking vice; in suffering persecution for righteousness' sake; in offending wicked princes by reproving them for their sins; in austerity of life, in habit, and in dwelling in retired places. By the ministry of our Lord and His apostles is that remarkable passage in Malachi fulfilled. "From the rising of the sun, unto the going down of the same, My name shall be great among the Gentiles." (*J. Jortin, D.D.*) *The herald of the day of the Lord*:—The last of prophets, who heralds the day of the Lord, is to restore the spiritual continuity between the generations of God's people; he is to bring the spiritual fathers of the race to recognise in the men of his own age their spiritual sons; he is to make the men of his own age welcome with the affection of sons their spiritual progenitors. He is to restore spiritual continuity, "lest God come and smite the earth with a curse." For breaches of spiritual continuity, that is, religious revolutions, are almost always disastrous. There are times, indeed, when God has willed nations to break with the past. But such exceptional moments we need not now consider. Breaches of religious continuity are not always permanent. The incoming of some flood of new knowledge may antiquate received statements of the current religious teaching, and the men of the "new learning" may revolt from what seems like intellectual bondage, and yet after all it may appear that what they revolted against was rather the parody of their faith than their faith in its true character, and a harmony between the combatants may yet be arrived at again, which is a victory of the faith, but not a victory to either side. There are reformations and counter-reformations; there are revolts and reactions. There are "blindnesses in part" which happen to our Israel, which may be necessary to let loose now and suppressed forces, and which may lead at last to reconciliation. There are revolts which are not apostasies. But so it is not always. There are breaches which are never healed, at least in this world. And in any case such losses of spiritual continuity are terrible

evils. More and more, as we go on in life, we feel our responsibility for making the best of the heritage which the past has bequeathed to us—the heritage of Christian creed and character. Verily, we have entered into the labours of other men. How are we to get the old religion to recognise the men of our day? How are we to “turn” them from the one to the other? Let a man get at all into the heart the Christian religion, and he becomes conscious at once that what that religion corresponds to is nothing which is changeable in human nature. Knowledge grows and past knowledge is outgrown; criticism develops, and its method alters, and a past criticism is a bygone criticism. But underneath all these developments there does lie a humanity that is permanent. The dress, the circumstances of a particular epoch fall easily off the Christ, and He stands disclosed the spiritual Lord of all the ages. The consciousness to which He appeals, the need of God, the desire for the Divine Fatherhood, the sense of sin, the cry for redemption, the experience of strength which is given in response to the self-surrender of faith, the union of men of all sorts and classes in the fellowship of the Holy Ghost—this consciousness, this experience, does not belong to any one age or class. It belongs to us now as much as to the men of old. The pledge that a Catholic religion is possible lies in the recognition (in the moral and spiritual departments only) of a Catholic humanity, which may be dormant in superficial ages and men, but can everywhere be awakened by life's deeper experiences or the profounder appeals of the men of God. How then are we to play our part, in keeping unimpaired, or in restoring, the spiritual continuity of our age with the past? 1. The task is to be wrought out in the character by spiritual discipline. Christianity finds its chief witness in life, in character. All down the ages it is character which has been the chief instrument in propagating the truth. The Christian character is sonship; something which is peculiar to Christianity; much more than mere morality, or abstinence from sin. It is the direct product of a conscious relation to the Divine Father, a fellowship with the Divine Son, a freedom in the Spirit. Christian sonship is the direct outcome of Christian motives, and its chief evidence lies in itself. Certainly the chief witness for Christ in the world is the witness of Christian sonship. Here then is your first vocation—realise and exhibit the temper of sonship. It is developed by generous correspondence with the movement of God's Spirit within us, by constant ventures of faith and acts of obedience: it comes of the deliberate and regular exercise of those faculties of the spirit to which Christ most appeals, of prayer, of self-discipline, of faith, of self-knowledge, of penitence. The obligation of keeping up the spiritual continuity of the generations, presses with especial force on the Church's teachers. The prophetic office of the Church consists in the permanent function of maintaining an old and unchanging faith, by showing its power of adapting itself to constantly new conditions; it is to interpret the old faith to the new generation, with fidelity to the old, and with confidence in the new. The old dogmas are to many men, and to many of the best men, as an unknown tongue. The prophetic office of the Church is to interpret the unknown tongue of old doctrine till they speak in the intelligible language of felt human wants. How is this to be done? By knowing the wants. By being in touch with the movements. There is a special sense in which the task of maintaining spiritual continuity down the generations belongs to the Christian student. Two things are necessary, as for the pastor: the knowledge of the old, and the appreciation of the new. The Christian student will study with reverent care, irrespective of modern wants, the genius of historical Christianity: making himself at one with the religion of Christ in that form in which it has shown itself in experience most catholic, most capable of persistence through radical changes, least the product of any particular age, or state of feeling. So with frankness and freedom he will study the conditions of the present. Mostly the same person does not do both these things. There is much work before us to emancipate Christianity from the shackles of mediæval absolutism, of Calvinism, of mere Protestant reaction, and to reassert it in its largeness, in its freshness, and in its adaptability to new knowledge and new movements. We live in an age of profound transition, socially and intellectually. What is wanted is for the same people to take measure of the ancient faith, and to discern the signs of the times. (*Canon C. Gore, M.A.*) *The gift of prophecy the supreme need of our age.*—A strange and weird figure is this of the prophet Elijah, the Tishbite. A unique person, with a unique mission. John the Baptist was one of his spiritual successors, and the greatest. Athanasius, perhaps, was another, and Martin Luther, and perhaps John Wesley; or, at

least, those latter have been like Eliscus, catching up his mantle, baptised with a portion of his spirit. They have been the men who have accomplished the great moral and spiritual revelations of the world. Rough, earnest, strong-willed men most of them, not given to mince their words or to stand upon courtesies; but they have been the men to keep alive the flame of religion, and to prevent its dying out. Mark their ages, and then compare the work of the man with the needs of his age. There were giants in the earth in those days, and people say we shall never see giants again. The individual grows less as the world grows more. Knowledge has got to be so diffused, and the elements of life so manifold, society so vast and complicated, that an Elijah whom all would recognise as a messenger from God seems impossible. The age of prophets, at least of Elijahs of the old type, has passed away. Yet, though no Elijah, there may be an Elisha; though no Isaiah, yet a Malachi. St. Paul tells us that prophecy is the highest gift bestowed by Christ upon His Church; and it is certain that all who feel that our call is to proclaim God's truth to men may well pray to be endowed with a portion of it. Whatever spiritual gifts may have been necessary or profitable to the Church at other times, I am persuaded that the gift of prophecy is the most necessary and profitable now. Men felt the difference between a Paul and a Philetus, for Paul spoke "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." A man may well pray for a portion of this power, and for grace to use it in the noblest cause. It is not eloquence, it is not popularity, it is not the power of attracting the crowd; it is something impalpable, but most real, when men bend their wills and hearts and consciences before the uttered truth. It is strange how even educated men misread the signs of the times. Th's age wants, and is prepared to receive, not the priest, but the prophet: not the man who claims to stand between them and God, and says, "No access to the Heavenly Father but by me"; but the man who can teach the truth, and help them, in their blindness, and waywardness, and ignorance, to discern the way of peace and righteousness. The prophet must be in earnest, or men will not receive him as a prophet; must himself believe his message, or he will carry no conviction to his hearers. We have a message able to stir the most phlegmatic feeling, and to arouse the dullest conscience, if only we knew how to deliver it. If our own hearts have found out the secret, we can speak of present peace and joy in believing, of the kingdom of God standing in righteousness, of the nearness of a Father to us in our dangers, difficulties, troubles. There are those who can speak of these things with a strange and moving power, and their arguments will rise high above the clouds of doubt and speculation, till they seem to bring us almost face to face with God. Such men are in very truth the Lord's prophets; such teachers build on immovable ground the fabric of faith. They are sure and trustworthy guides; for they are leading men to God through grace by the ways of holiness: they have themselves travelled, or are now travelling the road; they are testifying to us out of their own experience; they speak that which they know. It is a faith thus quickened, and "faith cometh by hearing," that vitalises sacraments and prayers and worship. Without such faith, all these things are dead; with it they become living, quickening powers. It is the spirit of the prophet, before all other gifts, that the Churches need to enable them to evangelise the world. (*Bishop Fraser.*) **And He shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children.**—*The reconciliation of the old and young.*—I. THE PROPHET WAS THINKING OF WHAT MAY FAIRLY BE CALLED A TIME OF TRANSITION. The passing from one dispensation, or order of things, to another. Such a period was that under Moses, when the people passed from a patriarchal to a national life. The bringing in of the only begotten Son was the greatest event of the sacred history. All that had gone before seems trivial in comparison with it. It was a change from law to grace, from a religion limited to one nation to a universal faith, from a system of rite and ceremony to one of inward spirit. But all times of great change are full of danger. They give great anxiety to all thoughtful minds. Ours is a time of transition, and the grave danger of our times is, the possibility of estrangement between the fathers and the children, i.e., between the old and the young. The fathers are disposed to be conservative; the older we get the harder we find it to receive new thoughts, or accustom ourselves to new ways. So when the fathers see the children entering on new ways, adopting new methods, forming new parties, there is danger that their hearts should be turned away from them. And on the other hand, the young are disposed to that which is new; their minds are receptive and plastic. They are tempted to think their

fathers' ways and thoughts are old-fashioned, to underrate the good of the past, and to leave their fathers behind. II. OUR DUTY IN SUCH A TIME OF TRANSITION. There is a duty peculiar to such an age. To fulfil it was part of the mission of John the Baptist. He did much to break the abruptness of the transition from the one dispensation to the other. 1. The duty of the fathers to the children. That "the fathers should recognise the new needs, and the new powers of the children." (1) We should not repress their thoughts, though they may differ from ours. Few things are more harmful to the young than repression. Doubt and difficulty, closed within the heart, grow more and more. Bring them out into the light of loving sympathy, and they often almost vanish away. (2) Nor shall we condemn. Condemnation has often made a searcher after truth into a determined heretic. (3) Let us foster and encourage the good rather than trouble ourselves too much about the error. We are all too anxious to root up weeds. A vigorous growth in the corn will do much to weaken the growth of the weeds. 2. The duty of the children to the fathers, the young to the old. "The children should recognise the value of the institutions and traditions which they inherit from their fathers." The opinions of the fathers are certainly entitled to respectful consideration. Age should prejudice you not against them, but in their favour. Be not swift to remove the ancient landmarks. III. OUR SAFEGUARD IN SUCH A TIME OF TRANSITION. There is a certain deep interest in this as the last word of the Old Testament. It is filled with the hope of one who should be the messenger of the Highest; but lying close behind it is the thought and hope of Him whose way should be thus prepared. We think not of the herald, but of the King before whose face he went. The true safeguard amid the perils of our day is in Christ. The young may outgrow the special forms in which His doctrine has been cast, but they cannot outgrow the Christ. Christ, rightly regarded, meets the needs of old and young. It is absurd to talk of outgrowing Jesus Christ. He is the true gathering point for the old and the young. (*W. Garrett Horder.*) *Religion in the family*.—The family is a radical and fundamental organisation and agency in human society. It is the original source of authority, government, morality, and religion. Without family ties, family government and discipline, family virtue and piety, the Church could not exist, and society would quickly relapse into anarchy and barbarism, and fall to pieces. Here are the roots of godliness, of self-government, of right development. Is it any marvel, then, that God guards the family sanctity and life with such jealousy, and lays upon the marital and parental relations such solemn sanctions and obligations? There is no more alarming sign of the times than the decay of family religion. And the decay is not superficial but radical, and the effects are far-reaching, disastrous, and permanent. Family government is fearfully relaxed, family religious instruction is almost a thing of the past, parental restraints have come to be obnoxious, children have lost reverence for their parents, the home altar, in ten thousand households, is broken down, and the children even of Christian parents grow up without the fear of God, without Christian training and restraint, and go forth into the world, wholly unprepared to resist temptation, or to meet the responsibilities of life. We must have a speedy and grand revival of family religion, or we are doomed. Nothing else can stay the tide of religious declension, in faith and in practice, the tide of demoralisation that threatens to make a clean sweep of social integrity, of law and order, and self-government. We must heed the Divine warning uttered by Malachi, or God will smite us with a still more fearful curse. (*J. M. Sherwood, D.D.*) *Our debt to childhood*.—There are encouraging hints that the study of the young is not to be always undervalued. One is, the careful observation of child-life which men of science are beginning to make simply in the interests of science. Legislators also are beginning to see that in order to have good citizens we must educate the young. The Church needs to establish an early tutelage of her children. In the old New England meeting-house all was stately and sterile, rigid and unattractive, to the children. Notice some of the advantages of the modern method of youthful Sabbath instruction. 1. Children learn more in company than alone. It is good to see truth through the eyes of others. 2. There are elements in the Church which are brought out by the effort to discharge our debt to the young. Here is a field for lay activity. It is an inexplicable fact, that a teacher, or some one outside the family, will sometimes get nearer the child's heart than the dearest home-friend. How can we all co-operate? As this enlarging interest in childhood is the hope of the world, so the growth of this spirit of helpfulness in individual lives is the guarantee of the

healthful and happy development of Christian character. (*Jesse B. Thomas, D.D.*)

Parental responsibilities.—Malachi, in his last chapter, prepares the people for the long silence of revelation by two words, of which one is a promise, and the other a precept. The command is, to walk by the law of Moses. The promise is, that in due time the Messiah's forerunner, coming in the spirit and power of Elijah, shall usher in the solemn yet glorious day of Christ, by his preparatory ministry. This was to be the next prophet whom the Church was entitled to expect. But his work was to be prominently a revival of parental fidelity and domestic piety. The work upon fathers and mothers was to be far more than the removal of domestic alienations. It was to embrace a great revival of parental and filial piety, an awakening of parents' hearts to the salvation of their children, and the docile seeking and reception of parental instruction by the children. This revival of domestic piety and parental fidelity is necessary to prevent the coming of the Divine Messiah from being a woe instead of a blessing to men. God's way of promoting revival is, not to increase the activity of any public and outward means only, but to "turn the hearts of the parents to the children." The duty of parental fidelity is equally prominent in both dispensations. The old terminates with it, the new opens with it. This is the connecting link between both. The fidelity of the parents ought to imply the docility of the children. The duties are mutual. I. THE URGENCY OF PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY APPEARS IN A SOLEMN MANNER FROM THE NATURE OF THE PARENTAL RELATION ITSELF. Wherever human society is, there a parent is. Every human existence begins in a parental relation. The glory of the Divine beneficence towards the human race appears in this, that the parents, without alienating anything of their own immortality, are able to multiply immortalities in ever-widening and progressive numbers. Here are the two facts which give so unspeakable a solemnity to the parent's relation to his children. He has conferred on them, unasked, the endowment of an endless, responsible existence. He has also been the instrument of conveying to this new existence the taint of original sin and guilt. Can the human mind conceive a motive more tender, more urgent, prompting a parent to seek the aid of the great Physician, for dealing with the spiritual disease which they have conveyed? II. FROM THE UNIQUE AND EXTENSIVE CHARACTER OF PARENTAL AUTHORITY. Men will be held accountable according to the extent of the powers intrusted to them. The trust is that of immortal souls. Let the extent of the parent's legitimate or unavoidable power over his children be pondered. Neither Divine nor human law gives the parent a right to force the tender mind of the child, by persecutions, or corporeal pains or penalties; or to abuse it, by sophistries, or falsehoods, into the adoption of his opinions. But this power the providential law does confer: the parent may and ought to avail himself of all the influences of opportunity and example, of filial reverence and affection, of his superior age, knowledge, and sagacity, to reinforce the power of truth over the child's mind, and in this good sense to prejudice him in favour of the parental creed. III. BUT THIS POWER HAS SUITABLE CHECKS AND GUARDS. One is found in the strict responsibility to which God holds the domestic ruler. Another is found in the affection which nature binds up with the parental relation. IV. THE PARENT'S INFLUENCE FOR GOOD AND EVIL WILL BE MORE EFFECTUAL THAN ANY OTHER. As parents perform or neglect their duties, the children usually end in grace or impiety. The parent has the first and all-important opportunity. Application—1. The education of children for God is the most important business done on earth. 2. The Church-membership of the children of believers may be reasonable and scriptural. (*R. S. Dabney, D.D.*)

Family government.—True family government is instituted for the sole benefit of the governed. "The true end of government is to make the pathway to virtue and morality easy, and the pathway of crime difficult and full of peril." I. THE VAST IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY GOVERNMENT. Of Abraham it was said, "He will command his children." Neglect of commanding is seen in the failure of Eli. By "turning the hearts of the fathers to the children," the text means that the chief duty of every father is to bring his children to God. In every case where family government has been enforced the pious parents have fully realised the truth of the glorious promise, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." We may learn the importance of family government from the teachings of all the greatest philosophers and statesmen, of all ages and climes. The Greeks and the Romans, the rulers of the world, and our grander Old English

and Puritan fathers, all taught and practised family government. Every pastor knows that young converts who have had no family government make as a general thing worthless Church members. The last argument on the importance of family government, is the happiness of the child. An ungoverned child is a bundle of bad passions, a seething volcano of untamed and ungovernable passions, hating everybody, and hateful to everybody. II. **HOW SHALL I GOVERN MY CHILD?** Lay down seven golden rules. 1. Begin, continue, and end in prayer. 2. Begin early. 3. Be tender. 4. Be firm. 5. Have no partiality among your children. 6. Let father and mother be united. 7. Imbue the soul of your child with reverence for God and right. A strong wall, and safe quarantine, may be made of four great laws. No bad company; no idle time; no fine clothes; and make home happy. (*Rufus C. Bevelson, D.D.*) *The home school*.—With this verse the Old Testament ends. So far down had Malachi come towards the Messiah, that the East was already growing bright with His coming. He predicts the end of sacrifices, and the coming of a more glorious era. What were the words that, when the last record was ended, were to come with blessed undulations down to our time? See the text. The institution nearest to the heart of society is the family. The most important office in society is the parental office. The sphere of each family is small, but the number of these spheres is incalculable. As each drop is small, but the sea is vast, so is it in society. Families are the springs of society. Declension in religion will be found to be accompanied with carelessness in the family; and the earliest steps of religious reformation ought to take place in the family. If all the families of a nation were to reform, the nation would be reformed. All preparation for God's work should begin in the household. Many persons are for ever running round for revivals, careless of home, neglectful of children, and seeking their own pleasurable excitement, frequently in a kind of religious carnival. Any conception of religious culture and life that leaves the family out, or that is at the expense of the family, is fundamentally wrong, and in the end cannot but be mischievous. The divinity of revivals may be tested by their effect on the family. If religious excitements make home dull, and parental and filial duties and religions tame and tasteless, they may be suspected of being spurious, carnal, worldly. I. **PARENTS ARE RESPONSIBLE TO GOD AND TO HUMAN SOCIETY FOR THEIR CHILDREN.** It is a responsibility assumed by every parent, to look after the welfare, temporal and eternal, of his child. II. **THIS RESPONSIBILITY IS JUST.** Because God has framed the family so that nothing can exceed the advantage which parents have in rearing their children. They take the child before all other influences. None gains ascendancy over the child before the parent. The parent receives the child in a condition perfectly fitted to be moulded and stamped. The child comes to us with all natural adaptations for taking impressions. It is sympathetic, trustful, and imitative. The hardest work we have to do in this world is to correct the mistakes of parents in the education of their children. The parent receives the child into an involuntary atmosphere of love, which is that summer in which all good dispositions must grow. Justice, and all other feelings, in the family, act in the sphere, and under the control, of parental love. Nowhere else is love so much the predominating element. Love is the atmospheric condition in which we are to mould and teach the child. Besides, the family is sheltered from contact and temptation and interruption. The family is the only institution in which one can repel all invasion and all despotism from state and from meddling priests. God has put our children into our hands with the declaration that they are His; that they have in them the germ of immortality, and that He commits them to our charge that we may fit them for the future life that is prepared for them. III. **THE DESTINY OF A CHILD RENDERS IT WORTHY OF A PARENT'S WHOLE HEART, THOUGHT, AND TIME.** Your child is given to you to be brought up in the manner best calculated to qualify it for the life to come. Your supremacy over it is absolute. With such a charge it is worth while to stay at home. Sometimes mothers think it is hard to be shut up at home with the care of little children. But she who takes care of little children takes care of great eternities. IV. **WHEN A CHILD HAS GONE FORTH FROM PARENTAL CARE, PARENTAL NEGLECT CANNOT BE MADE UP TO IT.** Some alleviation there may be, and some after-refuge, but there can be no complete remedy. There is no way of compensating for neglect to sow the seed at the proper time. The most precious legacy that a parent can give to a child is that throughout all its after life it should in connection with everything that

is wise and true and just and pure and spiritual call to mind father and mother. (*H. Ward Beecher.*) *Decay of family power*.—The text is in the form of a prediction. The object and effect of Elijah's coming mission shall be what is set forth in the text, namely, to reform mankind and bring the world back to those elementary principles or institutes ordered of old for human improvement and salvation. The special mission of John the Baptist was that of a reformer. He came to preach repentance. Degeneracy and corruption were so deep-seated and universal that it was necessary to begin at the beginning; not with the church or the state or society, but with the family, the fountain of moral influence; and build up again the family constitution which irreligion and vice had overthrown. We have here, then, the Divine plan of reforming and saving mankind. This prophetic utterance has application to all ages and nations. Christianity is God's ordained instrument to plant and extend His kingdom on earth; and, contrary to the teachings of the schools and the expectations of the wise, it shall not do this by the power of the state, by the force of law, by ecclesiastical organisms, by the influence of fraternities, or by means of patronage, learning, and wealth, but by simply recognising and working the original elemental principles of society; by simply "turning the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers." The Gospel seeks to accomplish the mission of life by the power of family religion—by invigorating and purifying the family constitution, by drawing close and sanctifying the bonds of domestic affection and life, and if it fails to do this it fails of its end. Affection is the great family bond and the chief element of power in domestic life. And Christianity appeals powerfully to the affections of our nature. There is a mighty force in it to excite and purify, to strengthen and exalt our nature. A family not under a religious training and influence is a fountain of social corruption. Here are the sources of infidelity and vice and disorder, of social, political, and religious declension and overthrow. Is there a widespread corruption of morals pervading society? Depend upon it, the main and primary cause of it all may be traced up to the family. This fundamental, elementary justification is not honoured, but abused and perverted. There are three fundamental agencies by which Divine wisdom seeks to reform and save the world—the family, the state, and the Church. They sustain most intimate relations to each other. They underlie all goodness, all prosperity, all order. The family is more radical than the others, and they cannot exist without it. It is a wonderful arrangement, this division of the whole human family into little separate communities, each community a little government, a miniature world by itself—marriage the foundation, love the bond, and Divine authority the governing power. Such an arrangement, simple as it is, touches all the elementary and radical principles of human nature. The family power is the fountain of all moral power in the world. Without such an agency we cannot see how religion could ever have gained a footing in it. During all the patriarch ages the family alone preserved the knowledge and worship of God. We cannot estimate the full value of such an agency. We cannot tell all its vital bearings on the kingdom of Christ, on the world at large. Where the family power is neglected or perverted religion has nothing to build upon. The only way to build up Christ's kingdom is to make the family what it should be. The household must be sanctified. There is no agency that can be substituted for the family. It is a shallow and miserable philosophy which would set it aside, or endeavour to improve upon it. It belongs to all time, to universal humanity. (*J. M. Sherwood.*)